

# Three Important Words: Corporate Social Responsibility—How and Where to Say Them



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**Abstract** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been growing in popularity and importance over the last decades. The speed of that expansion appears to be gaining further momentum, extremely good news to CSR devotees. However, any organisation's CSR strategies have to be communicated to stakeholders, as well as larger audiences. Due to the existence of blatant advertising of company CSR policies and the increasing cynicism amongst recipients of such messages, many organisations look to alternative communication vehicles. Notable amongst these are Cause-Related Marketing (CaRM), collaborations with NGOs, socially responsible gift giving, sustainability and/or ethical ratings and sponsorships to name a few. This article attempts to find the most effective vehicles for CSR communications and to investigate their impact on sceptical audiences who are continuously showered with similar messages.

**Keywords** CSR • Communications vehicles • Media • Stakeholders

## 1 Introduction

Dean 2003, (Pirsch et al. 2007; Van de Ven 2008) state that the manner in which consumers decode CSR communications positively or adversely requires further investigation. Parguel et al. 2011, p. 15, (quoting Hutton et al. 2001) assert that: '*... consumers' responses ...more specifically to CSR communication...has gained greater importance, because CSR communication expenses have grown to become the third largest budget item for corporate communication departments in large companies*'. Furthermore, '*...increasingly socially conscious shoppers ...account for more than 90% of shoppers internationally...*', writes (Brooks 2013 as cited in Plewa et al. 2015, p. 796). van Halderen et al. (2016, p. 567) write: '*society is increasingly putting pressure on companies to act in ways that enhance social and*

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*environmental welfare and to provide more information about their corporate responsibility efforts*'. KMPG (2013) asserts that companies' understanding of CSR and sustainability topics as part of their business is on the rise. Their survey involving 4,100 companies revealed that over 70% undertake CSR reporting, a major improvement in comparison with around 2/3rd doing so in 2011. A similar research carried out by the MIT Sloan Management Review and BCG (Kiron et al. 2015) showed that sustainability communication (an off-shoot of CSR communication) has increased over the past 4 years. Furthermore, it is often communicated and measured using clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and firmly placed on the senior management agenda. With the growing popularity of CSR, every organisation worth its salt has embarked on taking steps to formulate relevant policies and strategies, if not fully or partly engaged already. However, it is the manner in which such initiatives manifest themselves, in addition to the medium/media that will be under investigation in this paper. Many may be viewed merely as cosmetic exercises, window dressing, or a PR stunt, while a few could come across as genuine and truthful. However, it can be argued that CSR does have the potential to offer a number of benefits. Epstein and Roy (2003) state that CSR is not only good for just society but also the business itself, while, Porter and Kramer (2006) claim that the demand for CSR amongst stakeholders is an indication of a potential growth for companies to explore whether engaging in CSR pays dividends. This issue combined with the stakeholders' higher expectations brings about increased and widespread dissatisfaction with organisations engaged in and communicating CSR, raising public scepticism towards company CSR messages. Christensen et al. (2013) believe the public feels such messages may be separate/isolated from corporate practices. Habermas (1984, p. 95) writes: *'...CSR communication...would entail persuading others about the 'good' actions or using the language as a medium of self-presentation of the organisation as responsible and sustainable'*.

Minor and Morgan (2011) assert that for many organisations, the most precious assets lie not on the balance sheet, nor the capital of the employees, but rather in company reputation. They further warn of the fragility of the nature of reputation, i.e. once tarnished extremely it is difficult to repair. Minor and Morgan's paper sees CSR as some form of an insurance policy against reputational risk. They further state that although CSR is generally speaking thought of a tool for *'doing good'*, (citing a variety of examples), *'not doing harm'* is indeed more important. They warn of doing *'good'* while also doing harm, as this can result in *'...reputational consequences that are worse than simply doing nothing at all'* p. 41). In short, CSR as reputation insurance can only be effective when an organisations behaviour is consistent: doing *'good'* will not automatically erase *'bad'* behaviour. Chernev and Blair (2015) report that CSR is commonly regarded merely as a vehicle for improving corporate reputations and engendering good will amongst customers. They base this on a survey of over 300 CFOs, investment analysts and CSR specialists (McKinsey and Company 2009). Their research aimed to illustrate the extension of CSR beyond PR and goodwill to include customer evaluation of the firm's products and/or their performance. Another survey attempting to gauge the impact of FedEx's CaRM efforts (Lachowetz and Irwin 2002) indicated that over

75% of the respondents would be more willing to use the company's services in the light of its support for charities. Green et al. (2016, p 29) research which focused on a unique form of CSR behaviour considered 'gift giving' by companies. Depth interviews with 30 consumers resulted in some unexpected outcome. In '*...some instances consumers actively avoid purchasing products from socially responsible organisations and do so with the intention of managing their impressions with the gift recipients*'. CSR affects and influences all management disciplines, some more than others perhaps. It is worthwhile to state that: '*forays into CSR by the marketing discipline have proved to be the exception rather than the rule...a major paradigm shift (could enable) CSR initiatives driven by marketing (to be) taken more seriously*', (Jahdi 2014, p. 676). That said, finance, HR and production have undoubtedly all been researched from a CSR perspective as each has the potential to go astray, as it were.

## 2 Perspectives on CSR

Basu and Palazzo (2008) suggest three fundamental lines of CSR inquiry prevalent in academic literature, as follows:

1. Stakeholder-driven—this is a reaction to the demands of external stakeholders that might include NGOs, governments and pressure groups. Perhaps if it was pro-action rather than reaction, this approach might have more of an impact and higher chances of being accepted.
2. Performance-driven—the concept of 'good ethics is good for business'; or to cite Carroll (1998, p. 1) '*What is business expected to be or to do to be considered a good corporate citizen?*' This perspective tends to focus on image creation and maintenance as opposed to what drives the firm to be ethical and socially responsible.
3. Motivation-driven—either extrinsic motives such as corporate image improvement, pre-empting legal penalties and risk management; or intrinsic motives such as virtue ethics and Kantian duty ethics and so forth. This is perhaps better than the other two perspectives but only in the 'intrinsic driven' motives part.

Although some research indicates that communicating about CSR activities does not necessarily reflect positively on a company (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001), others show that organisations conveying a socially responsible image are perceived more positively and trusted more with respect to their integrity and credibility (Swaen and Vanhamme 2004). The Co-operative Bank in the UK used to be a prime example of such an organisation and one that survived in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial catastrophe while many banks and building societies lost more than just money. Sadly following some unfavourable revelations about the Co-op's senior management and the emergence of other negative news, that position and the image have been severely tarnished. Indeed at the time of writing in the spring of 2017, the Bank is in an even

more precarious position. What is becoming more evident is that companies that highlight their CSR credentials become under increased scrutiny lest they err. Meanwhile those not making such claims are less under the spotlight (Fig. 1).

Approach	CSR type, outcomes and examples
<p><b>Posthumous</b></p>	<p>CSR applied for damage limitation purposes; a death mask</p> <p>Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) referred to the Exxon Valdez incident that involved a tanker tearing itself open on a reef in Alaska's Prince William Sound on March 24, 1989 and spilling more than 10 million gallons of crude oil. A combination of international media coverage, Exxon's apparent lack of preparation and hesitancy to tackle the media effectively and efficiently exacerbated the situation.</p> <p>Instead, Exxon could have gone beyond mere damage repair and regulatory compliance by admitting to having created an environmental disaster, investing in a complete clean-up operation and formulation of relevant CSR strategies that would make Exxon the future industry CSR champion.</p>
<p><b>Pantomime</b></p>	<p>Superficial play-acting dressed up as CSR: a masque</p> <p>British arms manufacturer, BAE systems are not only the global suppliers of lead free eco-bullets (since 'lead used in ammunition can harm the environment and pose a risk to people'), they in addition developed a whole host of 'green' munitions such as less noisy warheads (to reduce noise pollution), smoke free hand grenades, and armoured vehicles fitted with hybrid engines (New Internationalist, November, 2006). The company has a Director of Corporate Social Responsibility who rather philosophically explained: <i>"Weapons are going to be used and when they are, we try to make them as safe for the user as possible, to limit the collateral damage and impact as little as possible to the environment"</i>. What the Director of BAE Systems overlooks is the fact that the company's core products are designed to harm people. Two major tobacco companies. Two major tobacco companies, JTI and BAT which are banned from advertising in the UK have long-standing lucrative corporate membership deals with the British Museum and the Royal Academy of Arts, etc. (The Observer, 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2016).</p>
<p><b>Piecemeal</b></p>	<p>Token gestures in application of CSR: masking mosaic</p> <p>Certain petroleum companies have also attempted to jump on the CSR bandwagon by publicising their investment in alternative fuel research and development (usually a fraction of their overall investment) while maintaining the status quo and producing conventional fuels attracting the largest part of their investment. When John Browne -a former CEO of BP and Nick Butler (Financial Times, 2007) called for government action on climate change, they were talking about a carbon trading scheme likely to profit BP without the company having to make any great effort to reduce emissions. In addition, critics, such as Dreisen (1998) also identified the adverse impact of such schemes on developing nations.</p>
<p><b>Public Relations</b></p>	<p>Communicating CSR intent to stakeholders: word masks</p> <p>CSR helps to 'greenwash' a company's image, cover negative impacts with positive images of its CSR credentials in a barrage of targeted media releases. Stauber (2007) webpage, <a href="http://www.prwatch.org/taxonomy/term/110">http://www.prwatch.org/taxonomy/term/110</a> lists a number of 'front groups' such as the SUV owners' Association, whose board is composed of industry representatives and which paid \$400,000 to a PR firm Stratacomm to lobby the US senate against proposed higher fuel economy standards legislation.</p>

**Fig. 1** The 10 Ps of marketing approaches to CSR (Jahdi and Cockburn 2007)

<p><b>Parsimonious</b></p>	<p><b>Frugal CSR spend: modesty masks</b>                  This may occur when an organisation is under legal or regulatory pressure to formulate and implement CSR policies. No more financial or non-financial resources are invested in such activities, policies, operations etc. beyond compliance with requirements. Although the company may wish to convey a socially responsible image due to adherence to the laws of the land and communicate a clean cut image. BusinessWeek ran an article entitled <i>The New Netpreneurs - Dot-com veterans are creating smarter startups for a chastened world</i> (October, 2001) and argued that following the dot com bubble bursting entrepreneurs were being more financially prudent and closely monitoring costs and expenditure (accessed 30/11/07 at <a href="http://www.sparkpr.com/client_news/2001/10/the_new_netpreneurs_dotcom_v.shtml">http://www.sparkpr.com/client_news/2001/10/the_new_netpreneurs_dotcom_v.shtml</a>).</p>
<p><b>Parrot fashion</b></p>	<p><b>Follows competition blindly: 'me too' masks</b>                  Sometimes this sort of thing occurs accidentally. At other times, there is a deliberate campaign of 'tit for tat' copycat marketing as recently discussed by C. Turner in <i>Marketing Week</i> (August 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, last accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2007 at <a href="http://www.marketingweek.co.uk/item/57443/pg_dtl_art_news/pg_hdr_art/pg_ftr_art">http://www.marketingweek.co.uk/item/57443/pg_dtl_art_news/pg_hdr_art/pg_ftr_art</a> when reviewing the dispute between Npower and EoN about their respective advertising campaigns. Each accuses the other of a copycat campaign and Npower has admitted using one but argued that Eon did it first in their Go Green campaign.</p>
<p><b>Profit driven</b></p>	<p><b>CSR for economic gains only: Midas mask</b>                  Some companies seek a CSR path due chiefly to their anticipated financial rewards. In June 2007 General Electric, for instance, announced how it was profiting from its environmentalism efforts and was on track to double its earnings from clean technology to £20 billion over five years (Marketing Week, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2007).</p>
<p><b>Partnership</b></p>	<p><b>Collaborative CSR paradigm: sharing unmasked</b>                  The Co-operative Bank in the UK, despite the fairly recent negative publicity, and dire health, still uses such an approach as it consults its customers on major issues the results of which are then published in its Partnership Reports (see Jahdi and Cockburn, 2007). This is where the communication arm of the marketing mix could be effectively used to contribute to company CSR. In marketing parlance, this approach could be applicable at the highest level of CRM (Customer Relationship Management) and KAM (Key Account Management).</p>
<p><b>Proactive</b></p>	<p><b>Anticipation of possible CSR benefits: Unmasked vision</b>                  Zadek (2003) writes that some organisations could find that taking advantage of certain opportunities may be beyond their reach as individual firms. To remedy this, competencies and capacities can be stretched by means of tri-partite partnerships, involving business, 'civil-society' organisations and government agencies. Although alliances such as this pose particular challenges as they aim to bring together diverse interests, philosophies and organisational cultures, they are also capable of offering mutually beneficial outcomes, if managed effectively and efficiently. However, the main focus of these partnerships tends to be on business generation rather than CSR application</p>
<p><b>Philanthropic</b></p>	<p><b>Welfare of fellow humans: Altruism unmasked</b>                  Nan and Heo (2007, p 64) warned that: "<i>while these research findings are encouraging to companies using cause-related marketing, the <b>absolute</b> nature of the measures makes it difficult to quantify the amount of positive effects that cause-related marketing has on consumer responses.</i>"</p>

Fig. 1 (continued)

The table above suggests a wide variety of approaches employed by organisations to communicate their CSR. The first seven approaches above, as individually explained, are often regarded by many consumers as the ‘business as usual’ way that companies do CSR. That complaint thereby justifies some of the consumers’ own inconsistent or hypocritical approaches to purchasing. The last three Ps above may provide a scaffold for future marketing patterns of a more socially responsible type. The latter is premised on more economically and socially advantaged societies taking the lead for two reasons. First, an economic surplus in household income and security of employment or availability of a ‘safety net’ is usually a pre-requisite for consumers to even consider themselves as fortunate enough to have a choice. Second, as a sign of goodwill to demonstrate to hesitant companies and governments in emergent economies that they will not be drawn into any competitive ‘ambush’ that some feel occurs with carbon trading proposals as mentioned above.

For any communication to be successful source reliability and credibility are essential requirements. H&M the global retailer, launched a World Recycle Week on 18 April, 2016 aimed at capturing 1,000 tons of unwanted clothes during that week; so far, so admirable and ethical. However, recycled yarn is used in a small percentage of new garments. Using publicly available figures and average clothing weights, it would take 12 years for H&M to use up 1,000 tons of fashion waste (Siegel 2016). Similarly, at the 2015 annual meeting BP promised to be open about its impact on climate change; a resolution that received 98% shareholder approval. However, ShareAction, the responsible investment group states that BP has fallen well short of the commitments it made last year. In addition management’s targets and pay incentives continue to encourage the replenishment of fossil fuel reserves (the Guardian, 11 April, 2016).

An important point must be taken into consideration. As well as controllable CSR communications there invariably is a whole host of uncontrollable CSR despatching/conveying of information that simply adds further to consumer confusion. Therefore, the nature of industry and the company’s perceived image and reputation can play crucially important parts in the transmission of such messages. The media employed for communication could also play an important role. Illustrated below is an integrative model of corporate identity composed of five distinct facets (Fig. 2).

The last two concerns are the ones that the company should really focus on; that said, ‘what the brand stands for’ now and in the past also plays a very important role in planning for the future. Communication could certainly have a major role in not only improving the current image, but also enhancing the future one.

Furthermore the company must also walk the talk, i.e. put words into action, empty CSR-related rhetoric will simply not do. As for the industry/company nature mentioned above, Elkington (1997) suggests four company types as follows:

- Butterflies: low impact, regenerative
- Honeybees: high impact, regenerative
- Caterpillars: low impact, degenerative
- Locusts: high impact, degenerative

Critical Concern	Identity Type	Concept	Time Frame
What we really are	Actual	corporate identity	Present
What we say we are	Communicated	corporate communications	Past/Present
What we are seen to be	Conceived	corporate image	Past/Present
What the brand stands for	Covenanted	corporate brand	Past/Present
What we ought to be	Ideal	corporate strategy	Future
What we wish to be	Desired	CEO vision	Future

**Fig. 2** The ACID test of corporate brand management (Balmer and Greyser 2003)

The first two categories refer to companies that are in the business to create and offer benefits to their stakeholders, and obviously to make a profit. The first with low impact be it on the environment and/or society, while the second’s high impact could have long-term implications. However, the degenerative categories, especially the high impact type amongst which certain mining and extractive companies may appear—would find it extremely difficult to convey a socially responsible image/message. When Union Carbide (infamous for the 1984 Bhopal disaster in India) attempted to sponsor the 2012 London Olympics, there was public uproar and the company withdrew its offer.

Benjamin Franklin the great American inventor once commented that: *‘glass china and reputation are easily cracked but never well mended’*. Snider et al. (2003) warn of the considerable growth in corporate communications with CSR reports ‘filling web pages and brochures’ mainly in reaction to stakeholder demands. While Sims and Brinkmann (2003, p. 243) cite the case of Enron which *‘looked like an exceptional corporate citizen with all the corporate social responsibility and business ethics tools and status symbols in place.’* Therefore, it comes as no surprise that many stakeholders do not readily accept CSR-related messages from companies.

### 3 Public Relations (PR)

Public relations as a communications tool has been invariably viewed with suspicion in its oft-ridiculed guise of ‘spin doctoring’. Ewen (2003) said that the history of PR is one of a battle for what is reality and how people will see and understand reality. PR can be employed as a major marketing communications tool to convey an organisation’s CSR policies to its stakeholders. However, if one is to cite the models below perhaps the ‘two way symmetric’ approach would be an ideal choice,

Model	Type of communication	Characteristics
Press agent or publicity	One way communication	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences or behave as the organisation desires.
Public information model	One way communication	Uses press releases and other one way communication techniques to distribute organisational information. The PR practitioner is often referred to as the in-house journalist.
Two way asymmetrical model	Two way communication (imbalanced)	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organisation desires. Does not use research to find out how stakeholders feel about the organisation.
Two way symmetrical model	Two way communication	Uses communication to negotiate with the public, resolve conflict and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organisation and its stakeholders.

**Fig. 3** Four Models of PR, Grunig and Hunt (1984)

where dialogue takes place and both sides are to treat each other as equals and with open minds. If one party's argument appears logical then the other would be willing to embrace it. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the large majority of CSR communications seem to be in the form of one or more of the first three models (Fig. 3).

## 4 PR and Astroturfing

Mellahi and Wood (2003) state that marketing managers (to whom advertising managers might be answerable) have collectively gained the power to shape the choices and lifestyles of large numbers of consumers. Such power could also be used to alter existing ethical norms and/or manipulate them in the company's interest. John Stauber of PR Watch warns of the use of the so called 'astroturf campaigns' as '*the appearance of democracy bought and paid for with millions of dollars from wealthy special interests*' ([www.corporatewatch.org.uk](http://www.corporatewatch.org.uk)). According to the Guardian newspaper (4 June, 2014), a pro-Kremlin group funded a vast network of online activists to create the illusion of widespread support for Vladimir Putin which seemed rather bizarre considering the restrictions imposed by that authoritarian state. Multiple online identities and fake pressure groups are used to mislead the public into believing that the position of the astroturfer is the commonly held view. The practice is not unique to Russia and is practised throughout the globe. The same newspaper also reports that a number of large organisations now employ sophisticated 'persona management software' to create armies of virtual astroturfers, complete with fake IP (Internet Protocol) addresses, no-political interests and online histories. Authentic looking profiles are generated automatically and developed for months or years prior to being used for political or corporate campaigns. With the



continuous improvements of software, the identification of these astroturf armies will become extremely difficult to do, thus undermining efforts to conduct open debates online. Needless to say some organisations would be keen to try this approach to publicise or authenticate their CSR policies. Fallin et al. (2013) publicise the fact that commencing in the 1980s, tobacco companies (in the US) endeavoured to create the appearance of broad opposition to tobacco policies by means of attempts to create a so-called grassroots smokers' rights movement. Simultaneously, funding was offered to third party groups, such as Citizens for a SoundEconomy (predecessor of FreedomWorks, and more recently Tea Party organisations, etc. intent on accomplishing economic and political agendas. Until fairly recently the UK also possessed FORREST that acted as a mouthpiece for smokers. On a lighter note, David Hockney, the world-famous artist, continues his efforts in a similar manner. A quick glance at British American Tobacco (BAT) website includes sections on sustainability, CSR and Ethics&Governance. Its 'Business Principles and Framework for CSR states: *'...we recognise that a reduction in the health impact of tobacco consumption is a legitimate public health objective. However, tobacco products are legal, significant demand for them exists and seems likely to continue and informed adults have rights to consume them...'* The term 'informed adults' is used in almost every sentence on their website. The question is: informed about what and how? The billions of people throughout the world that smoke are not really all informed of the harmful and fatal impact of smoking. If such an organisation boasts about its CSR, how seriously can consumers believe other companies' similar claims? Similarly, major tobacco companies, in an attempt to escape the impact of the ban on advertising their products in the UK, use sponsoring some of London's most respected arts institutions. This is an attempt to promote the 'spurious idea that they are responsible corporate citizens'. JTI pays almost £40,000 per annum to the Royal Academy for a premier membership package that sees the organisation listed in all exhibition catalogues. The same company is also a corporate supporter of the Southbank Centre on whose website its logo appears. Furthermore, British American Tobacco is an associate member of the Royal Academy of Arts and a corporate sponsor of the London Symphony Orchestra (the Observer, 1 May, 2016).

In order to attend the January 2015 World Economic Forum in Davos, where the topic under discussion was climate change, world leaders arrived separately in 1,700 private jets, unintentionally perhaps sending a very confusing message (Elving et al. 2015). According to the Guardian newspaper (1 March 2016), Paddy Power, the bookmaker, encouraged a problem gambler to continue betting until he lost five jobs, his home as well as access to his children. Once the Gambling Commission pointed this out to the company, as a gesture of goodwill, Paddy Power donated £280,000 to a 'socially responsible' cause. With actions such as these, scepticism towards CSR related communications can only be intensified.

## 5 Cause-Related Marketing (CaRM)

Sheikh and Beise-Zee (2011, p. 28) write: ‘... given that the communication of a firm’s commitment to CSR is a vital motivation, CSR is often practised via the support of causes [...]. In a marketing campaign a cause can help in communicating a favourable message to a specific segment of the market, e.g. those customers who hold dear the same or similar cause’. Adkins (Adkins 1999, p. 11) defines cause—related marketing as: ‘...activity which businesses and charities or causes form a partnership with each other or market an image, product or service for mutual benefit’. The North American Sponsorship Spending vis-à-vis ‘causes’ was \$1.92 billion in 2015, a 4.0% growth on the previous year ([www.causemarketingforum.com/site](http://www.causemarketingforum.com/site)).

This at a glance illustrates the growing importance of cause-related marketing. Sheikh and Beise-Zee (2001) state: ‘CaRM is not to be viewed as a synonym, but a manifestation of CSR; indeed a dimension of it termed specificity or cause specificity of CSR’, (as cited in Jahdi 2014, p. 675). Chang and Cheng (2015) cite American Express as being the first high profile cause-related marketing promotion which in 1983 announced it would donate one cent per transaction made with the card for the restoration of the Statue of Liberty. Other companies that have applied cause-related marketing include the US based FedEx which as part of its CSR philosophy supports its employees and the communities in which they live. This takes the form of corporate donations, in-kind services and employee volunteerism. It also collaborates with charitable organisations such as the International Red Cross. A survey aimed at measuring the impact of FedEx’s CaRM efforts indicated that over 75% of respondents would be more willing to use the company’s services based on its support for charities. Amongst further examples using CaRM can one could refer to the American Arthritis Foundation’s partnership with the publishers of the Reader’s Digest and RxRemedy in order to help create awareness of the disease, and portray the publication as socially responsible (Jahdi 2014, p. 4). A more recent example is Body Shop’s advertising boards using technology company Airlabs in pollution hot pots of London. People seeking respite from the capital’s air pollution can take a deep breath at one of London’s three new bus stops. The system works by trapping harmful particles (PM2.5), via a filtration systems before gas pollutants, such as NO<sub>2</sub>, are absorbed, delivering clean air to bus stop users (Lucy Siegle, the Observer, 11 June, 2017). Anecdotal evidence perhaps suggests that there is still a great deal of mileage left in Cause-Related Marketing as a means of conveying an organisation’s socially responsible image. However, as with many other communications tools, the task of convincing the various stakeholders is not getting easier either.

## 6 Conclusion

Sheldrake (2011) cited in Waddington (2012, p. 8) writes: ‘No organisation is an island. Everything it does occurs within the context of a changing world, in a dynamic interplay with every entity around it. The revolution in information and communication techniques has made this ...increasingly transparent, immediate and global. If ‘perception is reality’ characterised 20th century marketing and PR, ‘reality is perception’ is the 21st century axiom...’

This paper attempted to highlight the various forms of CSR-related communications as well as their pros and cons however, as mentioned in a number of occasions it is becoming extremely difficult to convince an increasingly suspicious and distrusting groups of stakeholders of the CSR intentions of organisations.

A famous and ancient Persian saying goes: ‘if there’s a person in the house, one word is sufficient!’ That obviously depends on who that person is, what word is actually spoken, by whom and for what purpose. One golden marketing communications rule is that if the sender of the message lacks credibility and reliability, then it will not have the desired effect.

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