

# **BUSINESS SCHOOLS' COMMUNICATION OF CSR ON THEIR WEBSITES: A MULTIFACETED PICTURE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Business schools and other public and private organizations are increasingly expected not only to comply with rules, regulations and expectations of responsibility but also to focus on managing stakeholders' impressions of the organization and on building reputation. One way of doing this is through CSR communication.*

*This paper is motivated by a recent interest within public sector management and communication research of studying higher education strategic communication and marketing. On the basis of a review of relevant literature, the paper analyzes the occurrence of selected internally and externally oriented CSR keywords in the sections of education, research and strategy of 17 business schools' website, the purpose being to investigate how business schools in different contexts prioritize CSR communication on their websites, and whether this communication is consistent. The findings are discussed in light of the context and increasing expectations from stakeholders.*

**KEYWORDS:** business schools, strategic communication, corporate social responsibility (CSR), reputation management

## **INTRODUCTION**

One way of studying the use of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a central theme in the contemporary discussions about the relationship between business universities or schools and society is to analyze how they *communicate* about their efforts regarding CSR. Among the many different ways by which organizations communicate about these efforts, how they do so on their website stands out (Esrock and Leichty, 1998; Esrock and Leichty, 2000; Pollach, 2003; Welcomer et al., 2003; Nielsen, 2005). This article is based on the idea that how business schools use and write about issues of CSR on their website provides insight in their approach to dealing with these issues. Business schools' corporate websites were selected because the content is under the management of the schools whereby they have full control over the messages. This means that websites allow universities to establish a strategic position via communications. CSR being a contextual and dynamic concept (Carroll, 1999; Matten and Moon, 2008) it might be expected that there are both similarities and differences between business schools in this respect (Apéria, Brønn and Schultz, 2004). Further, business schools may take different positions allowing them to stand out (Volkwein and Sweitzer, 2006).

The paper is motivated by a recent interest within public sector management and communication research of studying higher education strategic communication and marketing (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Today, business schools and other public and private organizations are expected not only to comply with rules, regulations and expectations of responsibility but also to focus on managing stakeholders' impressions of the organization and on building corporate reputation. One way of doing this is through CSR initiatives and communication (Fombrun 2005; Vidaver-Cohen 2007). In order to explore such issues, we analyzed how a sample of major business schools<sup>1</sup> communicates about CSR on their website.

The paper is structured as follows: part one reviews the literature on higher education strategic communication and strategic CSR communication and situates business schools within the new context of competition. It discusses the challenges to business schools in respect of CSR communication and identifies various criteria for evaluating the success of modern business schools' CSR communication on the web. Part two explores how selected business schools communicate about their efforts regarding CSR on their websites. Part three discusses our findings in light of the success criteria set up in the first part of the paper.

## HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The mission of a business school is to “teach and train participants (undergraduate students, young managers and executives) in the most advanced knowledge in business theory and practice, while contributing to the development and dissemination of new knowledge through research” (Durand and Dameron, 2008: 84). In order to do so, business schools try to attract high level participants and excellent faculty. Reputation is thus a key self-reinforcing ingredient of the business, and modern educational institutions increasingly recognize that they need to market themselves in a climate of global competition, the image and reputation of the institution playing a crucial role in the development of market positioning and relationship building (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007; Durand and Dameron, 2008: 54 ff.). The Global Compact Academic Network ([www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org)) can be taken as an indication of a standard-setting initiative that is designed to induce business schools to adopt a more systematic, progressive and visible corporate social responsibility policy. The network entails a wide array of academic institutions (universities, colleges, business schools, etc.). These institutions oblige themselves to show their commitment to the Global Compact by bringing significant strategic added-value through actions in five areas, e.g. education on topics related to the Global Compact and applied research and thought leadership in relation to the Global Compact.

Research on business schools' strategic communication and reputation management is scarce (Corley and Gioia, 2000: 320), and research on their CSR initiatives and communication is, as far as we know, almost non-existing<sup>2</sup>. This is so even though the business school, as a global social institution, has recently confronted a range of legitimacy threats (Boyle, 2004). However, there have been a few studies. We have selected seven: four focusing on strategic communication,

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<sup>1</sup> Our sample consists of 28 business schools who are partners, sponsors or members of The European Academy of Business in Society, EABIS (as of 1st April 2009). EABIS describes itself as “a unique alliance of companies, business schools and academic institutions, committed to integrating business in society issues into the heart of management theory and practice” (<http://www.eabis.org/index.php?id=about-eabis>).

<sup>2</sup> Studies on sustainability and business schools and particularly sustainability education are more frequent (e.g. Jabbour 2010; Wright 2010; Walck 2009 and other studies in the *Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*. In these studies, the focus is generally limited to business schools' contribution to environmental management.

marketing and/or reputation and business schools and three focusing on CSR communication and business schools.

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) made a systematic review of the literature on higher education marketing, the purpose being to explore the nature of the marketing of higher education in an international context. The authors argue that not only are elements of globalization in higher education widespread and multifaceted, the higher education market is also well established as a global phenomenon, especially in the major-English speaking nations, e.g. the UK. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) found that potential benefits of applying marketing theories and concepts that have been effective in the business world are gradually being recognized by researchers in the field of higher education marketing. Examples of such theories or concepts are: market orientation, image and reputation building and positioning. However, according to the authors, the literature on higher education marketing is incoherent and lacks theoretical models that reflect the particular context of higher education and the nature of their services. Even though there have been a number of studies that examined image and reputation, the notion of branding has barely made its mark in higher education marketing. Thus, it is concluded that the research of higher education marketing is still at a relatively pioneer stage with much research still to be carried out.

Volkwein and Sweitzer (2006) examined the variables that are the most strongly associated with institutional prestige and reputation and presented an explorative model. They found that success in the competition for students depends to a large extent on institutional attractiveness. Success in the competition for faculty depends on high salaries and favourable working conditions.

Vidaver-Cohen (2007) introduced a conceptual model of business school reputation that applies recent advances in reputation theory and research to the specifics of the business school setting. The research is a response to critics which have begun calling for more meaningful, theory-driven strategies for studying reputation in the business school context than current ranking systems. By illustrating how an organization's ability to meet specific stakeholder expectations mediates the relationship between organizational reputation assessments, Vidaver-Cohen's model provides an additional level of explanatory clarity to the discussion. Proposing third-party judgments as a moderating variable further articulates the relationship by advancing understanding of how reputation perceptions are formed. The observation made by Vidaver-Cohen suggests that instead of trying to manage the rankings most schools would be better served by adopting a strategic approach to reputation management – positioning themselves on specific characteristics highly valued by their own unique constituents.

Wæraas (2008) discussed the potential challenges of introducing corporate branding in public sector organizations, including universities. The author notes that while the corporate branding ideal is to achieve message consistency in the organization's self-presentation, public organizations are often characterized by contradictory and inconsistent values and multiple identities. This makes the ideal of consistency difficult to achieve. Thus, it is argued that public organizations will benefit more from branding on the basis of inconsistent values and multiple identities rather than trying to promote one set of values and one identity at the expense of others. This argument is in line with recent research in corporate branding (e.g. Balmer and Greyser, 2002).

Dirk Matten and Jeremy Moon (2004) conducted a survey of CSR education in Europe. They found that there is a highly diverse understanding of CSR teaching and research. Although the term CSR had gained currency, many programmes and research projects were grounded in the longer term orientation of business ethics and environmental responsibility. Two-thirds of their respondents provided some sort of CSR education, the main drivers being individual faculty members.

Christensen, Peirce, Hartman, Hoffman and Carrier (2007) investigated how deans and directors at the top 50 global MBA programs (as rated by the Financial Times in their 2006 Global MBA rankings) responded to questions about the inclusion and coverage of the topics of ethics, corporate social responsibility, and sustainability in their respective institutions. Their findings revealed among others that a majority of the schools require that one or more of these topics be covered in their MBA curriculum and one-third of the schools require coverage of all three topics as part of the MBA curriculum. The authors also noted a fivefold increase in the number of stand-alone ethics courses since a 1988 investigation on ethics, and the existence of institutional support of centres or special programs related to ethics.

Our review of the literature seems to indicate that business schools increasingly market and position themselves on specific characteristics, including to some degree CSR or ethical aspects. However, the question how they *prioritize* and *communicate* about their CSR efforts is not answered in the literature. In order to inform our study of these questions, we now review the literature on strategic CSR communication.

## **STRATEGIC CSR COMMUNICATION**

CSR communication can be defined as communication of CSR efforts to “a variety of influential and alert stakeholders” (Morsing and Beckmann, 2006: 12). The breakdown in recent research and practice of the boundaries between internal and external communication on the one hand and marketing and PR-communication on the other hand has paved the way for the strategic and integrative approach, which we find anchored in the concept of Corporate (Social Responsibility) Communication (e.g. Cornelissen, 2008 and van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). This leaves corporations with a big dilemma: how to communicate *consistently* about CSR? In line with this dilemma, issues taken up in the literature on CSR communication are for example whether corporations *should at all communicate CSR externally*.

Morsing (2003) argues that CSR communication needs to be handled in a subtle manner that may prove traditional marketing and PR tools insufficient, the problem being that corporations are encouraged to engage in CSR to build strong reputations, but at the same time stakeholders are reluctant to receive too much information about their CSR engagements. Firstly, stakeholders have different types of interests and engagements in corporations’ activities and are not equally concerned with CSR. Secondly, a scrupulous selection of CSR communication issues is crucial. Adopting a wrong CSR strategy in terms of scope of interest and issues can do more harm than good if it is not an integrated part of the core business. Thirdly, communication form and channels should be adapted to contextual parameters such as: situation, message, target group/stakeholder, goal to be achieved, etc. One-way mass communication may provoke or create ‘impressions’ and awareness about an issue among unaware stakeholders, but it is instrumental and inappropriate for creating attitude change or debate. Finally, the organization of CSR communication within organizations should be considered in order to attribute a strategic and measurable function to CSR conceived as a fundamental value embedded in the management of the organization, an argument supported by Galbreath (2008). In other words, organizations making use of CSR as a promotional instrument without integrating it in their value set and overall strategy cannot expect that CSR can have a positive impact on their image and reputation.

Dawkins (2004) also suggests that effective communication of CSR calls for a coordinated approach, which ideally embeds CSR messages into mainstream communication. The author stresses that effective communication of CSR tailors messages to different stakeholder groups. Furthermore, the function of internal communication as an under-utilized and potentially powerful channel for enhancing a company's reputation for responsibility among its key stakeholders is highlighted.

Morsing, Schultz and Nielsen (2008) contribute with two models that may help explain how companies can best communicate their CSR initiatives. Based on a reputation survey and two case studies of Danish corporate CSR frontrunners, first they develop an 'inside-out approach' to suggest how managers can manage their CSR activities to achieve favourable CSR reputation. Employees appear as a key component in building trustworthiness, as CSR communication is shown to evolve when taking an 'inside-out approach'. Second, they develop a CSR communication model with two CSR communication processes targeting different stakeholder groups: 'the expert CSR communication process' and 'the endorsed CSR communication process'. Integrating these models and processes, they argue, may help companies strategically capture reputational advantage from their CSR initiatives.

### *Strategic CSR communication on the web*

The use of CSR communication channels has been investigated in empirical surveys. The study "Communicating corporate social responsibility" and "The first ever European survey of consumers' attitude on corporate social responsibility" (CSR Europe/MORI 2000) provides for example the following list of CSR communication channels: social reports, thematic reports, codes of conduct, websites, stakeholder consultation, internal communication, prizes and events, cause-related marketing, communication on product packaging, interventions in the press and on TV, communication at points of sale. The study shows that companies use a wide range of CSR communication channels.

Research on CSR communication via *web* focuses on the web's agenda-setting potential (Esrock and Leichty 1998) or on organizations' self-presentation as socially responsible citizens (e.g. Esrock and Leichty, 1998; Esrock and Leichty, 2000; Pollach 2003; Pollach, 2005). Most of these studies have investigated how large Fortune 500 corporations use the web for communicating CSR, using quantitative content analysis that disclose CSR approaches and content patterns. Studies have in particular investigated how organizations use self presentations as a means to protect their self images and/or influence the way they are perceived by significant stakeholders. A distinction between tactical and strategic impression management behavior has been established by Tedeshi and Melburg (1984). While the purpose of the former is to achieve immediate gratification, the latter aims at influencing future outcomes including branding and reputation, which aligns with the contextual conditions of business schools that are outlined above. .

Wanderley, Lucian, Farache and Sousa Filho (2008) address the question whether CSR information disclosure on corporate websites is influenced by country of origin and/or industry sector. Analysing the websites of 127 corporations from emerging countries, such as Brazil, Chile, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Thailand and South Africa, it becomes evident that both country of origin and industry sector have a significant influence on CSR information disclosure on the web. Based on the data studied, the authors conclude that country of origin has a stronger influence on CSR information disclosure on the web than industry sector.

Our review of the literature on strategic CSR communication has focused on central issues or dilemmas, in particular coordination and consistency. The review has informed our research questions.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are central to the empirical part of our study:

*RQ 1: How do business schools use the web for communicating about their CSR efforts?*

*RQ 2: To which extent can the communication be categorised as consistent?*

We conducted a key word search and a search on the occurrence of CSR sites on the web of the participating business schools in order to answer these two questions.

## APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

In line with Matten and Moon (2004), we assume that CSR would mostly be understood as an umbrella term for a broad set of synonyms and overlapping concepts reflecting both business and society relations and business ethics. For our key word search, we have selected five frequently used CSR synonyms, the first three concepts in an external perspective (external stakeholders) and the last two in an internal perspective (internal stakeholders):

- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Sustainability
- Corporate Citizenship
- Code of conduct
- Corporate Governance

We first conducted a CSR keyword search in English on the business schools' websites in order to confirm our belief that CSR is relevant to European business schools. This search paved the way for our study of the research, education and strategy sections of the website, in which study we have focused on the occurrence of CSR sites<sup>3</sup>. Our study is based on a comparative design: taking three categories as the units of analysis, the study design allows for comparison across areas, and between business schools and countries. It allows us to see how business schools in different contexts prioritize CSR communication on their websites, and whether the communication is consistent.

A major sample of 28 European business schools and universities was drawn from EABIS' academic network, suggesting that these institutions are more likely than others to integrate CSR into their management strategy and to run research projects and study programmes within CSR.

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<sup>3</sup> Steps in the collection of data: 1) domain and sub-domain establishment related to the three selected categories (research, education and management), e.g. for London Business School: london.edu (start page) and london.edu/facultyandresearch/, london.edu/programmes/, london.edu/theschool/, 2) Google advanced search machine ([http://www.google.dk/advanced\\_search?hl=da](http://www.google.dk/advanced_search?hl=da)) used to determine the number of pages with CSR related content (baseline), 3) CSR-hits (selected key words: corporate social responsibility, sustainability, corporate citizenship, code of conduct and corporate governance).

Accordingly, these institutions are also expected to communicate about their CSR objectives and practices on their websites. They all practice teaching and research up to the Ph.D. level. A minor sample of 17 was extracted from the major sample for technological reasons in that the content management system used for the websites is based on comparable portal systems. Variables used for the analysis are segmented in subsites or portals covering the following content areas:

- *School/university management*
- *Educational programmes, modules and courses*
- *Research projects and activities.*

For full universities with a business faculty the search was undertaken within the subsites or portals representing the business faculty. However, in cases where no separate *business faculty/school management* section or portal existed, the search was based on the general university section for the *management* part of CSR.

## **ANALYSIS: BUSINESS SCHOOLS' COMMUNICATION OF CSR ON THE WEB**

Below we draw a picture of the extent to which business schools communicate CSR on their corporate websites in general and within particular domains of activities that may be considered as primary to higher education and research (Durand and Dameron, 2008: 84). In response to the strategic approach to CSR adopted for our study, the degree of alignment of CSR to the strategy of the institutions will be integrated in the analysis.

### *Findings*

Table 1 indicates the extent to which the business schools/faculties of the major sample communicate CSR compared to each other, based on calculation of the total number of pages that contain at least one occurrence of CSR compared to the total number of pages on the business school or faculty website in general. In the following, pages containing a CSR keyword will be referred to as 'CSR pages'.

Table 2 is an illustration of the distribution of the total amount of CSR pages tracked within the domains of *research*, *education* and *strategy*, establishing the internal balance of CSR communication among the three domains of the schools/faculties respectively. Using table 1 and 2 we will provide an answer to the research questions raised above.

Name	Level of CSR communication			
	Total	Share	Rank	Country
Vlerick Leuven Gent Management Nantes	155	4,28%	12	Belgium
Solvay Business School	99	3,46%	14	Belgium
Copenhagen Business School	730	2,37%	17	Denmark
Aarhus School of Business	1870	2,46%	16	Denmark
Helsinki School of Economics	149	1,09%	25	Finland
Turku School of Economics	50	6,44%	6	Finland



INSEAD Business School	828	4,36%	11	France
Audencia Ecole de Management School	71	1,24%	23	France
HEC	62	1,50%	22	France
Nyenrode Business University	337	6,69%	4	Holland
TiasNimbas Business School	1350	44,26%	2	Holland
Amsterdam Business School/Amsterdam University	112	2,15%	18	Holland
Bocconi Business University	19	1,56%	21	Italy
Milano School of Management	90	6,57%	5	Italy
Norwegian School of Management (BI)	329	1,07%	26	Norway
St. Petersburg State University School of Management	55	4,10%	13	Russia
Esade Business School	362	0,52%	27	Spain
IESE Business School/University of Navarra	1940	6,14%	7	Spain
Ashridge Business School	9800	61,25%	1	UK
London Business School	167	1,58%	20	UK
Warwick Business School	111	2,09%	19	UK
University of Cambridge	7680	0,31%	28	UK
Durham Business School	134	2,76%	15	UK
Kingston Business School	47	4,61%	9	UK
Manchester Business School	284	4,40%	10	UK
Nottingham Business School/Nottingham University	60	13,36%	3	UK
Royal Holloway/London University	823	1,11%	24	UK
Bath University School of Management	119	5,56%	8	UK

*Table 1: The level of CSR communication among the EABIS academic network members*

Amongst the 28 business schools/faculties of our major sample two schools (*Ashridge Business School* and *Tias Nimbas Business School*) stand out with more than 60% and 40 % respectively of the schools' websites containing CSR keywords (table 1). If we consider the figures for the other schools and faculties, their CSR pages constitute less than 15 % of the total amount of pages on the entire websites (e.g. *Nottingham Business School* 13%). At the bottom of table 1 we find schools with less than 1% CSR pages out of the total amount of pages on their websites (e.g. *University of Cambridge* and *Esade Business School*). In the middle, schools and universities with an average of 3,5 % CSR pages (e.g. *Solvay Business School*, *St. Petersburg State University School of Management* and *Durham Business School*) are listed. Consequently, in respect of the extent to which the business schools and faculties of our sample communicate about CSR in general, there is an apparent span from 1% to 60 % between the least and the most CSR communicating school/faculty. A glance at the 'country of origin' of the institutions does not seem to draw any pattern as to how much they communicate explicitly about CSR. One could expect this criteria to have an impact in that the institutions are submitted to different national regulation systems that force higher education institutions in some countries to contribute more actively to society than others and consequently to communicate more explicitly about CSR (Matten & Moon, 2008; Habisch, Jonker, Wegner & Schmidpeter, 2005).



As indicated above, the consistency of CSR communication on the schools/faculties' corporate websites was investigated within the subpages of *research*, *education* and *strategy*. Table 2 gives a picture of the extent to which the 17 business schools/faculties drawn from the minor sample of our data a) communicate about CSR within the three different domains above, b) are consistent in aligning their CSR communication on research and education to the overall school/faculty strategy and c) demonstrate an integrated approach to communicating their CSR research and education activities.

In table 2, question a) is answered by considering the proportion of CSR pages in each of the three domains in comparison with the total amount of CSR pages (column 1-4), allowing to establish the internal balance among the three domains for the 17 institutions (column 4-6). The answer to question (b) appears from the gap between the proportion of CSR pages in research and education compared to the number of CSR pages in strategy. Finally, question c) is answered by comparing the level of CSR communication in education and research respectively.

Name	Share of CSR-pages				Internal balance			Country
	Total	Res <sup>4</sup>	Edu <sup>5</sup>	Strat <sup>6</sup>	Res	Edu	Strat	
Ashridge Business School	62,19%	52,23%	53,50%	54,48%	1	1	1	UK
Bath University School of Management	7,66%	30,86%	11,33%	0,00%	2	4	-	UK
Nyenrode Business University	8,87%	21,57%	4,84%	24,22%	3	7	2	Holland
Solvay Business School	4,34%	13,06%	13,46%	0,00%	5	3	-	Belgium
London Business School	5,62%	10,29%	33,89%	1,41%	7	2	11	UK
INSEAD Business School	4,36%	4,92%	10,87%	9,72%	13	5	3	France
Manchester Business School	5,87%	11,65%	1,84%	6,17%	6	13	5	UK
Turku School of Economics	6,96%	16,05%	9,38%	0,00%	4	6	-	Finland
Durham Business School	2,98%	3,10%	4,42%	4,89%	15	8	7	UK
IESE Business School/University of Navarra	6,71%	9,96%	0,79%	6,17%	8	17	6	Spain
Vlerick Leuven Gent Management Nantes	4,28%	5,48%	3,11%	1,52%	12	11	9	Belgium
Bocconi Business University	4,02%	3,70%	1,51%	8,30%	14	15	4	Italy
Helsinki School of Economics	1,36%	9,80%	1,56%	1,47%	9	14	10	Finland
Esade Business School	0,77%	0,00%	3,85%	3,03%	17	9	8	Spain
Warwick Business School	2,34%	5,61%	2,13%	0,54%	11	12	12	UK
Copenhagen Business School	3,13%	6,14%	0,91%	0,41%	10	16	13	Denmark
HEC	6,50%	0,44%	3,76%	0,00%	16	10	14	France

Table 2: Overview of Business Schools' share of CSR pages and their balance of CSR communication within research, education and strategy on the web

In response of question (a) the school who had the highest level of CSR communication in table 1 (*Ashridge Business School*,) is also not surprisingly the most eager communicator of CSR within research, education and strategy (52, 54 and 54% respectively). Two other schools also seem to have relatively high levels of CSR communication in research and education: *Bath University*

<sup>4</sup> Research

<sup>5</sup> Education

<sup>6</sup> Strategy

*School of Strategy* and *London Business School* (31 and 34 % respectively). However, their levels of CSR communication in strategy are significantly low (0 and 1% respectively). Concerning the level of CSR communication in strategy, *Nyenrode Business University* is positioned relatively high after *Ashridge* (24 %). At the bottom of the table, *HEC* appears together with *Copenhagen Business School* who both manifest rather low levels of CSR communication in all three domains (0, 4 and 0 % vs. 6, 1 and 0% respectively).

Question (b) related to the alignment of CSR communication in research and education to CSR in strategy leaves us again with *Ashridge* at the top of the table with a complete communication balance between the three domains. *Warwick Business School* follows with a CSR communication gap of only 1 between the three domains and this gap is also minor for *Vlerick Leuven Gent Strategy Nantes* with 3 and 2 respectively. Schools and faculties who show the largest gap in CSR communication are *IESE Business School*, *Bocconi Business University* and *London Business School* for whom the CSR communication gap between the strategy and research or education is beyond 10. Significantly for these schools, the level of CSR communication in strategy is far higher than in research or education. Finally, *Bath University School of Management*, *Solvay Business School* and *Turku Business School* appear with no occurrences of CSR in strategy. Interestingly enough, there are no schools and faculties having a relatively low share of CSR communication in strategy along with a very high share in research and education, except from those who have no CSR occurrences in the strategy domain.

The findings for question (c), answering whether there are CSR communication gaps between research and education still forefronts *Ashridge* with no gaps, leaving *IESE Business School* at the bottom with a gap of 9 between the two domains. *Warwick Business School* and *Vlerick Leuven Gent Strategy Nantes* seem to balance their CSR communication within the two domains with only a gap of 1 between them.

Summing up, we observed that the schools and faculties who are most energetic communicators in one or more of the domains are not necessarily those who appear as the most consistent in communicating about CSR in the three domains that we studied.

#### *Limitations of research*

The findings above must be evaluated with some reservation. Firstly, since the application of CMS systems are highly individualized and complex, comparative search studies within theme portals and subpages do not necessarily track all relevant occurrences of a word or phrase that may occur elsewhere on a website, as e.g. in the ‘news section’ or other specific section. For the above study this means that for business schools and faculties having established e.g. ‘community involvement’ or ‘sustainability’ as a separate portal in their main menu (which is quite common for private companies but less frequent for higher education institutions), our keyword search will only cover such particular menus in the total account of CSR occurrences on a website, without accounting for the occurrences within the three domains of CSR research, strategy and education, unless they are subordinated to these portals or subpages. Secondly, the restriction of our search to the five selected CSR keywords above, excludes a number of potential CSR occurrences in our study, which might appear when searching for other concepts, such as e.g. ‘community involvement’, ‘social engagement’, etc. Thirdly, as we limited our search to CSR keywords in English, non English institutions which do not have a complete parallel of their CSR pages in English, do not appear in the study with a complete representation of their CSR communication activities. Fourthly, we have not at this stage of the study taken into account relevant parameters such as the number of mouse

clicks it takes the user to access CSR information, which can be relevant for the evaluation of CSR as an operational branding instrument.

Taking in consideration these limitations, we will now discuss our findings in light of the success criteria set up in the first part of the paper.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our paper has investigated selected European business schools' communication of CSR on their websites. On the basis of a review of the literature on higher education communication and strategic CSR communication, we have identified two research questions related to how and the extent to which business schools communicate about their CSR efforts on the web.

In order to answer our research questions, we have analyzed the occurrence of three selected externally oriented CSR keywords (*corporate social responsibility, sustainability, corporate citizenship*) and two internally oriented CSR keywords (*code of conduct, corporate governance*) within three particular domains of activities that may be considered as primary to higher education and research institutions, i.e. *research, education and strategic management*.

In answer to the first question whether European business schools seem to comply with the agenda of communicating about their CSR activities on the web, our findings revealed that out of the total number of pages on a website, EABIS business schools members use less than 15 % to communicate about CSR. For 21 out of 28 schools and faculties the share of web-pages containing as a minimum one of the five basic CSR keywords are below 5 %. In consequence, even amongst CSR motivated business schools, CSR cannot be seen as a predominant issue of communication. Furthermore, the high frequency of CSR occurrences on some schools websites, e.g. Ashridge and Tias Nimbasis partly due to extensive cross-links to specific activities such as a master in sustainability and a sustainability foundation respectively. On the other hand, frequent reference to a CSR study-programme or a specific CSR activity or project, may be taken as a sign of proactive marketing on the web which is likely to generate awareness about innovative CSR initiatives not only to 'the market' (potential students), but also to other stakeholders, including the community, authorities, media, competitive schools and employees, etc. (Maignan, Ferrell & Ferrell 2001). Doing so helps to document what is going on in the organization and to let stakeholders know how important CSR seems to be or not to be for the organization.

Concerning the question of communicating consistently about CSR by aligning CSR research and education communication to strategic CSR management, we found that creating a balance in CSR research, education and strategy communication, in other words between what can be interpreted as higher education institutions' 'products' and the strategic management of the organization, seems to be a challenge to some business schools. 3 out of 17 do have CSR research and study programmes without having anchored these activities in their overall strategy. Others seem to have prioritized CSR at the strategy level without implementing CSR in their research and study programmes. Consequently, we may draw the conclusion that many business schools should use more efforts to balance their CSR communication in order to establish more consistent communication between their core activities and their mission and vision statement. This conclusion can equally be drawn from our findings concerning the gap between CSR research and education. Some of the business schools thus have prioritized CSR research rather than CSR education and vice versa. Assuming that ideally business schools' teaching should be based on and supported by research findings,

business schools and faculties should strive for a higher degree of consistency between these two core areas of activity. Effective communication of CSR necessitates a coordinated or integrated approach. Thus, our pilot study seems to indicate that business schools still have a long way to go towards learning how to act strategically in respect of CSR communication. However, further research, preferably of qualitative nature, is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

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