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## **CSR Communication – An Emerging Field The Editors' Preface**

CSR communication is an emerging field of research and practice, which has grown considerably during the last 10 to 15 years along with stakeholders' increasing pressure on corporations to contribute to society by integrating CSR policies and activities into their strategy. Associated with stakeholder management, CSR communication may be defined as "a process of anticipating stakeholders' expectations, articulation of CSR policy and managing of different organization communication tools designed to provide true and transparent information about a company's or a brand's integration of its business operations, social and environmental concerns, and interactions with stakeholders" (Podnar 2008: 75). Following this definition, CSR communication is concerned with integrating communication and implementation processes of CSR from the strategic to the operational level. Although it is not a new discipline, CSR communication is still a complex interdisciplinary field for researchers to outline and define in terms of exploring appropriate communication theories, models and concepts. CSR communication also keeps challenging practitioners in terms of anchoring CSR to strategic communication planning, developing appropriate communication and message strategies, selecting genres and channels that are in line with the communication affordances and potentials embedded in new media, etc. The ethical dilemma embedded in CSR and CSR communication, focusing on how to associate instrumental and moral motives, contradictory demands from stakeholders and navigate the jungle of upcoming standards and procedures, make CSR communication a delicate and controversial issue (e.g. Schlegelmilch/Pollach 2005; Morsing et al. 2008). One response to these discrepancies is the emergence of a new stream of hypocrisy literature positioning CSR communication as a dynamic field that calls for more sincerity based methods (Fassin/Buelens 2011) or takes into account that reaching 100 % transparency and achieving a perfect match between what companies do and say in CSR is an illusion (Christensen/Cheney 2011).

The first International CSR Communication Conference, which was hosted by the University of Amsterdam in October 2011, provided an interesting overview of the crossed boundaries and interdisciplinarity of the field. It gathered distinguished researchers, PhD students, and practitioners. A collection of papers demonstrating the broad variety of topics and issues that form the heart of or are related to CSR communication were presented at the conference: CSR communication theories & concepts, CSR and brand/reputation management, CSR and consumer empowerment, CSR communication across cultures, CSR and social media to mention but a few. The theme section of this issue thus gives a rough picture of the variety of topics and issues that constitute CSR communication.

The first paper *Scepticism in CSR Advertisements* (**Francisca Farache**) investigates the level of substantial information provided in CSR advertisements from four socio-economic magazines in the context of Brazil and the UK. It is demonstrated that half of the companies investigated tend

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to disclose low volumes of substantial information and that they fail to follow the advice of the literature on CSR communication. The paper concludes that corporations in Brazil tend to provide a higher level of substantial information than corporations advertising in the UK. The findings thus contradict the literature on advertising content specifying that material from developed countries tends to contain more information than that from developing countries.

The second paper, *Communicating Environmental and Ethical Performance: A Longitudinal Analysis of Annual Reports from 1998–2009* (**Thomas Kilian & Nadine Hennigs**) is a study of annual reports of all German DAX-30 companies from 1998 to 2009. Based on content analysis, the paper first examines categories of CSR-related communication. Second, it uses the categories in a longitudinal perspective spanning twelve years to compare how motives to pursue CSR and CSR-related activities have changed over time. Arguing that annual reports are considered the most important, credible source of information on corporate activities and performance, it concludes that along with the public's increased demand for businesses to operate responsibly, in contrast to primarily performance-driven motives, there has been a rising significance of stakeholder-driven and value-driven motives as a normative basis for engaging in CSR during the investigated period.

The third paper *Promoting Corporate Philanthropic Efforts through Social Media* (**Hen Ping Lee & Sherry J. Holladay**) investigates how corporations use social networking sites (SNS) in communicating corporate philanthropy. Arguing that although philanthropy is the oldest form of CSR, little is known about how philanthropic activities are reported to stakeholders and how SNS is used in this type of communication. An explorative analysis of a sample of 40 Fortune 100 companies' use of social media platforms is undertaken with the aim of increasing the understanding of the possibilities of social media for facilitating stakeholder awareness of philanthropic activity. The results of the study indicated that the majority of the 40 corporations in the sample use at least one form of SNS and that about 67% use all types of SNS (Facebook, Twitter & YouTube).

The fourth paper *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Management and Marketing Communication: Research Streams and Themes* (**Anne Ellerup Nielsen & Christa Thomsen**) maps the rapidly growing body of research in the field of CSR) management and marketing communication, the focus being on research streams and themes. The paper explores the concepts of strategic and operative CSR communication which have been adopted widely within the CSR communication literature and relates these to research streams within management and marketing/public relations. Being framed within a corporate communication perspective, the review answers the call for CSR communication research to develop and substantiate outcomes that may better explain or inform the interrelationship of CSR communication strategies and practices from an integrated and holistic perspective.

## References

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