# Communication in the CSR Context

Dr. Sherif A. Zaki Tehemar

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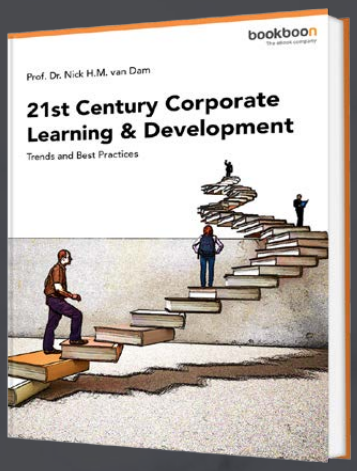


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# Preface

In the last few years, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as a management philosophy, has received considerable attention and become an accepted trend that many companies are trying to incorporate within their core businesses. As any management concept, it has to be well planned and communicated in order to achieve its optimum results. This book is about this concept and about the benefits of CSR. It sheds light on how to effectively communicate the CSR programme. It gives the reader the chance to obtain practical information on how to strategize CSR, how to communicate it. It is another attempt in the CSR world that tries to identify the challenges that CSR practitioners may encounter when developing the CSR communication strategy and how to overcome them.

I have tried to give some answers to questions that I have asked and solutions to the problems that I faced when developing my first CSR strategy. Even after assisting my organization to become one of the pioneers and leaders in CSR, both nationally and internationally, I am still learning, and I am honoured to be.

I believe that we live by ethics and we grow by knowledge. This book is a humble attempt from a CSR practitioner who has spent seven years of his successful career, trying to know and understand CSR.

I hope I have.

Dr. Sherif A. Zaki Tehemar



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# 1 Introduction

During the last few decades, there was a remarkable shift in the way corporates behaved, with increased focus on their ethical and social behaviour as well as their responsible commitments towards the environment. This tremendous move can be attributed to the conceptual change from shareholder theory (maximizing profit) to stakeholder theory (maximizing social and shared values) and resulted in the evolution of the Corporate Social Responsibility concept as a new management approach. Consequently, corporates tend to improve their reputation and public images as well as increasing their profits by acting responsibly toward their employees, customers, the community and environment, in order to gain the social licence to operate.

In 2000, Corporate Social Responsibility was defined by the World Business Council on Sustainable Development as: 'The continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic Social development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society at large'. Several studies have demonstrated that, in order to implement successful CSR programmes, corporates are required to communicate transparently with all their internal and external stakeholders.

More companies are trying to adopt socially responsible practices because the public, employees, and shareholders have high expectations for the values and conduct of business (Carroll, 1999). This is evident by the increase in the number of yearly company CSR rankings, such as *Forbes Magazine*'s 100 Best Corporate Citizens, *Ethisphere*'s World's Most Ethical Companies, the Global ESG 100 by *RiskMetrics Group*, and the disclosure of activities in the annual reports (Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

It has been reported that for CSR practice to succeed, it should be strategized, implemented, and communicated to various stakeholders; several communication tools and models have been proposed by researchers and practitioners. In general, these studies and publications have focused either on the communication tools to be used or the stakeholders' engagement process. With the exception of Du et al. (2010) and Tehemar (2011), little has been elaborated on the factors that affect CSR communication or the detailed steps required to formulate a comprehensive yet successful CSR communication strategy.



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# 2 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

## 2.1 The Definition

The publication of Howard R. Bowen's 'Social Responsibilities of the Businessman' (1953) can be considered the first to highlight the concept of CSR. He defined CSR as the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society.

Following this publication, various research projects have been conducted in an attempt to develop a more accurate definition of CSR. McGuire (1963) stated: 'The idea of social responsibilities supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations'.

A landmark contribution to the concept of CSR came from the Committee for Economic Development (CED) in its 1971 publication, *Social Responsibilities of Business Corporations*. The CED declared that: 'business functions by public consent and its basic purpose is to serve constructively the needs of society – to the satisfaction of society'.

Another major contribution came from Carroll (1998) when she mentioned that corporations are expected to fulfil certain responsibilities, just as private citizens are. He categorized these responsibilities into four pillars: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic.

In the late 1990s, one of the most comprehensive definitions of CSR appeared when the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defined CSR as: 'the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large'.

In 2010, the International Standards Organization (ISO) introduced the ISO 26000 which defines social responsibility as the 'responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behaviour that:

- contributes to sustainable development, including health and the welfare of society;
- takes into account the expectations of stakeholders;
- is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour; and
- is integrated throughout the organization and practiced in its relationships



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In general, the author believes that the broad concept of CSR and the best definition for it is that of Hopkins (2007): 'CSR is the role that a company takes to integrate responsible business practices and policies into its business model to promote higher standards of living in society, for employees, and the environment while preserving profitability'.

## 2.2 The Benefits

More companies began to realize the importance and the benefits of embracing CSR programmes. It has been proven that the financial crisis, damage to the Japanese nuclear factory, and Thailand floods are increasing the importance of CSR. According to a recent IBM study, more than 1,100 CEOs said they plan to increase their companies' corporate social responsibility spending by 25% on average. (Alsayad, 2009). Several studies and surveys concluded that consumers are ready to buy from companies that have CSR agenda. A 2002 study by Hill and Knowlton, found that 79% of Americans take CSR practices into consideration when deciding on a product purchase. Moreover, a research done by CIM shows that a number of customers who felt guilty about unethical purchases has increased from 17% to 35% (CIM 2007).

The same applies for employees; it has been reported that employees are more motivated, productive and loyal to companies that adopt CSR programmes.

There are at least six reasons for encouraging companies to adopt CSR practices: innovation, cost reduction, brand differentiation, long-term thinking, and customer and employee engagement (Forbes 2012). Other benefits include increased sales and revenue, expanded market share, better work environment, improved relationships with local authorities, and improved crisis management process.

However, for companies to benefit from CSR, they have to adopt the CSR strategy, link CSR programmes to their core business and competences and to engage with their stakeholders.

## 2.3 The Implementation

### 2.3.1 The Strategy

One of the challenges that companies need to overcome when developing a CSR strategy, is to consider all the factors relevant for their short- and long-term future. The adoption of a sustainable approach requires a much longer timeframe and perspective than the short- to medium-term planning horizon most business leaders use.

Successful CSR requires a store of important elements including clearly articulated business drivers, priority issues and the objectives to be achieved.



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In general, the following elements and objectives have to be included in any CSR strategy:

- Minimize the environmental impact of the company's operations
- Ensure that employees are motivated and engaged in business operations and contribute effectively and efficiently to achieving the company's objectives
- Engage heavily in the community and invest in the wellbeing of society
- Improve the quality of the service or products delivered and provide measures to continuously develop, or at least maintain, customer satisfaction
- Develop a comprehensive communication plan that encourages interaction from different stakeholders
- Foster a culture of transparency and innovation
- Invest in the health and safety of the workplace
- Introduce and maintain responsible practices within its supply chain
- Provide tools to measure and control

McElhaney (2009) proposed a five-step model for creating a CSR strategy:

- Senior leadership and management of the company, including the board, must take an authentic, firm and public commitment to CSR and engage in it
- Determine the three top business objectives and priorities for the company and develop a CSR strategy that contributes to the achievement of those business objectives
- Align CSR strategy with the core competencies of the company
- Fully integrate CSR into the culture, governance and strategy development efforts of the company and into existing management and performance systems
- Develop clear performance metrics or key performance indicators to measure the impact of the CSR strategy

One of the key elements of the CSR strategy and its communication framework is the stakeholders' identification and prioritization process. The following section will shed light on this process.

### 2.3.2 The Stakeholder Theory

Widely defined, a stakeholder is anyone or any group that is affected by the organization's activities. The narrower meaning proposes that at least employees, shareholders, customers, suppliers, governments and communities shall be defined as stakeholders (Freeman 1984, Freeman 1994, Mitchell et al., 1997). Consequently, the stakeholders in a corporation are the individuals and constituencies that contribute, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to its wealth-creating capacity and activities, and that are therefore its potential beneficiaries and/or risk bearers (Tehemar & Azhar 2012).



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Freeman's stakeholder theory supposes that organizations have a direct relationship with the external environment and a direct impact on multiple stakeholders. The theory focuses on creating value for each of the stakeholders rather than merely the stockholders. Freeman's work also identifies stakeholders as those individuals or groups who can impact or are impacted by an organization's successes or failures. Stakeholders can include suppliers, customers, employees, governments, stockholders, community members, and other groups that potentially could be impacted by organizational actions.

From a managerial viewpoint, corporate success depends on an on-going process of stakeholder management in which the interests and demands of stakeholders are identified and properly managed (Werhane & Freeman 1999).

A more descriptive approach for the stakeholder theory was proposed by Preble (2005) which can be considered a process for managing stakeholders. Preble explained how stakeholders can be identified and then categorized according to their claims. He recommended that companies should determine their potential performance gaps, based on stakeholder expectations, after which the prioritization of stakeholder demands can be performed. The fifth step introduces different organizational responses that should be developed for stakeholder interaction, followed by the sixth step that includes monitoring and control. The six-step model for managing stakeholders is presented in the figure below.

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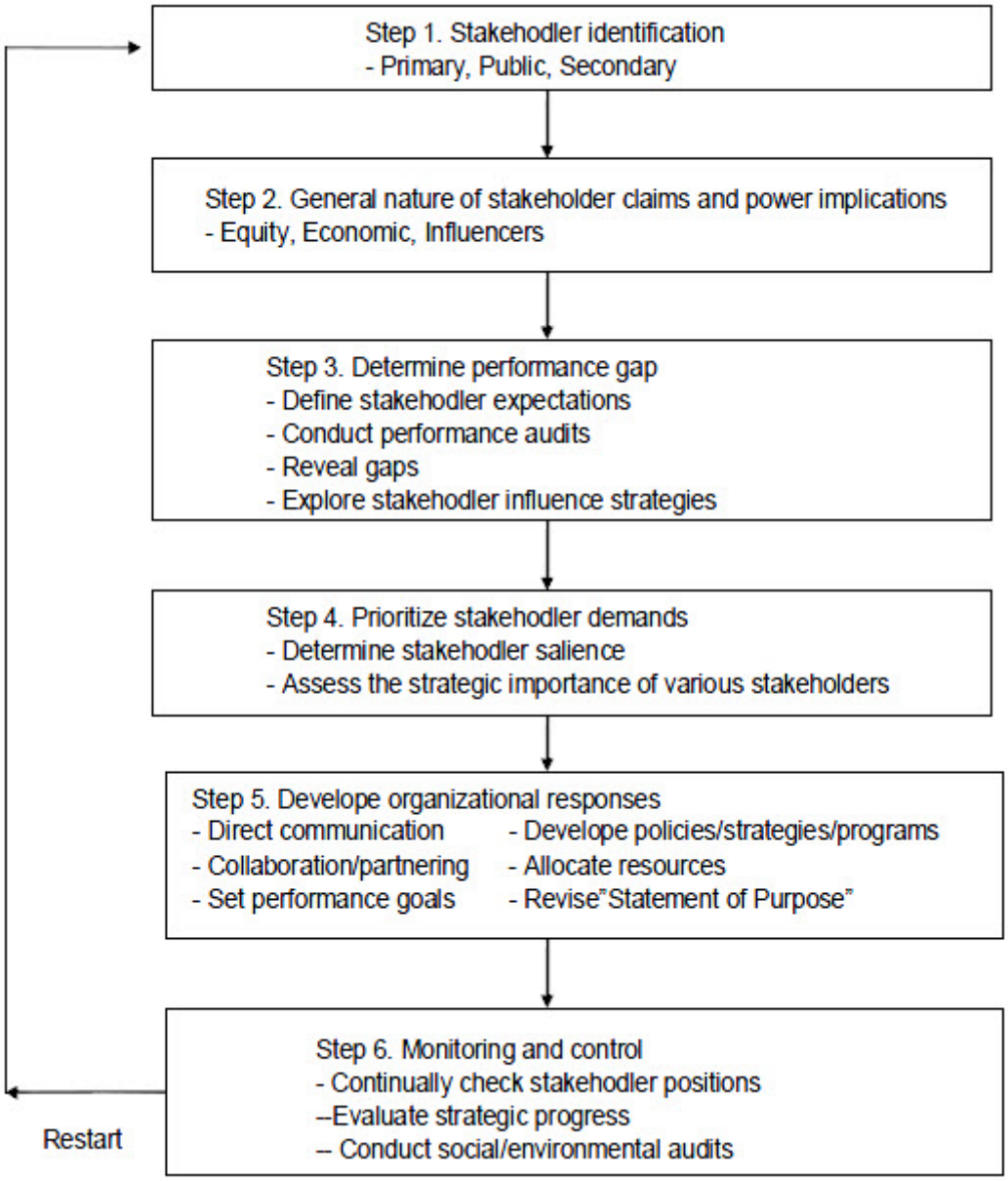


**Figure 1:** The 6 Step Model created by Preble 2005

### 2.2.3 Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization 2.2.3

All stakeholders are not equal, and different stakeholders are entitled to different considerations. For example, a company's customers and employees, though equally important, are not entitled to the same considerations. The primary stakeholders in a typical company are its shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, the community, the environment, regulatory authorities and trade unions, and civil society organizations.



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The first step in the process of stakeholder engagement is identification – determining who the company's stakeholders are. Once performed, a more in-depth analysis should be conducted to recognize stakeholders' interests, how they will be affected and to what degree, and what influence they could have on the company's CSR agenda. The answers to these questions will form the basis of the stakeholder's engagement and consultation process.

**Step 1: Identify the primary stakeholders**

Clarkson categorizes stakeholders into primary and secondary (1995). Similarly, Frooman (1999) classifies stakeholders in two categories: strategic stakeholders – the ones who can affect the firm, and moral stakeholders – the ones affected by the firm. On the other hand, Preble (2005) categorizes the stakeholders into three categories: primary, secondary, and public.

According to Clarkson (1995), primary stakeholders are those which are crucial to the company's survival: shareholders and investors, employees, customers, and suppliers, together with public stakeholders such as the government and communities. The secondary stakeholders are those that affect or are affected by, influence or are influenced by, the corporation, but are not necessary for its survival or engaged in direct transactions with the organization. These can be, for example, the media or special interest groups such as environmental or civic organizations.

When identifying affected stakeholders, the best approach is to start by determining the geographical boundaries of the company. This analysis can be used to establish the area of influence and determine who or what might be affected and how. This process will reveal those most directly affected by the company's operations, from occupied houses near the building, the effects of air and water emissions, off-site transportation of company waste, or even the socio-economic effects of job creation.

By mapping out the sphere of influence in this manner, the company can identify the distinct groups in respect of environmental and social impacts.

**Step 2: Identify the secondary stakeholders**

It is also very important to include in the stakeholder analysis those groups or organizations whose interests determine them as stakeholders. These are generally groups who have motivations, rather than a direct relationship such as with the media.



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**Step 3: Prioritize Stakeholders**

Although necessary, companies do not possess sufficient resources to simultaneously address all the multiple interests that stakeholders have towards them. This requires companies to develop strategies on how to balance between differentiating stakeholder interests, and prioritizing on which stakeholders they will initially focus. Prioritizing stakeholders also helps to categorize and clarify organizational priorities; not every person, group, or other organization affecting, or affected by, the organization in question is equally important as a stakeholder (Scarlett, 2011).

The most commonly used model for stakeholder prioritization is the interest-influence grid developed by Imperial College London. The level of influence and importance of each stakeholder is established through internal consultations and determines the relative importance of each stakeholder group. Another popular model introduced by Murray-Webster and Peter Simon is the three-dimensional version of the above, which also takes into account the attitude of the stakeholder.

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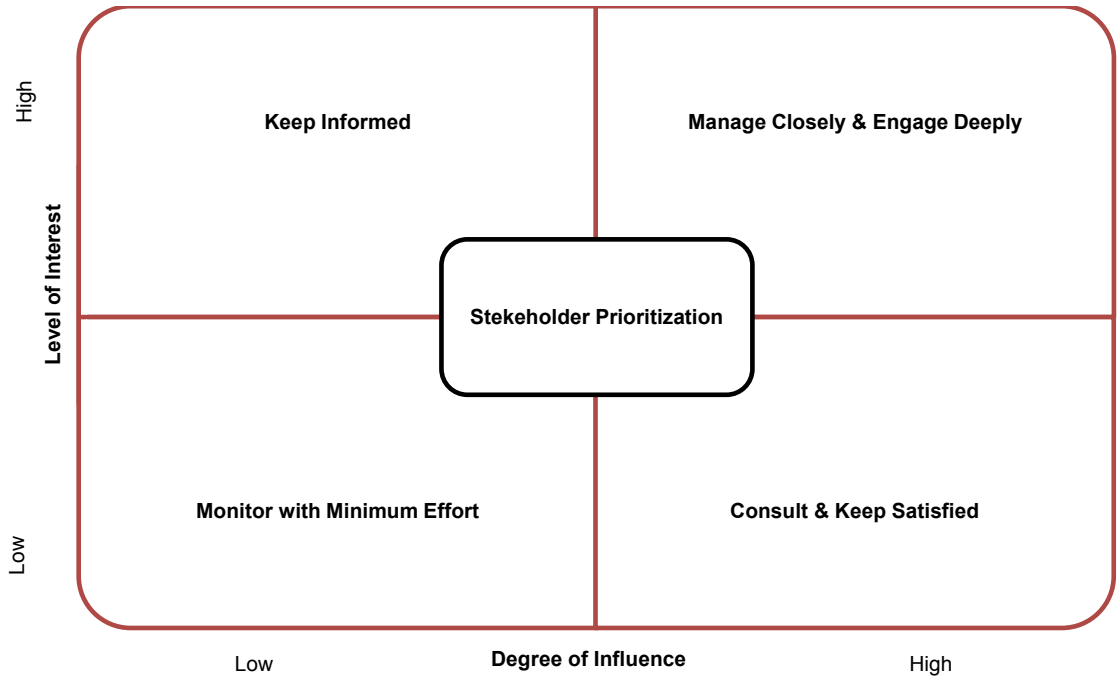


**Figure 2:** Prioritization Matrix by the Imperial College of London

It also might be helpful to consider the following questions when drawing up the list of top priority stakeholders:

- What type of stakeholder engagement is required by regulations?
- Who the most vulnerable are among the stakeholder groups, and that they may be considered a priority despite low influence/low interest.
- Which group is expected to support the hospital most in their CSR efforts, and which are expected to cause opposition and why.
- Who is it critical to engage with first, and why?
- What is the optimal sequence of engagement?

**Step 4: Identify the stakeholders' interests**

In his comprehensive stakeholder management model, Preble (2005) recommends that the general nature of various stakeholders' expectations should be assessed, after the initial identification process has been conducted. In general, these expectations will help:

- to identify what type of power these groups, or members of these groups possess;
- to elicit an appropriate response from the company;
- to discover the appropriate communication channels to use; and
- to create the appropriate message content in communications with them.



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**Step 5: Verify stakeholder representatives**

Identifying stakeholder representatives and planning the stakeholders' engagement process, in consultation with them and through their support, is imperative to its success.

When working to identify representatives, every effort should be made to ensure that these individuals are indeed spokespersons for the stakeholders and can be relied upon to serve as communicators and mediators between the company and its stakeholders.

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# 3 The CSR Communication Framework

A communication strategy is crucial for the CSR agenda to succeed. A key component of engaging in CSR is communicating it with an appropriate degree of social disclosure (Zéghal and Ahmed, 1990). Companies cannot expect the community to support and welcome its CSR practice and its 'good' deeds without first knowing and understanding the motive behind doing it. This necessitates creating proper communication channels with all stakeholders. Kellie McElhaney mentioned in her article, *A Strategic Approach to Corporate Social Responsibility* (2009): 'Promoting a company's CSR practice, once properly executed and integrated within the company, can be innovative and [a] valuable business strategy to reach critical constituencies inside and outside the organization'.

When companies communicate their CSR practices, they aim to provide information about the company's special behaviour in order to legitimize the company among its stakeholders (Deegan and Rankin, 1999; Hooghiemstra, 2000). Marketplace polls report consumers not only expect corporations to do more for the social good: they want to be informed of what corporations are doing, and how they are supporting the good deeds (Environics, 1999). This issue can be very complex due to the broad nature of CSR and the differing interpretations from various stakeholders.

Within the same context, Dawkins (2004) identifies communication as too often the missing link in the practice of CSR, with effective communication of CSR programmes 'a rare achievement'. Similarly, Lamandi (2012) observed inappropriateness of the communication channels selected by the companies in transmitting their CSR messages, when studying the CSR communication framework in Romania.

The aim of the present section is to provide the reader with detailed information about how to develop the CSR communication strategy and what the factors that should be considered are, when performing this task.

## 3.1 The Principles of Communication

Many definitions describe communication as a transfer of information, thoughts, or ideas to create shared understanding between a sender and a receiver. The information may be written or spoken, professional or social or other. The key concept in the communication process – sender, message, context, and receiver – is interpretation.



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The communication process that is 'uni-directional' (does not have a way for feedback from the receiver) is defined as one-way communication. The process that is bi-directional (allows feedback from the receiver) is defined as two-way communication. A two-way communication process enhances the engagement between the sender and the receiver and increases the probability of correct interpretation.

Each element of the communication process influences the effectiveness of the communication because they affect the way the receiver interprets the messages and motives.

In general, there are seven principles that should be applied for effective business communication:

- Clarity
- Conciseness
- Objectivity
- Consistency
- Competence
- Relevancy
- Receiver knowledge

Essentially, CSR practitioners should be aware of the difference between 'communication' and 'engagement'. Communication involves transmitting information, conveying ideas, and sharing or exchanging information between two or more parties. On the other hand, engagement is the process of involving, attracting, and establishing a meaningful and solid connection between the sender and the receiver. Depending on the stakeholders' identification and prioritization matrix (explained previously), CSR practitioners select the appropriate way to connect.

In most cases, the content of the message should be customized in a way to make it more attractive and understandable by the receiver. In order to acquire the attention from the receiver on a particular issue in the message, PR practitioners utilize a process called 'framing'. Practically, 'framing' is a critical activity in the construction of social reality because it helps shape the perspectives through which people see the world (Duhé & Zoch, 1994). The framing process is better understood as a window or picture frame drawn around information that delimits the subject matter and focuses attention on key elements. Thus, framing involves processes of inclusion and exclusion as well as emphasis (Hallahan, 1999).

Framing the content or the story is a critical process in the CSR context because it includes the positive parts of the story and excludes the negative ones. This process might raise concerns by the stakeholders who could argue that part of the story is missing and therefore could affect the credibility of the company. If well-presented, however, and its drive were to emphasize and not to eliminate, framing should lead to a desirable interpretation by stakeholders. Additionally, framing is a very useful process when tailoring the content to suit the stakeholders' interests, and is described in the following sections.



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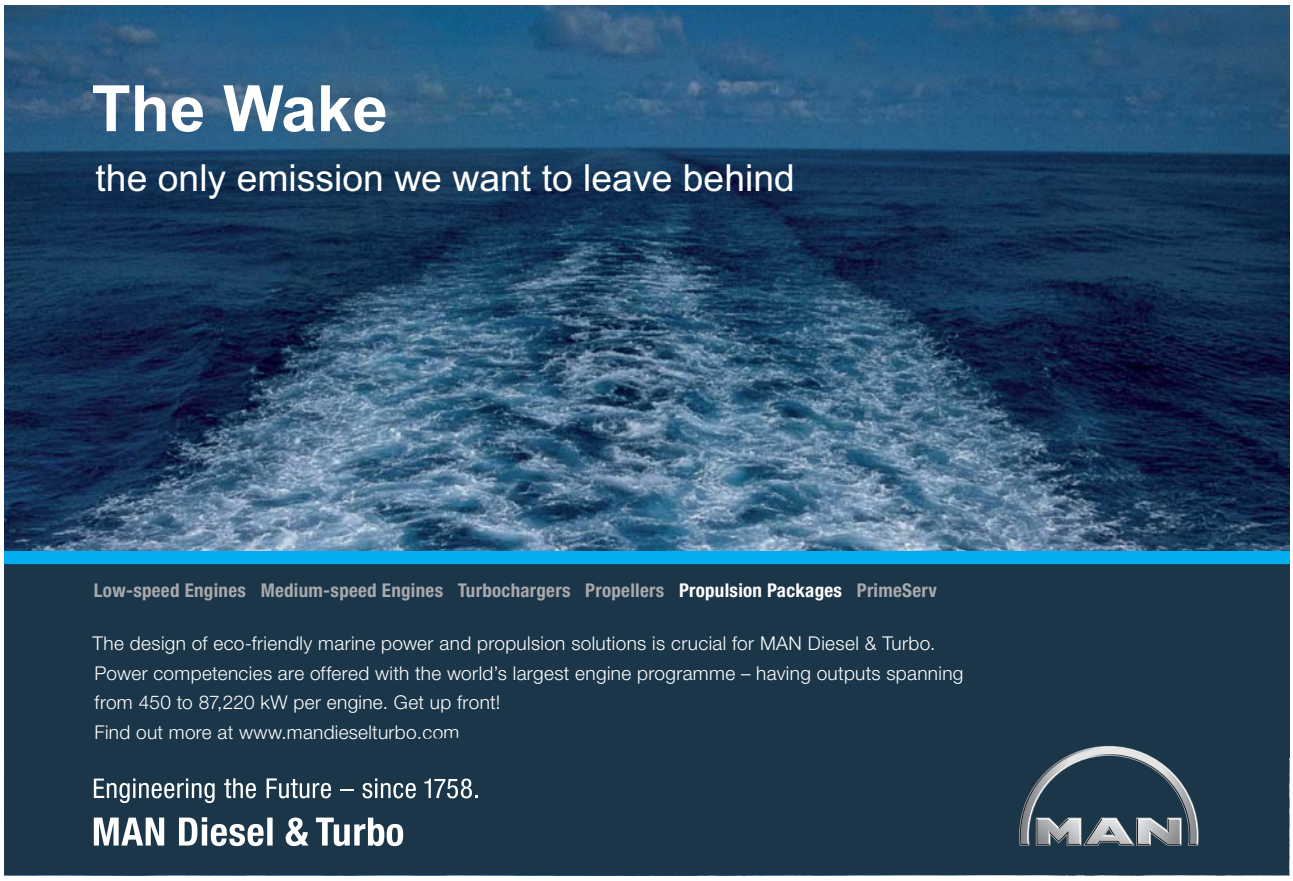
## 3.2 CSR Communication Strategy

### 3.2.1 The Prerequisites

There are fundamental requirements that a company should have before beginning its CSR programmes and developing its CSR communication framework. (Tehemar, 2011) These requirements are presented in the table below:

| Requirement for Successful CSR Communication Framework |
|---|
| Leadership commitment |
| Existence of culture of transparency |
| Presence of an organization strategy with clear CSR objectives and goals |
| Presence of CSR department or CSR committee with clear responsibilities |
| Presence of solid organizational structure hierarchy |
| Presence of organizational committees structure with clear reporting mechanisms |
| Clear understanding of community's culture |
| Proper identification and mapping of stakeholders, focused on each sector's interest |
| Presence of an active Total Quality Management department |
| Well-established data management process |
| Proper differentiation between Public Relations activities and CSR |

**Table 1:** Fundamental Requirements for CSR Communication Framework



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### 3.2.2 The Challenges

Perhaps the biggest challenge that companies face when communicating CSR is to be able to structure the message about the significance of CSR for the company. The other challenge is justifying, explaining, and convincing different stakeholders and interest groups why certain CSR issues are logical and necessary to be undertaken by the company.

Another key challenge is the source of information. What information and how the stakeholders obtain it remains a fundamental issue that needs to be addressed. TV, Internet, CSR reports, magazines and newspapers are the most common sources, however, whether reporters or columnists always have the necessary CSR background to comment on ethical practices is debateable.

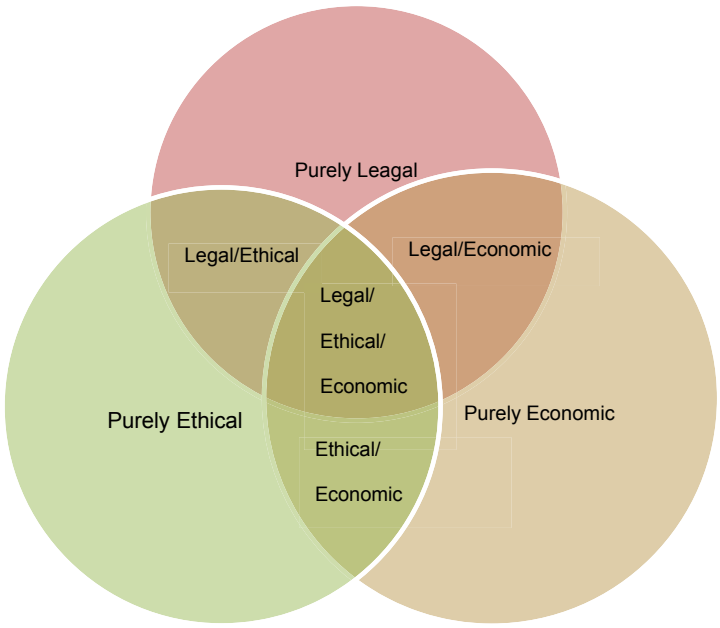


**Figure 3:** Schematic illustration of the 'Three Domain Approach' proposed by Schwartz and Carroll (2003)



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Within the context for the reason that affects the selection of the CSR programme, the author recalls the 'Three Domain Approach' proposed by Schwartz and Carroll, 2003. They categorized the CSR motives into: legal, ethical and economic (Figure 3 above). The author shares the same opinion with Bruhn-Hansen (2012) who mentioned that this model is the best approach when developing a communication strategy. It is vital to determine the motive for CSR prior to establishing any connection with the stakeholders. If the CSR motive is economic, the message should contain convincing financial data and statistics for stakeholders with financial backgrounds. Similarly, a legal motive should be addressed in a manner appropriate for regulators. The final challenge remains in the interaction of the three main motives and how they can be communicated, hence, well-perceived by various stakeholders.

### 3.2.3 Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of the CSR Communication Strategy

There are several factors that can affect the effectiveness of the CSR communication strategy. These can be divided into: intrinsic (company specific) and extrinsic (time, communication channel, message's content and stakeholders' entities). It is crucial that CSR practitioners consider these factors when developing their CSR communication strategy.

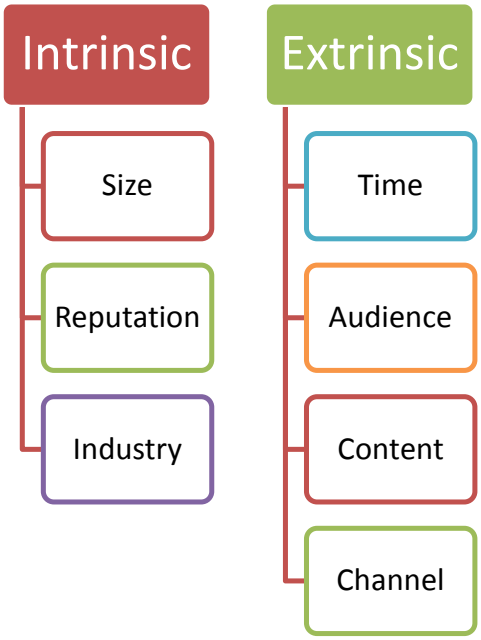


**Figure 4:** Schematic Illustration of the different factors that affect the effectiveness of the Communication Strategy

#### 3.2.3.1 Intrinsic Factors

The intrinsic factors are company-specific factors related to its size, its CSR reputation and the industry it represents and in which it operates (Du et al., 2010).



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Society always expects better CSR activities from large, multi-national enterprises rather than small or medium-size companies. Moreover, by being continually inspected and monitored by the international community, large companies are constantly expected to meet the 'high' expectations of their stakeholders by adopting CSR programmes that have a meaningful impact. This creates an unavoidable and stressful situation for the CSR and PR practitioners when framing the CSR message to be delivered. Large companies should use multiple communication channels to reach the maximum number of their stakeholders and their messages should undergo different framing and customization processes to meet the expectations of their different stakeholders.

Most commonly, the mental schemas are constituted by pre-existing characteristics based on memories, experiences, and beliefs, for example, which stakeholders recall when interpreting CSR information (Hallahan, 1999). Consequently, for companies who have a high CSR reputation, stakeholders will use this existing information when interpreting the CSR communication and therefore attribute positive implications to the company when judging its activities (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Consequently, Du et al. (2010) recommended that companies should use 'company-controlled channels' like CSR reports to maintain this expectation and make the company-specific factors relevant (Du et al., 2010).

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The third intrinsic factor is the industry which a company represents. This applies especially to companies operating in industries which, by their nature, are harmful to the environment or to consumers' wellbeing. These include industries such as fast-food, tobacco, oil, and so on (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). More efforts should be performed by the CSR practitioners, in terms of framing the message content, to eliminate stakeholders' concerns. It is advisable for those companies to heavily invest in programmes that 'correct' the harmful effects resulting from their operations (cancer research by tobacco companies, green initiatives by the oil industry or health campaigns by fast-food companies).

#### 3.2.3.2 Extrinsic Factors

The term 'extrinsic' refers to those factors that rely mainly on the stakeholders' expectations and attitudes.

- Time

It is important to classify the timing of the dialogue into three phases: beginning, midpoint and culmination. The communication techniques, channels and content at all three stages will vary significantly. At the beginning, two essential objectives should be achieved. Firstly, to educate the stakeholder about CSR, and secondly, to identify the CSR issues that should be addressed. The midpoint communication revolves around updating the stakeholders on the progress of the CSR process, discussing the status of the performance indicators, and to address any challenges and formulate action plans, if necessary. The culmination of the communication is about celebrating the achievements and acknowledging any shortcomings.

Basically, it is preferable to engage with the stakeholders from the start of the CSR programme. This will facilitate future engagement and will maximize the chance of the message being appreciated and understood by stakeholders. More importantly, by keeping them always informed, stakeholders will be ready to support the company in case of any undesirable circumstances that may occur.

- Message Content

In general, the stakeholders often determine the content of the CSR message. Investors and owners are more interested in the cost, revenues, and financial implications of adopting the CSR principle, thus their messages should contain more statistical information. Regulators and policy-makers need to be convinced about the necessity for creating new policies and regulations, and regarding industry-wide CSR practices. Consequently, their message should contain the benefits that communities will gain by applying ethical principles, and how the CSR contributes to the welfare of those communities at large.



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CSR community messaging serves two main purposes: the contribution the company is making to community wellbeing and the importance of such practices. The latter ensures that the company celebrates its CSR victories and the former is meant to tap into community power to encourage companies to do better. Similarly, social organizations need to be aware about the difference between philanthropic activities and CSR, and their messaging will reflect that.

CSR messaging to internal stakeholders (discussed in detail later) also needs to be customized at each management level. While at the executive level, the message should be more strategic in nature, that at middle management level should be more about the implementation aspect of CSR. The CSR message at lower management level should emphasize the benefits of adopting CSR practice in their daily work, and how it can positively affect their work environment and their future.

- Stakeholder Entities (Audience)

Stakeholders usually consist of different groups of people who have different cultural and educational backgrounds, consequently, they respond differently to various communication channels. It is therefore essential that the CSR communication is tailored to stakeholders' different interests, information needs, preferred channels and legitimacy demands (Dawkins, 2004; Suchman, 1995).

Practically, the company should realize that the type of audience dictates the direction the communication model takes. The audience and stakeholder for every organization are unique and represent their own unique issues and concerns. A mining company for example, will have to be concerned about the communities being uprooted as a result of a mineral discovery, whereas a hospital has to be concerned about the patients and the communities surrounding the hospital. The trick is to have a finger on the pulse of the stakeholder through an effective engagement mechanism, and to feed the findings of the engagement into the structure of the CSR communication model.

- Tools (Communication Channels)

A successful and holistic CSR communication plan should make use of as many channels as possible to enhance the reach of its message. Whether it is through representation on external committees or through a carefully planned social media presence, utilization of multiple channels to position the company's CSR message is paramount for the success of its CSR programme. A page on the corporate website dedicated to the company's concept of CSR goes a long way in cultivating the knowledge and understanding of the company's CSR stance among stakeholders. The language should be culturally sensitive and the content a representation of the company's unique brand of CSR.



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A one-on-one meeting with key stakeholders is also a recommended way, not only to cultivate trust, but also to convey the message. This may seem tedious, but planned in a careful and periodic manner; it takes much less effort and gives much better results than dinner parties for 200 people. Lastly, a CSR report that tracks the progress of the company on key CSR issues as well as on operational aspects that have a social dimension. A well-presented CSR report is considered the ultimate evidence of a company's commitment to CSR and of its pledge to transparent and inclusive communication.

Within the context of the communication channels, several considerations can be taken into account. Overall, companies can choose to communicate their CSR activities by utilizing either internal or external communication channels or a combination of the two (Du et al., 2010).

The most commonly used CSR communication channels are:

- Committees: are mainly used for creating interactivity and sharing information among its members about CSR issues. Committees can be either internal (members are employees of the company) or external (members are representatives of different stakeholders). The latter can be considered an excellent model for stakeholders' engagement as it initiates dialogue between different members of the community. Moreover, it allows the company to shape its future CSR agenda, based on the input and suggestions of community members, hence developing a programme that creates a positive impact on the society.

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- Meetings: are mainly conducted to share information, either between small groups or between large groups (general staff meeting). It is another example of two-way communication that promotes interaction from the attendees.
- Surveys: are one of the excellent tools that can evoke discussion or provide a database for decision-makers. Most companies use surveys such as customer satisfaction or employee satisfaction. Some upload surveys onto their corporate websites to obtain the necessary input from community members on CSR issues.
- Website: The corporate website is a tool that is increasingly being used by businesses for communicating CSR issues. It usually has a specific section in the website where company policies are set out for economic, social, and cultural issues. It can also include reports, publications and CSR-related conferences, events, and updated information. International companies usually customize the content of their websites, according the geographic location of the visitors.

  It is important that the CSR section should be divided into different units that appreciate various stakeholder entities, for example, an environment section, community section, and so on.

- Press Releases/TV Interviews: give an opportunity to provide more detailed information, but the credibility of the report depends on the individual, therefore media meetings or journalism forums may prove more effective tools. Advertisements are very effective CSR communication tools as they are widely available for target groups, but only for short, simple information suitable for broadcasting. The 'social ad' is the most common way of CSR communication, which is preferred by the media. One of the best examples of a controlled press release is that of *Unilever* when announcing the innovative solution for a hair product that uses little water. Another good example is that of *Coca Cola* announcing its initiative for water purification in Ethiopia.
- Sponsorship/Partnership: some companies sponsor community activities for charitable purposes while others develop partnerships with other companies or NGOs to expand the scope of their CSR programme: a partnership between different hospitals and pharmaceutical companies during the World Diabetes Day, and so forth.
- Workshops: are usually used for educational purposes. They are considered to be very effective as they allow participation and interaction from the audience. One of the excellent examples is that of the Dr. Soliman Fakeeh Hospital from Saudi Arabia when it conducts a workshop to educate 100 of its suppliers on responsible practice. The hospital also uploads the presentation used on its corporate website.
- Social Media Networks: have become the most commonly used communication platforms in the world (section on CSR and Social Media Networks is presented later).



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- CSR Reports: offer a greater responsibility in a detailed presentation of the activities. Companies should not expect that every stakeholder will read their100-page reports. Consequently, it is advisable to include an executive summary that highlights the key issues. Some companies divide the report into several sections to cope with the different stakeholders' interests (environmental, economic, community, supply chain). An excellent example is that of *Nike Incorporated*. The company not only divides the report into downloadable sections but provides video presentations for each section, as well.

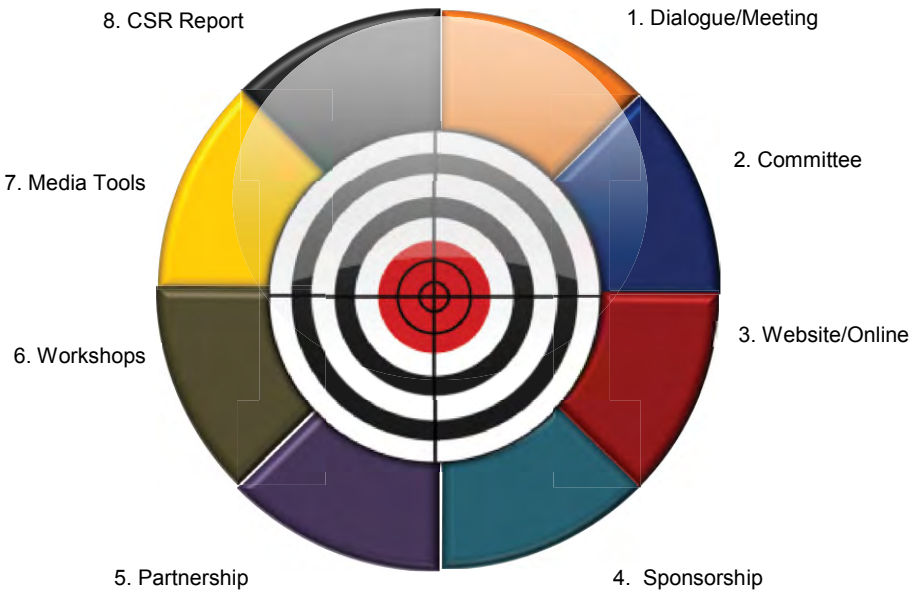


**Figure 5:** Schematic Illustration of the Most Commonly Used Communication Channels

### 3.2.4 Measuring the Effectiveness of the Communication Plan

One of the fundamental steps in the communication plan is to develop key performance indicators that allow the CSR practitioner to assess the effectiveness of the plan and its outcome. The practitioner should be aware of:

- The difference between measuring the success of the CSR initiative/programme and measuring the effectiveness of the communication plan. Measuring the success of the initiative can be accomplished by developing key performance indicators (KPIs) that measure the Social Return on Investment (SROI), percentage of the change (reduction of energy consumption), employee turnover rate, and so forth.
- The difference between effectiveness and outcome. Practically, effectiveness reflects the accuracy of the plan in terms of understanding (awareness) and feeling (engagement) among the stakeholders. The outcome reflects the reaction from the stakeholders after being made aware and being engaged (participation in campaign, volunteer work).



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Measuring the effectiveness of the plan is a complex task. First, practitioners have to differentiate between KPIs and metrics (less accurate measures like metrics are only used for online platform assessment); second, define effectiveness by identifying motive (to change behaviour, understand information, or to engage and act); third, know the limitations of the communication channel (some channels do not allow interaction or feedback from the receiver) or take into account the number of inactive visitors of Social Media; fourth, Choose KPIs that tell the most (be specific and limit choices); last, analyse carefully with a human mind set (understand the human factors that can affect the data).

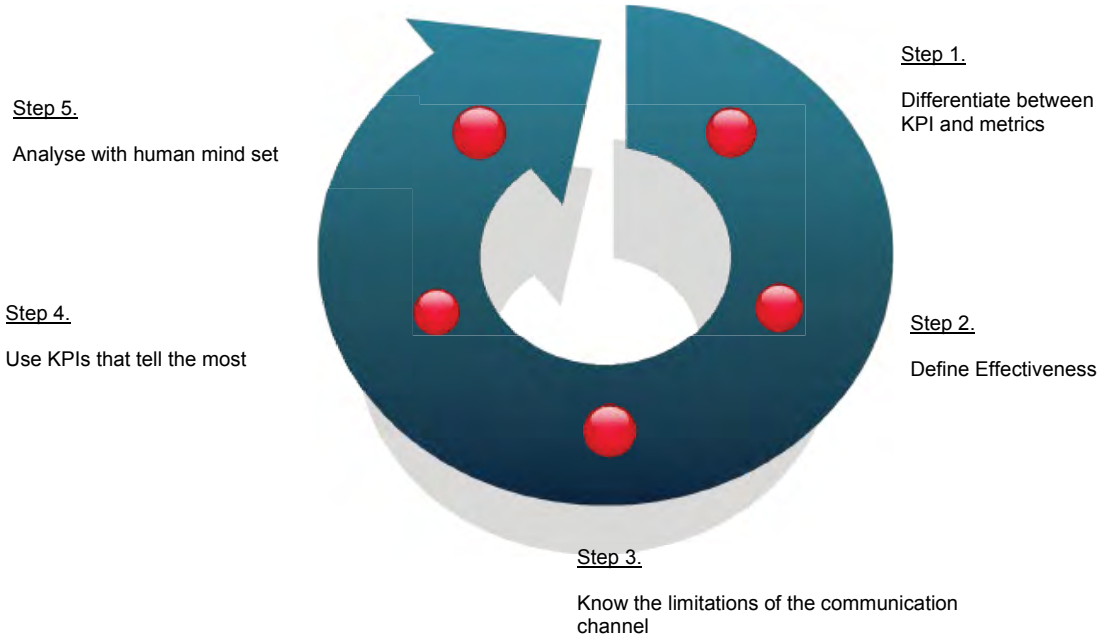


**Figure 6:** the 5 Step Cycle of Measuring Effectiveness of the Communication Plan

The Key Performance Indicators Criteria (Source: Deloitte)

- Process dependent: KPIs should be derived from, or be the outcome of, specific processes to ensure that they are relevant and can be easily obtained and tracked.
- Reliable: The data used for KPIs should reflect accurate, verifiable information.
- Quantifiable: KPIs should be concrete, not conceptual, and should be measurable and easily expressed in relevant units.
- Ongoing and comparable: KPIs should provide information that is comparable and relevant across periods, rather than being 'one-time' indicators of performance.



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Examples of KPIs and metrics that can be used in the CSR communication context are presented in the table below.

| What to Measure | Channels | KPI | Metric |
|---|---|---|---|
| Awareness | Social Media | None | Number of visitors<br>Number of retweets<br>Number of comments<br>Number of shares<br>Number of likes |
| Awareness | Website | None | Number of downloads<br>Number of visitors |
| Awareness | Intranet/E-mail | None | Number of E-mails opened |
| Engagement | Event | % of the active attendees (who act)/Total number of attendees<br>% of the number of volunteers/ total number of invited staff | None |
| Engagement | CSR Report | % of feedbacks/total number distributed | None |
| Awareness | CSR Report | None | Number of CSR distributed (mail)<br>Number of downloads |
| Engagement | PR release | % of feedback/total number of PR distributed | None |
| Awareness | PR release | None | Number of distribution |
| Engagement | Workshop | % of the attendees who applied the lessons learned/total number of attendees | None |
| Awareness | Workshop | None | Number of attendees |

**Table 2:** Examples of KPIs and Metrics used in the CSR Communication Context



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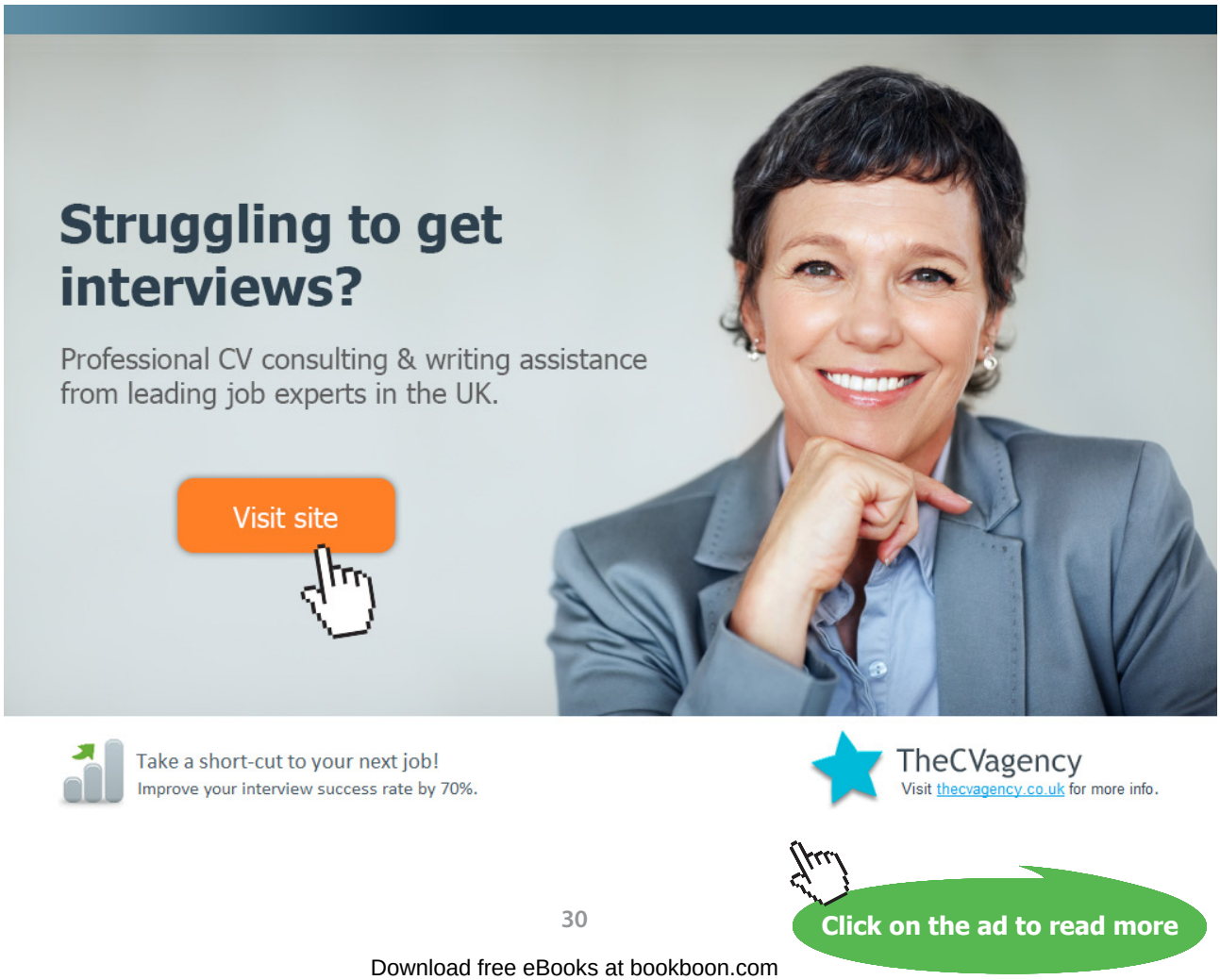
# 4 Internal Communication

The strategic alignment of internal CSR communication and employee engagement with overall business performance/company targets should be considered the core of successful CSR strategies (CSR Europe, 2010). It has been reported that for CSR communication to be successful, top management-driven CSR initiatives have to be instituted, introduced, and communicated throughout the organization (Saleh M. et al., 2012).

Internal communication was defined by Strauss and Hoffmann (2000) as 'the planned use of the communication actions to systematically influence the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of current employees'. Therefore, the employees, considered one of the key-stakeholders of the company, have to be informed and engaged for proper implementation of the CSR programmes.

## 4.1 Internal Communication Approaches

Several communication approaches have been recommended by communication experts. The most common approaches are described below.



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### 4.1.1 Vertical & Horizontal Approaches

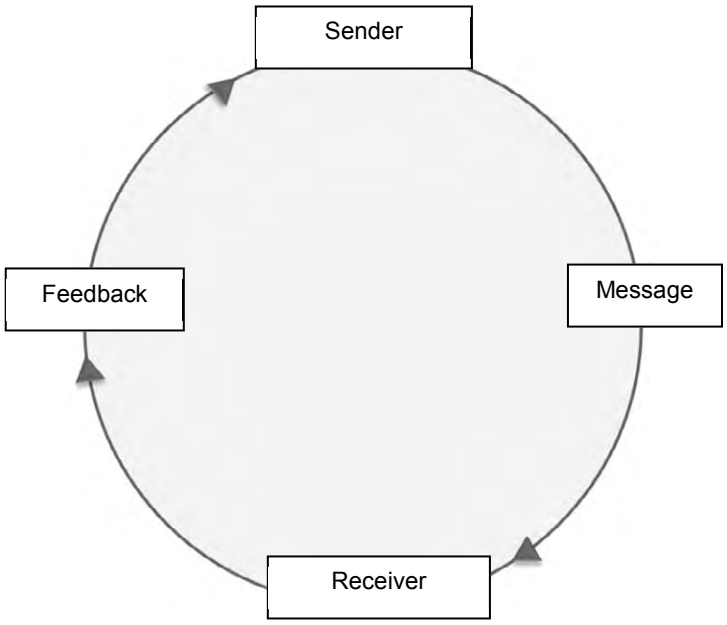
The vertical approach can be top-down, that is, from senior management to employees, or bottom-up from the employees to the senior management. The top-down approach uses the formal method of communication while the bottom-up approach uses methods like general staff meetings or surveys to obtain feedback from the employees.

The horizontal approach is the one used to the spread the message among employees of the same level (managers, directors and executives). Mainly, this method is in the form of committee meetings such as the executive committee or CSR committee in which employees of the same level meet and share information.

### 4.1.2 One and Two-Way Approaches

One-way communication is linear and limited: sender to receiver and serves to inform, persuade or command. This can be in the form of a letter, memorandum, advertisement, newsletter, and so on.

Two-way communication (dialogue) always includes feedback from the receiver. This can be in the form of discussion groups, online 'chats', and so on. This method is the best for engagement as it encourages interaction and contributions from both parties.



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## 4.2 Most Commonly Used Communication Channels for Employee Engagement

There are various internal communication channels that can be used. In most cases, each company decides which is best and convenient, according to the following factors: the size of the company (small, medium, or large), its location (local, national, or international), the number of employees, their educational background, their cultures, and the level of CSR engagement.

It can be assumed that a small local company (low revenue) with a limited number of employees will not use sophisticated channels when communicating its CSR practice internally. On the other hand, large, multinational companies should use several communication tools to reach a larger number of employees. Similarly, companies that are heavily engaged in CSR are required to use several channels to promote a culture of sustainability within their internal environments in order to ensure that their employees are ready to engage in multiple CSR programmes.

Most companies use several channels at the same time. The most commonly used channels are:

- Electronic (digital): electronic-based channels that re-deliver in digital format such as intranet, e-mails, blogs, digital newsletters.
- Print: paper-based channels that are delivered in printed format such as newsletters, magazines, posters.
- Meetings: human-based channels such as one-on-one or one-to-several meetings
- Orientation & Education Workshops: educational sessions

## 4.3 The Benefits

There are several studies that provide strong empirical evidence for CSR's influence on employees' commitment and behaviour (Aguilera et al., 2006; Maignan & Ferrell, 2001; Maignan, et al., 1999; Peterson, 2004).

In 2005, the UK Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) launched a 'CSR competency framework' to promote the adoption of CSR by corporations (www.csracademy.org.uk). This framework supports corporations' efforts to enhance employees 'implementation of socially responsible behavior' (Redington, 2005). A recent global survey of 1,122 corporate executives suggests CEOs perceived that businesses benefit from CSR because it increases attractiveness to potential and existing employees (*Economist*, 2008: 13).



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More specifically, the Towers Perrin study (2008) found that CSR is the third most important overall driver of employee engagement. The study also found that 'for companies in the U.S., an organization's stature in the community is the second most important driver of employee engagement. This is important because higher employee engagement levels are highly correlated with better business performances as measured by revenue, earnings and other key business metrics.'

From the above mentioned studies and others, it can be concluded that the benefits of communicating CSR internally resulted in:

- creating and maintaining a clear link to the company's mission and secure executive endorsement
- engaging employees at all levels as decision-makers and leaders in regard to CSR targets and activities
- increasing employees' retention and loyalties
- improving the recruitment process and finding talented candidates
- leveraging employees' skills and their ability to make positive contributions to the community
- providing opportunities for employees to develop new skills
- encouraging teamwork through group volunteer programmes
- Improving the performance of the employees resulting in improving the bottom line (profit)

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## 4.4 The Challenges

- Multi-location/Multinational

Companies operating in different locations (local company with different branches or large enterprises operating in different countries) are required to take advantage of the digital platform and streamline the process of engagement through feedbacks, group discussion, and others. It might be advantageous to develop a CSR committee with CSR representatives from each branch or country to ensure that the right message is well received.

- Culture and Education Diversity

Cultural diversity may result in different expectation and interpretation of the CSR programmes among employees. Similarly, education diversity can be considered an obstacle for successful communication and implementation of CSR. Employees who have a college degree (workers, and support service staff) will require more effort and different message contents for explaining the CSR concept than staff with a post-graduate degree (executives and directors).

- Structure of Flow of Information

The structural flow of information of the company will greatly affect the outcome of the internal communication strategy. How the information is managed and where it ends is crucial for selecting effective communication channels. In large enterprises, the information is managed and controlled by the IT department but monitored by the Total Quality Management (TQM) department. In this case, the CSR department should work in close cooperation and liaise with the IT and TQM departments to streamline the CSR message within the organization.

- Cost

Budget plays an important role in defining the success of the internal communication strategy. It is not necessary, however, that the most expensive tool should be the one of choice. In some cases, inexpensive channels like screen-savers or bulletin boards may create an effective and meaningful impact. It is up to the company to decide which channel works best, according to the situation. Moreover, as CSR commitment is not a onetime event, so budget location has to be carefully studied to ensure the consistency and sustainability of the message within the internal environment.



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- Operational Difference

It is essential that a company takes into consideration the operational differences of business units and departments when developing its internal communication strategy. For example, the supply chain management department will look at the CSR from a responsible supply chain management perspective (child labour, code of ethics, and eco-friendly products), while the health and safety department will interpret CSR as an environmental initiative and an occupational health and safety concept.

## 4.5 Internal CSR Programmes

The CSR department should develop specific CSR programmes that encourage employees to engage. There are several programmes that organizations have conducted to achieve this goal, some of them are mentioned below.

- CSR Competitions

In order to ensure that employees have properly understood the CSR concept and strategy, companies have conducted CSR competitions in which employees are requested to answer a CSR questionnaire (either online or paper-based). The winner is chosen from those who obtained the highest scores.

- Educated on CSR Campaign

Some companies have conducted internal education awareness campaigns for their staff under the theme 'Educated on CSR'. During these campaigns, employees have the chance to listen and interact with CSR practitioners. Moreover, the campaigns are accompanied by educational materials, either in digital or printed form.

- Award for the Best CSR Idea

To encourage employees' engagement, CSR departments can launch a specific award for the best CSR idea. Usually, this award is presented to the employee who has proposed the best applicable CSR idea that improves the company's CSR objectives. Most often, the CSR department announces this innovative idea in a general staff meeting and then uploads and publishes it, followed by the words 'propose by' and the name of the employee.

- Award for the CSR employee of the year

Some companies include specific KPIs in the performance evaluation of employees, and the one who obtains the best score is awarded the CSR employee of the year.



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- CSR Club

To promote the engagement process, some companies formulate a CSR club where employees can share ideas and information, provide suggestions and recommendations about CSR programmes.

- Charity Day

To foster a culture of philanthropy, companies have organized charity days in which employees donate goods or money. In most cases, moneys generated from these activities are donated to the society to support community activities.

- Volunteer Programme

Most companies practicing CSR are engaged in local community activities. Employees are encouraged to participate and volunteer by donating part of their time to those activities.

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## 4.6 The Practice

A critical first step in developing the mission, vision, values and strategy is to define the concerns, priorities and perspectives of the stakeholders. There are several ways of developing an internal CSR communication strategy. In general, the company should consider its employees as one of its main stakeholders, and treat them as such. Consequently, the seven-step cycle of the internal CSR communication is presented below.

- Define the Purpose

The company should have a clear understanding of the rationale behind communicating CSR to the employees. 'Why we communicate and what should be communicated?' remain the questions to be answered before developing the communication plan. The outcome should not only be to inform employees about how 'good' the company is, but to educate and persuade them to participate in the CSR programmes: 'People will perform only what they fully understand and believe'.

The three main purposes are:

- Information and awareness
- Education
- Motivation

The first two are considered 'passive' purposes, while the last as 'active'.

The study of Melcrum (2006), *Engaging employees in Corporate Social Responsibility,* describes the stages of employees' engagement in CSR from 'I'm aware of the message', in which employees are familiar with the CSR strategy, to 'I understand the message' in which employees learn the reasons behind the company's CSR objectives and begin to understand their role in making the company successful. The next stage is 'I believe', in which employees believe in the company's CSR objectives, and finally, 'I am committed to act', in which employees become inspired to act in ways that help the company reach its goals.

However, the author believes that employees should pass through three stages of perception (understand, believe and interact). He combined the first two phases mentioned by Melcrum (aware and understand) into one phase (understand) as one cannot be aware of the CSR strategy of the company without at the same time understanding the CSR objectives and one's role in achieving them.

Logically, the company should not expect newly-hired employees to be motivated and interactive with an ongoing CSR programme, without first being informed about what CSR is, then being educated in CSR strategy (directions, goals and objectives) and how CSR will positively affect their careers and life.



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- Categorize Employees

Categorization of employees is recommended, according to their positions and their hiring dates (executives, directors, technical and support staff) and recent or long-standing). This will facilitate selection of the appropriate channel and message content for each category.

- Allocate Budget

As mentioned previously, budget allocation ensures the sustainability of the communication strategy. Hence, companies should provide the required logistic and financial support for effectively developing and maintaining the communication strategy.

- Select the Channels

Most commonly, the channels used to communicate CSR internally are electronic, print, meetings or workshops. The corporation should select what is appropriate, according to the resources available and the position of the receiver (employee). Some companies use inexpensive channels like screen-savers or desktop backgrounds containing CSR tips that change on a daily or weekly basis. However, it is preferable to choose the channels that allow interaction and feedback from employees such as discussion groups or meetings. Moreover, the company can use more than one channel to ensure that the message is well received.

Orientation workshops should be mandatory for newly-hired employees to inform them about the CSR concept and practices, as well as their role in achieving company goals.

- Customize the Content

Detailed description about customizing the content of the message has been described in Chapter 3 and the internal communication strategy is not an exception. In general, the factors that affect the content of the message when communicating CSR to employees are:

- The position of the employees

Messages addressed to the executives should contain more statistical data, strategic views and opinions, as well as information about how CSR programmes will improve the competitiveness and reputation of the organization. On the other hand, messages addressed to lower level employees should be clear and understandable in order to convince the employees to interact.



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- The cultural background of employees

As mentioned previously, messages should be edited or visual to take into account the different cultural background of the employees.

- The hiring time of the employees

Messages addressed to newly-hired employees should be comprehensive and focus on explaining the CSR concept to them, introduction of the CSR strategy, and clarification of the benefits of implementing CSR to the company. Hence, employees will be informed and ready to participate in the future.

For those considered long-standing staff members, the messages should be motivational in order to influence them to interact and engage.

- The communication channel

Internal communication channels are mainly e-mails, bulletin boards, brochures, and so on. The communication channels selected will dictate the type and the content of the messages. E-mails usually focus on short, descriptive information, while brochures and handbooks will contain detailed information. CSR tips and hints are usually one sentence which is displayed on screen-savers, applications (apps) or desktop backgrounds. Educational workshops and meetings are open for more detailed discussions.

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- The purpose of communication

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of communication affects the content of the message. If the purpose is educational, the message should be comprehensive and descriptive. On the other hand, if the purpose is to convince employees to interact, the message should be motivational. As a rule, the message should be clear, comprehensive and authentic.

- Start the Engagement

Once the communication is executed properly, the company should look active. The CSR department should be ready to answer queries, and upper management should ensure that what is mentioned and communicated is 'real'.

- Measure the Outcome

'What can be measured can be managed.' Peter Drucker

The organization alignment should be clearly visible through strategy, using the strategy map, performance measures and targets, and initiatives.

According to a study conducted by Hewitt and the Canadian Business for Social Responsibility, declining employee perceptions of CSR within an organization can be a significant threat to engagement for over a third of organizations. They recommend combined initiatives to sustain both employee engagement and CSR in order to increase the probability of a better return on investment than non-coordinated efforts. Consequently, it is crucial for any organization to measure the outcome of its internal communication strategy through specific Key Performance Improvement (KPIs).

In its specific report, 'Internal CSR communication and employee's engagement' published in 2010, CSR Europe recommend Scorecards to be used to improve accountability through objective and performance measured ownership, employees' behaviour, and motivation with recognition and rewards. The integration of sustainability KPIs in the performance assessment of employees could harmonize and align the company's values with the employees' values.

It is worth mentioning that some KPIs such as employees' turnover rate or satisfaction rate can be indirectly correlated to the success of the internal communication strategy. While others, for example percentage of employees who have been engaged in CSR programmes, or the percentage of employees who respond correctly to CSR questionnaires, are considered more specific measurement tolls. It is always wise to combine different KPIs to measure and improve the outcome.



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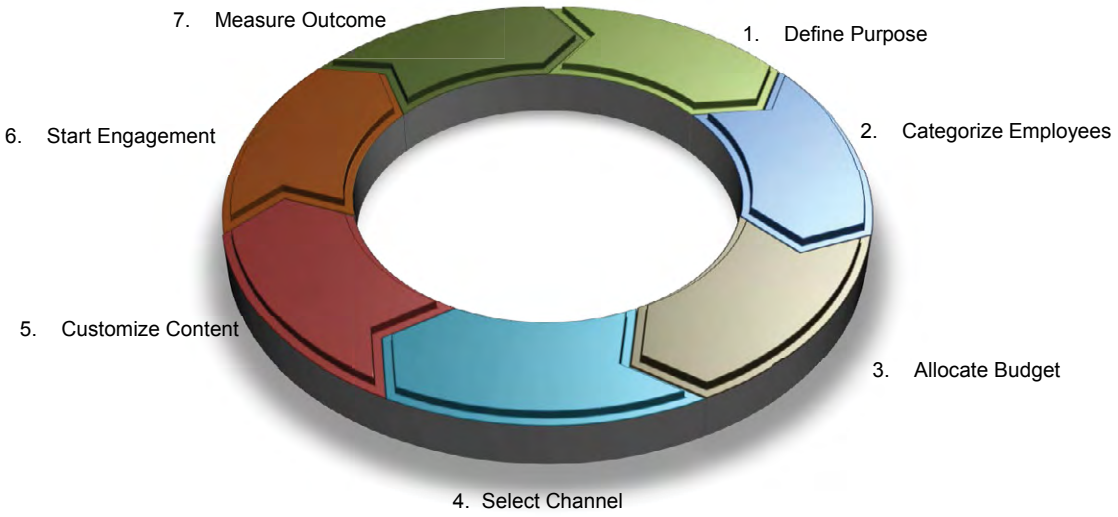
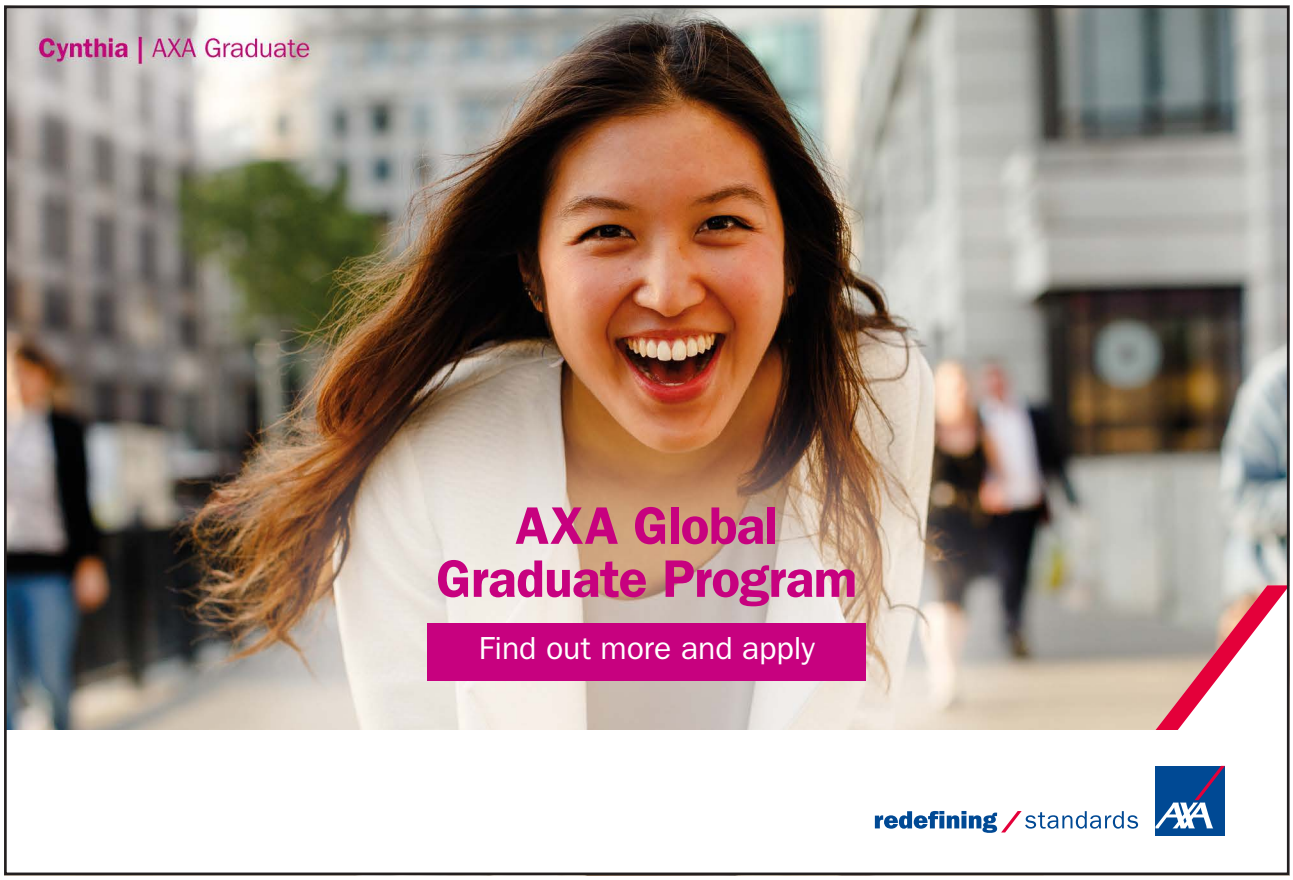



**Figure 7:** The 7-Step Cycle of Internal Communication

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# 5 Social Media & CSR

Since the evolution of Web 2.0 technology, the world has changed dramatically. Harris and Rea (2009) define Web 2.0 as 'a perceived second generation of Web development and design that facilitates communications and secures information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the Web'. This evolution has created the required infrastructure that allows the Social Media Networks (SMN) to develop. Kaplan and Heinlein (2010) define social media as 'a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content'.

## 5.1 Social Media Network (SMN)

There is no doubt that the use of Social Media Networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are growing rapidly and represent a huge opportunity for businesses to grasp the attention of their customers and communicate with them. According to the Digital Marketing Rambling website http://expandedramblings.com (accessed 22/12/13), there are 340 social media sites, applications and tools available on the Internet that are used by billions of users. The most important SMNs are presented in the section below.

| SMN | Number of Users | Date Checked |
|---|---|---|
| **YouTube** | 1.19 billion monthly active users | 30/10/2013 |
| **Facebook** | 1.19 billion active monthly users | 30/10//2013 |
| **Twitter** | 500 million total users and 215 active users per day | 03/10/2013 |
| **Linkedin** | 259 million users | 29/10/2013 |
| **Pinterest** | 70 million users | 10/7/2013 |

**Table 3:** The number of users for the top 5 SMNs worldwide. (Source: Digital Marketing Rambling)

### 5.1.1 YouTube

YouTube is a video-sharing website. It allows users to upload, view and share videos. Most of the content on YouTube has been uploaded by individuals, but media corporations including CBS, the BBC and other organizations offer some of their material via YouTube, as part of the YouTube partnership programme. Unregistered users can only watch videos, and registered users can upload an unlimited number of videos.

**Statistics**

- Age: The highest percentage of YouTube users (32%) is 45–54 year-olds
- Gender: 45% male, 55% female
- Education: 59% of the users has a college degree, while 21% has a higher degree (Bachelor's and above)
- Income: The highest percentage of YouTube users (34%) has a yearly income of USD 50K to 74K



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### 5.1.2 Facebook

Facebook is an online social networking service. Users must register before using the site, after which they may create a personal profile, add other users as friends, exchange messages, and receive automatic notifications when they update their profile; As of September 2012, Facebook had over one billion active users.

**Statistics**

- Age: The average age of Facebook users is 45–54 (34%).
- Gender: 43% male, 57% female
- Education: 60% has a college degree while 20% has a higher degree (Bachelor's and above)
- Income: The highest percentage of Facebook users (32%) has a yearly income of USD 50K to 74K.

### 5.1.3 Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service. It enables users to send and read 'tweets' – text messages limited to 140 characters. Registered users can read and post tweets, but unregistered users can only read them. Users access Twitter through the website interface, SMS, or mobile device 'app'. The service rapidly gained worldwide popularity, with 500 million registered users in 2012, who posted 340 million tweets per day. The service also handled 1.6 billion search queries per day. Twitter is now one of the ten most-visited websites, and has been described as 'the SMS of the Internet.'

**Statistics**

- Age: The highest percentage of Twitter users is 25–34 (28%)
- Gender: 50% male, 50% female
- Education: 62% have a college degree, while 23% have a higher degree (Bachelor's and above)
- Income: The highest percentage of Twitter users (43%) has a yearly income of USD 25K to 49K.

### 5.1.4 Pinterest

Pinterest is a pin board-style, photo-sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, and hobbies. Users can browse other pin boards for images, 're-pin' images to their own pin boards, or 'like' photographs.

**Statistics**

- Age: The highest percentage of Pinterest users (27%) is 25–34 years old
- Gender: 21% male, 79% female
- Education: 65% has a college degree while 24% has a higher degree (Bachelor's and above)
- Income: The highest percentage of Pinterest users (41%) has a yearly income of USD 25K to 49K.



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### 5.1.5 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social networking website for people in professional occupations. It is mainly used for professional networking and available in 20 languages. Registered user can create a profile with details about their education, work experience and competencies.

There are several ways to effectively use the network on LinkedIn:

- To keep in touch with own network group or groups and receive updated information on each member's current occupation, personal development and business achievements, for example.
- Introductions to employers or business associates can be requested through user's network contacts.
- Employers can search for qualified personnel, recommended by reliable contacts within their network group or groups.
- Find the appropriate contacts for a possible job opportunity within a company or obtain information regarding the company's work ethics, location, and so on.

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**Statistics:**

- Age: The highest percentage of LinkedIn users (62%) is 35–54 years old
- Gender: 50% male, 50% female
- Education: 45% have a college degree, while 49% have a higher degree (Bachelor's and above)
- Income: The highest percentage of LinkedIn users (32%) has a yearly income of USD 50K to 74K.

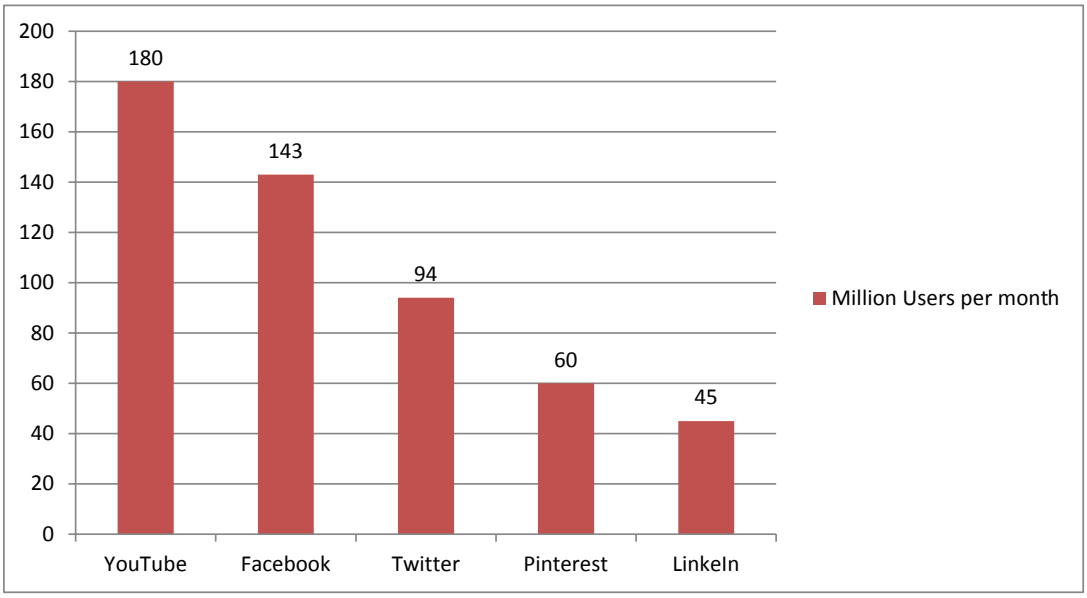


**Chart 1:** Number of visitors (in millions) per month in the United States for the top 5 SMNs (Source: Quantcast https://www.quantcast.com/top-sites)

## 5.2 Types of Social Media Users

Almost all internet users interact with SMN in some ways. According to a study published by Kamber (Social media consultancy firm), 27% of the online time is spent on SMN. Several classifications about the types of SMN users have been proposed by researchers and social media experts. The most well documented and used is that of Forrester Research Company. Unfortunately, this classification is not SMN specific, that is, not categorized according to a particular SMN (Facebook, Twitter), it is only based on country, age and gender. However, it does give marketers an idea of the types of users with which they are dealing, but further research is required to identify the real stakeholders. Forrester Research classifies the users into six categories:

- The Creator

The person who creates social media for the world to see; this type of user will publish blog posts or web pages, upload videos/images/audio and share content, online.



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- The Critic

The person who responds to content posted by others; posts ratings and reviews of products and services, comments on blogs and forums and contributes to articles in a 'wiki' website.

- The Collector

The person who organizes content for themselves or others, using RSS feeds, social bookmarking (Digg) and photo- or page-tagging.

- The Joiner

The person who joins social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter; maintains multiple profiles.

- The Spectator

This type is probably the most common – The person who reads blogs, views user-generated videos (YouTube), reads online forums, listens to podcasts and frequently searches for user reviews and ratings.

- The Inactive

The person who is online but in no way participates in any form of social media. Does not post anything or read anything which is user-generated content. This type is becoming rarer as more websites integrate elements of social media into their website.

CSR practitioners should be aware of the types of users when developing their CSR communication strategies, according to the graph above. For example, they should take into consideration that in USA, 54% of the users aged 41–50 are inactive. This means that half of their visitors will not give feedback (likes, retweets, comments) about the CSR practices when posted to SMNs. Accordingly, the latter should be excluded from the monitoring process when measuring the outcome.

Moreover, Forrester Research provides an excellent free tool called 'Consumer Tool' on its website. Visitors can check the type of users according to their location, age and gender, in real time. A detailed presentation of those types is presented in the table below.



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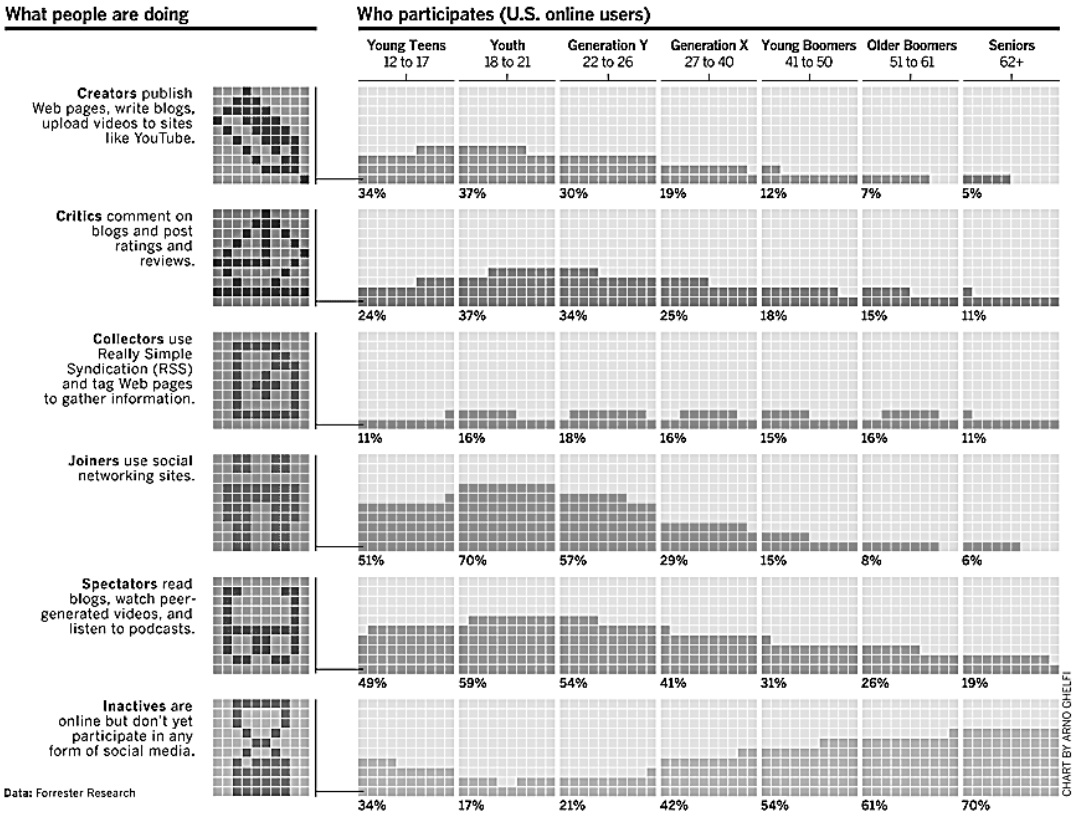


**Figure 8:** Type of SMN users as presented by Forrester Research

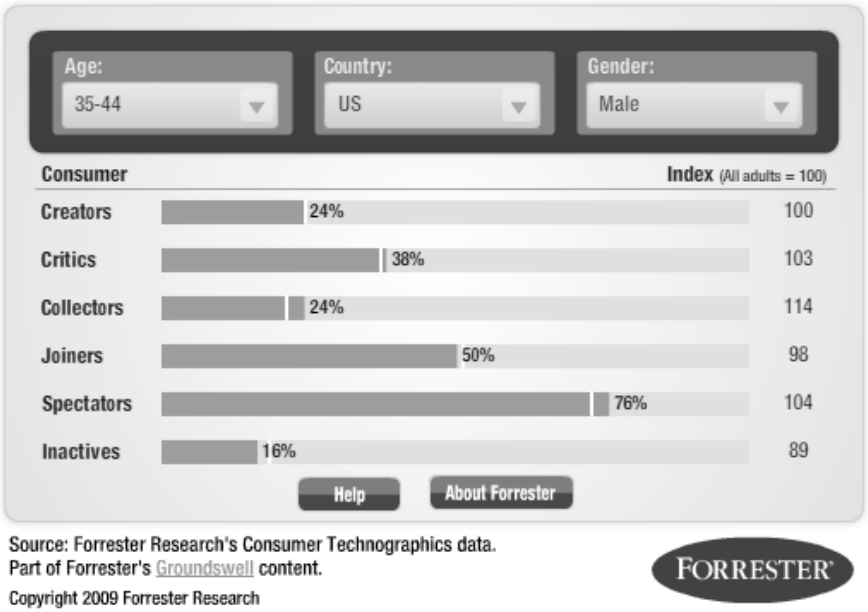


**Figure 9:** Consumer Tool by Forrester Research



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## 5.3 SMN & CSR

Within the context of CSR, SMNs play a crucial role in defining the way of communicating CSR practices to the community. Many organizations are trying to take advantage of these new channels to promote their credentials in the CSR domain and to give them a competitive edge. These channels enable the flow of information, and people are not only able to access the sustainability performance of any company, without limitations, but also post feedback that can create a challenging situation if such post were inaccurate or misleading. Unfortunately, not all companies practicing CSR are aware of, and prepared for, this new technology. This has created a situation whereby companies are trying to protect their reputations rather than telling stories and inspiring new ideas and innovations.

The benefits of using SMN for CSR are as follows:

- SMN is a great communication tool that can intensify CSR messages and brand a company as a good corporate citizen.
- SMN can be used as a vehicle for generating dialogue and interaction about CSR practices and initiatives with stakeholders.
- SMN can make CSR practices more discoverable by using tools like retweets, likes, and comments.
- SMN can foster a culture of transparency and increase awareness of the CSR concept within the community at large.
- By being an always 'ON' online platform, SMN can protect the reputation of the company from inaccurate and misleading information in real time.
- SMN fosters creativity and innovation by the sharing and collaboration of users from all over the world.
- SMN increases employees' loyalty and satisfaction by promoting the 'good' about their companies.
- SMN is an inexpensive marketing tool compared to other media channels.
- SMN can create word-of-mouth (WOM) process.



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The risks involved in using SMNs for CSR:

In general, as any online application, SMNs can be the source of malware or viruses that can lead to loss of data if proper preventive measures are not taken (according to Sophos, 40% of users have reported some form of malware – source: Blue Coat Web Security Solutions report). Within the context of CSR, the risks of using SMN can be summarized as follows:

- Companies have no control over the conversation – it is happening with or without the companies' involvement.
- SMN requires 'continuous' online presence for a proactive approach and immediate action, whenever required.
- Using SMN requires careful attention of the message's content and visuals used as incomplete information posted by companies might be misleading and can negatively affect their reputations.
- As SMN is available for users from all over the world, it is crucial to understand the cultural backgrounds of the different nations when choosing the colour and graphics, as they can create a false impact.
- SMN requires investment in talent and staff to properly manage the communication. In most cases, companies should formulate a team from PR and CSR practitioners to manage this task.
- Choosing the right channel might be 'tricky' and requires clear understanding of the demographic data of the users and not wasting resources by communicating to the wrong candidates.

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### 5.3.1 The Rules & Requirements of connecting CSR to SMN

It is vital for any company willing to use SMNs for communicating its CSR practice to realize that using these channels is a strategic decision that has to be founded on a solid communication plan (SMN being part of the entire plan), to appreciate their benefits and understand their risks. The following are the fundamental steps that should be followed:

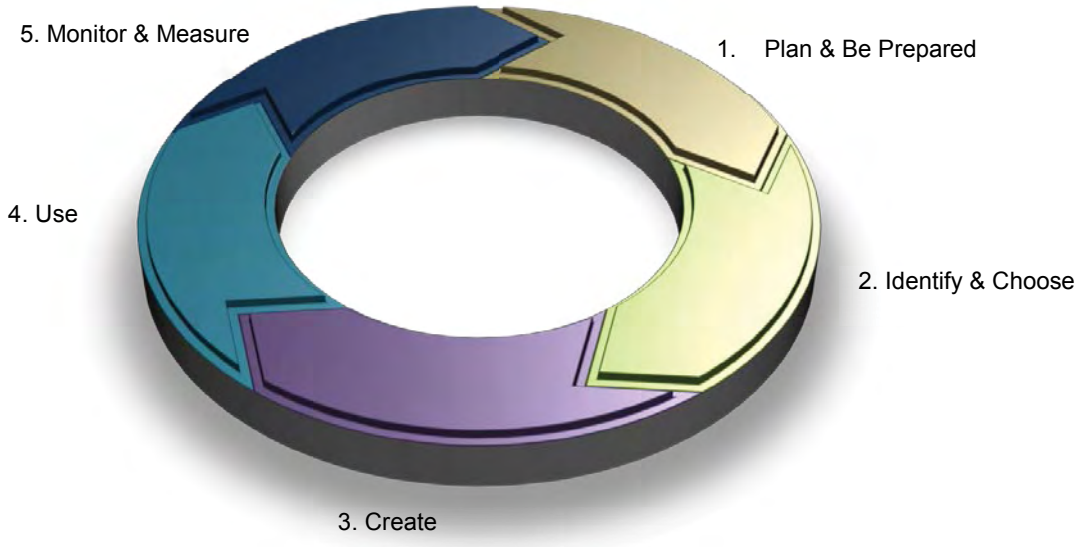


**Figure 10:** The 5 Steps to follow for using SMN with CSR

**1. Plan and Be prepared**

'What gets planned, gets done' Peter Drucker

The company should be well prepared to engage with its stakeholders through SMN. This can be accomplished by developing a comprehensive CSR strategy with clear goals and objectives, having a solid communication plan, being proactive, having a 'story to tell' and most importantly, be ready to share information in a transparent manner. Additionally, the content of the message has to be clear, comprehensive, authentic and linked to the core business and competency of the company. Users will appreciate stories like waste management processes (known to be hazardous and infectious), health education and awareness campaigns, supporting needy patients through healthcare services rather than from food manufacturers. On the other hand, stories like supporting environmental research, using eco-friendly products will be highly respected by the industrial sector instead of being conducted by service sectors. It is important to remember that the CSR initiative, once executed properly, deserves to be highlighted.



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**2. Choosing the right message for the SMN site**

As stated previously, one of the key elements for the success of the communication plan lies in understanding the company's stakeholders' interests, age group, geographic location, gender, and so on, therefore messages should be tailored accordingly, and SMN is not an exception. Moreover, as not all SMNs work in a similar manner nor are visited by the same users, choosing the SMN will also depend on the content of the desired message to be delivered. For example, telling a long story requires creating a video to be uploaded to YouTube rather than writing a lengthy paragraph on Facebook. On the contrary, Twitter or Facebook will be the perfect media to host an announcement or share information rather than LinkedIn which is more focused on feedback from professionals.

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| SMN | Strength |
|---|---|
| **YouTube** | Long story, emotional, highest number of users |
| **Facebook** | The easiest to customize the story according to the stakeholder entities<br>The best in sharing information and obtaining feedback<br>Branding |
| **Twitter** | Engagement in real time<br>Discovery & Networking<br>53% of people recommend products through Twitter |
| **LinkedIn** | Professional feedback, better knowledge, the highest in higher educated users, opinion from experts |
| **Pinterest** | Graphic, illustration and info-graphics are better presented on this site |

**Table 3:** The strength of the top 5 SMNs

| SMN | Weakness |
|---|---|
| **YouTube** | The most expensive among the SMNs if done properly<br>Requires talented staff |
| **Facebook** | The most risky among the SMNs<br>Inability to expect reaction<br>More than 8% are fake users |
| **Twitter** | 140 characters only<br>Daily active tweets tend to decline after the third tweet – make the first one impressive<br>40% of registered users are passive participants |
| **LinkedIn** | Not for ordinary users |
| **Pinterest** | Only info-graphs (illustrations)<br>Just for awareness but not for real engagement |

**Table 4:** The weakness of the top 5 SMNs

There are several websites that provide detailed information about the age and gender distribution of a particular SMN. This will help organizations to targets their' real' stakeholders. Moreover, some SMNs like Facebook provide tools to target users according to geographic location, gender, age. Suggested sites are http://empowered.forrester.com/tool_consumer.html and http://www.socialbakers.com/ or look at detailed reports that are published by companies like Pingdom on its blogsite (http://royal.pingdom.com/), Ignite Social Media (http://www.ignitesocialmedia.com/social-media-stats/2012-social-network-analysis-report/) and Webcertain (http://internationaldigitalhub.com/en). It is always wise to get professional services from market research companies or allow the marketing department to do the tasks.



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**3. Create the SMN pages**

Companies should think about their websites and SMNs pages as their iconic representations to the world. Consequently, they should invest in the design, structure, contents and visuals to obtain the maximum impact. It is advisable to:

- Use the same theme for both the website and SMN page (colour, layout) to improve corporate entities.
- Use visuals whenever possible.
- Be creative and choose the story that promotes human interaction.
- Update the page on a regular basis.
- Enhance the pages' 'vitals' by compelling stories.
- Do not excessively post.
- Ask the visitors to interact.
- Make the content clear and simple.
- Never delete or ignore misleading posts.

**4. Use multiple SMNs**

While it is true that it is not possible to be on every channel, every day, and to monitor them all as well, however, using many channels will enhance the visibility of your CSR practices. As long as the right team manages the appropriate content to post, as many channels as desired can be used. It is worth noting that one of the benefits of using SMN to communicate CSR practices is that the whole world can be stimulated in real-time.

**5. Monitor & Measure outcome**

As mentioned previously, one of the key elements of the CSR communication strategy is to include a process to measure the outcome, based on qualitative and quantitative metrics. There are simple ways for monitoring activity on SMNs, such as observing 'likes' on Facebook, retweets on Twitter, tracing stakeholders' comments, and acting accordingly.

For a more professional method, the measurement process should include an audit plan with clear indicators. In general, the audit plan should allow the company to monitor its business efficiently and effectively and help manage and grow its social presence across different platforms. There are some companies that provide excellent services in this area like Social Mention, Hootsuite, Sprout Social and Sysomos. Most of them provide the companies with intelligence and insights needed to measure results and ultimately make decisions on what is working and what is not working.

In most cases, these social media management companies collect data from blogs, SMNs, messages, and major news sources and identify opinions by gender, age and location.



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# 6 Examples of Best Practice

This section highlights some of the best practices from local and international companies in the CSR communication context. The companies represent different industries and are considered pioneers in their fields. Their websites can be visited to obtain information and learn more from them.

## 6.1 Starbucks

Industry: One of the largest coffee houses in the world.

President/CEO: Howard Schultz

CSR person in charge: Blair Taylor (Chief Community Officer)

Number of Employees: 149,000

Area of service: Worldwide

Website: www.starbucks.com

Best Practice in CSR communication: much attention paid to the message contents and customization in the corporate and regional website. Moreover, Starbucks invites comments on its CSR report through a survey available on the website, including the possibility of ranking the report on different elements and including more detailed aspects. This format makes it easy for readers to comment – and is probably more encouraging than a simple e-mail address for feedback.



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## 6.2 TNT

Industry: Transportation/Distribution

President/CEO: Tex Gunning

CSR person in charge: Jan Ernest De Grout, General Counsel, Director Legal, Corporate Responsibility and Public Affairs

Number of employees: 156,000

Area of Service: Worldwide

Website: www.tnt.com

Best Practice in CSR communication: TNT includes a compact Page Options/Subscribe toolbox on every page in the 'Social responsibility' section of its website. The tools allow the user to listen to an audio version of the page, receive page update alerts, send to a friend, report an error, and print the page. Users can also subscribe to RSS feeds (press releases, YouTube videos, Flickr photographs); stakeholder magazine, annual reports, event alerts, SMS alerts, and e-mail newsletters. One of the best examples of partnership was performed with the United Nations World Food Programme from 2002 to 2008.

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## 6.3 Nestlé

Industry: Food Processing

President/CEO: Paul Buckle

CSR person in charge: Peter Brabeck-Letmathe

Number of Employees: 339,000

Area of service: Worldwide

Website: www.nestle.com

Best Practice in CSR communication: Nestlé has created an excellent Social Media Network. People can engage easily with Nestlé through different SMNs. This well-structured engagement process made the company climb from 43rd spot to 2nd, in the CSR Online Awards, 'Global Leaders' 2010, for its corporate website as a platform for CSR communication and stakeholder engagement.

## 6.4 Dr. Soliman Fakeeh Hospital

Industry: Healthcare Service Provider

President/CEO: Dr. Mazen S. Fakeeh

CSR person in charge: Dr. Sherif H. A. Zaki Tehemar

Number of Employees: 3000

Area of service: Local (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia)

Website: www.dsfh.med.sa

Best Practice in CSR communication: The hospital received recognition and many awards (Best working environment in KSA in 2012, 1st prize of King Khaled Award for Sustainability in 2013, The Patient Center Care Award in 2011,and others). The hospital is renowned for being one of the few hospitals worldwide to reach the A+ level of CSR reporting in 2011. The hospital focused on raising CSR awareness in the workplace, healthcare sector and community at large. Some best practices include: CSR digital magazine, education on CSR campaign for employees, publishing the 'Good Hospital Guide' as sustainability handbook for hospitals and conducting CSR workshops for suppliers.



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## 6.5 Unilever

Industry: Consumer Goods (including foodstuff, beverages, cleaning products and personal care products)

President/CEO: Paul Polman

CSR person in charge: Gavin Neath (Head of CSR)

Number of Employees: 173,000

Area of service: Worldwide

Website: www.unilever.com

Best Practice in CSR communication: its website provides multiple discussion platforms related to the supply chain and agriculture, nutrition, health and well-being, and marketing and communications. 'Unilever Sustainable Living Plan' provides initiatives directed to improving health and well-being, reducing environmental impact and enhancing livelihoods.

## 6.6 Centrica

Industry: Utilities/Energy

President/CEO: Sam Laidlaw

CSR person in charge: Ivor Gibbons (CR Manager)

Number of Employees: 38,000

Area of service: Europe & North America

Website: www.centrica.com

Best Practice in CSR communication: Centrica ranked 1st in the CSR online Awards 'Global Leaders' for two years in a row (2011 & 2012). Centrica provides a vast range of dialogues including blogs, SMNs, and a website, as well as news, media, videos and case studies. Moreover, its website demonstrates how user-friendly, well-organized and functional, a clean website can be. It includes a CEO introduction as a video clip (with multiple viewing formats and PDF transcript) on which the entire panel comments favourably.



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