



## Corporate websites and public relations

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### ABSTRACT

Corporate responsibility (CR) has recently turn out to be a known international issue which has received much research interest in the field of public relations (PR) and considered a major aspect of public relations for years. The importance of corporate websites (CW) and the Internet as PR tools has been documented in several studies owing to the increasing importance of these websites for propagating approaches to CR. In this work, the relevance of CR information and their levels of interactivity on these websites was discussed. A specific tool was designed for the analysis of these aspects of CW. The results of this paper shows the importance of public relations on the web pages of the studied corporates and most of the corporates tend to enhance their communication with public.

**Key words:** Public relations; corporate responsibility; Internet; Websites.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate responsibility (CR) from the company's perspective, has received great attention and has been considered by the society as a legitimating process for the organization [1] [2]. Numerous studies have proved that it is an activity that keeps gaining value and interest from different public sectors who monitor and evaluate the behavior of companies in this area. This paper mainly aims to evaluate the level of company's importance on CR information hosted on their corporate websites (CW) and the interaction level of such information. A specific tool was designed in this study to identify issues of CR and to analyze the level of interactivity of such information hosted on CW. The obtained results from this study will guide future studies and facilitate organizational comparison in terms of CR issues and of the level of interactivity in the public-organizational relationship on this matter.

### 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1. PR and corporate websites

The Internet has recently become a vital organizational

communication tool [3]The significance of CW and the Internet as PR tools has been demonstrated in several studied [4, 5]. Both have been receiving growing interest in the aspect of communicating organizational responsibilities [6]. Studies that focused on the Internet and PR have shown the likelihood of an interaction amongst the organization and the public as a matter of high importance. A major feature of the Internet is interactivity and it has been widely studied in the area of communications [7]. Regarding the level of interactivity of CW, several PR scholars have shown 2 basic approaches-information dissemination and establishment of relationships amongst the organization and different publics [8]The interactivity level in the first approach is low, and Internet usage is unidirectional, with the major aim of propagating information and striving to work on the firms' image before the public. In the 2nd approach, the interactivity level is high[9], and communication is easier owing to internet usage[10], helping to build relationships through the facilitation of public-organizational interaction. This paper focused on analyzing the importance attached to CSR/CC/SD matters by organizations on their CW, as well as the level of information interactivity on such issues. These intents are operationalized in these research questions (RQs).

- RQ1: What are the available CC/SD issues on CW?
- RQ2: What are the resources used to present CC/SD information?
- RQ3: What are the available resources to facilitate CC/SD issue-related feedbacks?

#### 2.2. Public relations (PR) and corporate citizenship

One of the important themes in the field of PR is CR. There is a mild relationship between PR practice and CR[5]. From the societal perspective, PR can be regarded as a legitimate organizational practice from the eyes of both post-structuralist [11] and functionalist [12]. Companies have within the social sphere, assumed more responsibilities that exceed their own economic activities [13]. The past 50 years witnessed the emergence of the actual meaning of CR and the role of companies towards CR. Adding to the emergence of several concepts, several authors have suggested a gradual emergence in the responsibility of companies.

Carroll (1979) presented the differences between economic–legal responsibilities and ethical–philanthropic responsibilities when studying the development of company responsibilities theory. [14] The concept of CR received much attention in the 1980s. [2, 15] suggested that the relevance of corporate citizenship increased in the last 10 years owing to the incorporating a world focus and the stakeholder theory approach into CSR. He believed that “corporate citizenship involves the strategies and operating practices a company develops in operationalizing its relationships with and impacts on stakeholders and the natural environment”. The concept of CR has in the past few years drawn closer to the wider concept of sustainable development [16]; Herrmann, 2004). As such, we rely on the notions of a joint CSR/CC/SD which is based on the listed organizational commitments and their connection with the public in fulfilling their social, economic and environmental obligations; fulfilling its obligation to ethical behavior and information transparency; in company management; in products development; and in evaluating and controlling the achievement of these obligations. Hence, the communication function represents the main co of CSR/CC/SD management.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study applied content analysis methodology on the CW of the studied 5 companies'. During the analysis, 2 categories - content and information categories were established. The 1st category helps in identifying the issues of CSR/CC/SD, beginning with the GRI of 2002 and the CCCI. The CCCI method, as put forward by [15] was reliant on the most significant international bibliography of the subject and on the most significant evaluation criteria. The other documents and reports used were complementary as tabulated in Table 1. Five values that correspond to CSR/CC/SD-related issues were also presented in Table 1.

Regarding the information presentation [17] the stated bibliographies in the theoretical framework formed the basis of the categories but supported with opinions from website design experts. Five categories were recognized and among them, the volume of information category helps in identifying the existence of the different issues on the CW and the amount of available information different issues. A good percentage of CSR/CC/SD information is related to the annexed documents. Although the documents were sorted and compiled, (Hiebert, 2003) no analysis was performed on their content since the aim of the study was the identification of the information, as well as identifying the level of relevance and presence assigned to each issue on the websites. The information category hierarchy allows the ordered level development; that is, where most of the CSR/CC/SD information is hosted within the webpages. [2] The information category location allows information localization on CSR/CC/SD within the websites' homepage.

The next category (information resources) assists in identifying the available resources for information presentation on CSR/CC/SD. There were 2 kinds of resources recognized: i) Expositive resources are resources that facilitate information distribution; here, the visitor is extremely passive and receptive. Such resources are recognized as graphics or audiovisual. ii) Interactive resources are resources that facilitate obtaining information via active interaction; here, the visitor is mainly active and participative. They are identified as hypertexts, charts, interactive graphics, and other similar resources.

The feedback resources category assists in identifying the available CW systems for responses, opinions, and assessment of CSR/CC/SD matters. Three forms of feedback were provided, which are the company's general email, the specific CSR/CC/SD issues-linked emails, and the other forms of feedback which allow the assessment of CSR/CC/SD-related issues.

The CW of all the quoted firms in the selective index of the Iraqi companies in the first half of 2018 formed the sample in this study. The studied companies include Zain company, Asiaccell, alsomod company, alfaw, public company for electrical devices, all these companies are located in Iraq, the period needed to complete the study of the websites for these companies is 20 working days [18].

### 4. FINDINGS

#### 4.1. Presence of CSR/CC/SD issues on CW

The propagation of CR information through the Internet has escalated recently. The webpages of all the listed enterprises contain CSR/CC/SD-related information. The CW of the listed enterprises also contain specific CSR/CC/SD sections. Out of the studied enterprises, 80.6% of them allocated a specific section to CSR/CC/SD while 20.4% did not. Among those that allocated a specific section, most of them (29.2%) referred to it as “Corporate Social Responsibility” 25% called it “Corporate Responsibility”, while 16.7% called it “Social Responsibility”. Only 4.2% of the studied enterprises called it “Sustainable Development” while none described it as “Corporate Citizenship.”. Table 2 showed the non-homogenous nature of the 5 CSR/CC/SD issues hosted on the CW of the listed firms. Issues related to showcasing the company's general characteristics, products and services were the most present and relevant. This strengthens the concept of the self-presentation capability of CW. These issues inclined more to the commercial perspective instead of allowing the company's compromises to ruin its marketing activities. Cooperate governance is another issue with a high presence even though relevance was mainly established in association with legislation, mandating enterprises to publish such information on their webpages (Act 26 of 2003 and Eco Order 3722 of 2003).

**Table 1: CSR/CC/SD issues**

Issue	Definition	References
Products and services	Explains the services, products, and brands of a firm from a corporate point of view and not from a commercial perspective.	GRI (2002); Ingenhoff (2004)
Employment and HR	Declare and explains the systems of contract, evaluation, promotion, and dismissal. Declares and explains issues relating to human rights in the firm.	GRI (2002); Ingenhoff (2004); UN Global Compact (UNGC) (2000); Business Impact Review Group (BIRG) (2003); European Commission Green Paper (ECGP) (2001); Maignan and Ralston (2002); Capron & Gray (2000).
Social action	Declares actions relating to the involvement of the firm in social issues	GRP (2002); Maignan & Ralston (2002); Ingenhoff (2004); ECGP (2001); BIRG (2003); Capron & Gray (2000)
Environmental action	Declares actions relating to the involvement of the firm in environmental issues	GRI (2002) ECGP (2001); BIRG (2003); Capron & Gray (2000); Maignan & Ralston (2002); Ingenhoff (2004)
Relationship with public	Declares the interests, importance, and connection of public groups with the firm	GRI (2002); Ingenhoff (2004)

**Table 2 : Presence of RSC/CC/DS issues on CW**

Issues	% Presence
Products & services	92.40
Employment & HR	78.10
Social action	88.30
Environmental action	50.60
Relationship with public	65.00

However, matters relating to social action, HR and employment, as well as environmental action had spaces in only 78.10% of the studied websites.

Finally, it was observed that corporate ethics issues received little attention on the studied CW; approximately 88% of the studied firms gave it little attention. Among those that even considered it, it is often sandwiched in other general issues like corporate governance or social action.

<sup>a</sup> *Information presentation resources on CSR/CC/SD*

Regarding the resources for information presentation on CSR/CC/SD, the so-called “expositive” resources showed a clear predominance over the “interactive” resources as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3 : Feedback and Information Resources Usage (%)**

Issues	Information resources			Feedback resources		
	Expositive		Interactive	Email		Other feedback
	Graphic	Audiovisual		General	Specific	
Products & services	100.0	89.40	65.60	100.0	80.0	32.0
Employment & HR	100.0	76.0	48.50	100.0	84.30	22.0
Social action	100.0	55.70	35.70	100.0	79.30	10.80
Relationship with publics	100.0	43.0	55.70	100.0	71.40	20.0

Almost 100% of the studied companies use graphics resources for propagate of CSR/CC/SD issues-related information. Audiovisual resources also received adequate attention About 57% of enterprises use interactive resources. These resources are available on the Internet, making it different from other media. It can be stated that resources for the propagation of CSR/CC/SD issues received little significance on the evaluated webpages.

4.3. Feedback resources used with CSR/CC/SD information

Regarding the available resources for feedback facilitation, Table 3 showed that 100% of the listed firms provided CSR/CC/SD issues-related emails. Regarding email, almost 100.0% of the firms provided a common email address to be used in all sections of the webpage, while 78.3% provided specific CSR/CC/SD issues-related email in the associated sections. Meanwhile, 23.4.6% of firms use both specific and general emails.

**5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The CSR/CC/SD-related issues are of much importance to most of the listed enterprises (companies) as evidenced by a large number of firms (nearly 81%) that dedicated a section of their webpage to CSR/CC/SD issues. Almost 90% of these firms usually situate this section in the most relevant website levels (mainly on the homepage). This dedicated section to CSR/CC/SD implies that the issue is explicitly recognized,

highlighting the recognition of the need for CSR/CC/SD on the CW of firms. This assertion is reinforced by the way CSR/CC/SD information is placed on the webpage structure. The results, however, showed a low interactivity level of the CW of the listed companies in connection with CSR/CC/SD-related issue. The websites mainly assume unidirectional function with more focus on presenting the information content. It was also observed that there is a high prevalence of expositive sources instead of interactive resources; similarly, no appropriate feedback resources were observed for dialogue and interaction with the public.

Finally, there are some limitations to this study. Being conducted on firms, the outcome cannot be representative of other firms. However, the study offered a way of evaluating CSR/CC/SD information, as well as evaluating the interactivity of the CW of different companies. The proposed methodology in this study is also applicable elsewhere as it allows the development of comparative studies that allows the determination of the importance of CSR/CC/SD-related issues at the global level while delimiting the patterns in presenting such information. This will add to the global view of the current state of CSR/CC/SD in firms and will serve as a vital tool for improving the interaction and relationship between firms and their publics.

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