FROM CORPORATE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS TO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: HOW TECH BRANDS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE NATIONAL REPUTATION

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Abstract:

This article delves into how factors within the high-tech industry can shape a nation's image, exploring the intricate dynamics between tech corporate diplomacy and the public diplomacy of the state. It presents a strategic approach for tech companies to fortify their image, with a particular focus on highlighting the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) narratives. It discusses how such initiatives not only have the potential to enhance the reputation of tech companies on a micro level but also offer industrial and diplomatic advantages for the nation on a macro scale.

Keywords: Tech Diplomacy; CSR; Tech Marketing; High-tech Industry

Introduction

The economic and business dimensions are intricately connected to the diplomatic initiatives of nations. Frequently, the official representatives of nations utilize aspects of the private business sector in their diplomatic efforts (Uyar et al., 2020). Therefore, the presence of robust enterprises, businesses, and a strong private sector is beneficial for nations. Beyond the business realm, contemporary enterprises worldwide are increasingly dedicated to advancing social causes, reflecting a global trend that emphasizes prioritizing social agendas. In addition to seeking profitability, companies now acknowledge their dual responsibility to fulfill obligations to the environment and society (Puchakayala et al., 2023).

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The question of whether to engage in social responsibility is no longer in doubt; rather, it is now a matter of determining when and how such involvement should occur. Corporate social responsibility (CSR), encompassing a range of social initiatives, has gained widespread acceptance as a means to foster employee satisfaction (Bauman and Skitka, 2012), promote employee retention, enhance employer branding (Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2018), improve financial performance (Cho et al., 2019; Okafor et al., 2021; Wokutch et al., 2013), affect consumer perceptions (Currás-Pérez et al., 2018), stimulate organizational innovation (Jia et al., 2022), and strengthen credibility and relationships with the public (Lee et al., 2019).

CSR scholarly research holds many insightful dimensions. For example, Currás-Pérez, Dolz-Dolz, Miquel-Romero, and Sánchez-García explored and delved into three necessary dimensions of CSR: Social, Environmental and Economic and three consumer-perceived value (PV): Utilitarian, Emotional and Social (Currás-Pérez et al., 2018). Conte, Vollero, Covucci, and Siano explored three dimensions, too: CSR penetration, explicitness, and symbolic communication practices (Conte et al., 2020). They claim that "the three dimensions help provide a global assessment of CSR communication" (p.1427).

When exploring different aspects of CSR, it can be classified into two distinct typologies: "act" and "talk". The first typology relates to the operational dimension of CSR, encompassing concrete actions taken by businesses to advance social welfare. These actions are driven by voluntary engagement and are devoid of profit-driven motives. The second typology concentrates on CSR reporting and communication (Conte et al., 2020), encompassing marketing and advertising endeavours, as well as the dissemination of information regarding the organization's societal involvement, agenda, and initiatives aimed at improving society.

The typologies exhibit a notable disparity, with the first type emphasizing the act of "social" initiatives and the second type primarily centred around the marketing, promotion, and communication of these social messages (Vollero et al., 2022). Since "Messages about corporate ethical and socially responsible initiatives are likely to evoke strong and often positive reactions among stakeholders" (Morsing and Schultz, 2006: 323), this article primarily addresses the second typology, with a specific focus on the high-tech business sphere, and argues that CSR needs to become integral to decision-making and media management in the tech industry. Moreover, as this study claims, these talks by entity (micro) have implications on a much broader scope of industry and country (macro).

Tech entities, similar to other organizations, actively engage in CSR practices (Ferrat et al., 2023; Moyano-Fuentes et al., 2019). In today's landscape, they are increasingly focusing on communicating their CSR initiatives to improve their brand image and overall performance (Chang, 2009; Cormier and Magnan, 2015;

Tangngisalu et al., 2020). Given the escalating criticism directed at the technology ecosystem in recent years (Weiss-Blatt, 2021), companies often find the need to adopt communication strategies to counter negative sentiments and protect their public image. While such actions may benefit the specific brand, they also play a role in shaping the broader image of the locale from which the brand originates.

In routine, tech brands employ various marketing strategies to showcase their innovation (Mashiah, 2021). Our current focus is on developing a conceptual management framework for effective social context messaging to reshape the reputation of the tech sector during the new ongoing crises and clashes. This framework is grounded in the understanding that CSR, in both normal and crisis situations (Ham and Kim, 2019), not only provides a financial advantage in the competitive market (Gong and Grundy, 2019) but also carries symbolic diplomatic significance, positive social value, and reputational benefits (Conte et al., 2020; Morsing and Schultz, 2006). From micro to macro, as the subsequent chapters illustrate, the strategic promotion of this CSR symbol by tech actors can confer reputation advantages (Morsing and Schultz, 2006), serve image management purposes in international relationships (Beise-Zee, 2011; Hayes et al., 2022; Lii et al., 2013; Moliner et al., 2019; Prasad and Holzinger, 2013; Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The Social Responsibility

There have been many versions of social agenda management in business, including "corporate social responsibility", "corporate social performance", "corporate responsibility", and "social responsibility". Although they have many different names, they all offer the same principle, dealing with businesses and organizations practical ways to take responsibility for a wide range of social issues. Various books, articles, and guides describe how to take proactive steps to address environmental issues (physical action) while making profits from the sale of a product or service (Blowfield and Murray, 2014; Melo and Galan, 2011; Rajak, 2011; Zadek, 2007). Largely speaking, researchers argue that this activity has positive implications for businesses worldwide (Zairi and Peters, 2002). A business entity that adopts social codes, adopts the norm of "doing good", and dedicates resources, will return the investment and ultimately profit, because it also sees the interest of the whole, and not just its narrow business interest (Adams and Zutshi, 2004; Rowe, 2006).

In the organization prism, CSR is identified as a broad field that is studied from different angles, all of which focus on the need of organizations to pay back to society by doing good (Meyer, 2015). Moyano-Fuentes, Rodríguez-

Martínez and Jiménez-Delgado (2019) study CSR in the context of organisation location and geography. As they stated, "Companies could be observed to want to pay back society in return for the benefits that they obtained from being located in a science and technology park" (p.198). In other words, the place in which the organization is located affects the CSR tempo. Being in "tech areas" can "encourage companies to implement a greater number of actions in the sphere of CSR" (Moyano-Fuentes et al., 2019: 197), and CSR information flow. Ferrat, Daty, and Burlacu examined CSR in the context of firm size and investments (Ferrat et al., 2023). They focus on the CSR factor using environmental, social, and governance ratings (ESG) and find that its impact is based on firm size, with larger CSR-leading firms showing diminished returns compared to their CSR-lagging counterparts, while the traditional CSR factor premium persists in smaller corporations.

According to Moir (2001), all organizational actions in the field of CSR are divided into two main types: (1) normative and ethical actions and (2) utilitarian instrumental actions. The first type is a product of the organization's view of the social norms and environment that surrounds it and primarily the organization's motivation to look at foreign factors outside of it (Cannon, 2005). The second type emerges from the perspective of the organization and essentially the preservation of the interests of the organization by social action (Moir, 2001). Both these types of CSR can be observed within the technology industry. Moreover, the geographical location of a tech organization can also impact the way social responsibility practices are carried out. One can argue that the presence of a tech company in a particular area influences the scope and character of the social initiatives undertaken by that organization (Moyano-Fuentes et al., 2019). In addition, it is important to note that taking social responsibility or "doing good" has two main paths: inside and outside the organisation.

The first path is doing a good deed to a factor outside the organization, for example, participating in a protest or initiative of a social nature or actual volunteering of staff or managers and contributing their time, energy, resources, and knowledge to the "other" (external factor), keeping the environment, recycling, human rights and community (Moir, 2001). The second way is to promote a social agenda and initiative inside the organization and for the in-house factors. For example, promoting a green agenda inside the offices, making social policy in the manner of recruitment, diversity, equality policy, and more (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Ferdman and Deane, 2014). In both instances, organizations use social action as a storytelling, and a means to inform relevant audiences about its social action (Barker and Gower, 2010; Brown et al., 2005; Sole and Wilson, 2002).

2.2. CSR Communication and Storytelling

Storytelling is an important and essential tool for brands. According to Morgan and Dennehy (1997), stories can enhance the memorability and credibility of information: They suggest that stories "are a powerful means of communicating values, ideas, and norms (Morgan and Dennehy, 1997: 495). Barker and Gower (2010) also emphasize the significant impact of stories and storytelling in the realm of organizational effectiveness (Barker and Gower, 2010). One area where storytelling thrives is in the context of CSR. Despite the challenges organizations may face in maintaining a positive reputation, narratives that showcase an organization's good deeds and implemented CSR programs inside and outside the business, serve as valuable tools for promoting enduring positive values. In fact, the symbolic representation of CSR initiatives becomes instrumental in shaping the organizational myths and collective social understanding of reality and effectively engaging stakeholders (Barker and Gower, 2010; Boyce, 1996; Morgan and Dennehy, 1997).

In essence, through CSR storytelling, organizations and businesses possess the ability to shape and influence people's knowledge and recollection of their identity and actions. While it is important to acknowledge that the misuse of CSR communication can lead to "organizational hypocrisy" (Christensen et al., 2013), there are also good functional reasons and proper ways to use CSR communication in diverse areas. Hence, the next section will focus on the specific reasons why companies in the tech industry are increasingly compelled to actively engage in and allocate significant investments towards CSR communication and storytelling today, more so than ever before.

2.3. Anchor of Marketing Communication in International Relations

Innovation plays a critical role for technology firms, as it is widely recognized as a primary source of competitive advantage, particularly for high-tech enterprises, which must navigate rapid and disruptive changes (Makri and Scandura, 2010). Thus, technology organizations strive to be at the forefront of innovation and embrace a culture of innovation (Sai Manohar and Pandit, 2014). Such entities are widely accepted in society for their innovative spirit, as evidenced by their ability to invent and market products that enhance human life. Nonetheless, in recent times, certain technology firms have been embroiled in scandals and controversies, leading to their portrayal as negative and detrimental (Colombo et al., 2016; Eriksson and Olsson, 2016; Etter and Vestergaard, 2015; Weiss-Blatt, 2021).

Coombs and Holladay (2002) argue that an organization's reputation is "how the organization is perceived by its publics" (p.167). The media has a significant

impact on public perceptions and beliefs and serves as a catalyst in portraying technology firms in a positive or negative light. Historically, technology firms have received favourable media coverage (Mashiah, 2022), but recent high-profile scandals have led to negative portrayals of many technology brands (Weiss-Blatt, 2021). Consequently, technology firms may aim to reshape their public image by adopting different management strategies. Technology firms may argue that improving their public image can be achieved by engaging in socially responsible practices and contributing to various sectors of society (Adams and Zutshi, 2004; Rowe, 2006). Thus, these firms engage in socially oriented operations and management approaches, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate social performance (CSP), corporate social and environmental responsibility disclosure (CSERD), corporate responsibility, or social responsibility. After they draft formal "policies and procedures" for socially orientated activities (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013: 698), and implement the social agenda, they then aim to report their actions to different stakeholders (Bouten et al., 2011; Michelon et al., 2015; Nielsen and Thomsen, 2007).

In practice, tech companies not only make a socially oriented form of action, but also highlight and promote positive stories, and report about their social impact on society (Golob and Podnar, 2019). A recent study by Vollero, Yin, and Siano delves into the institutional disparities that contribute to the diversity in CSR communication strategies among companies based in North America, Europe, and Asia (Vollero et al., 2022). But of course, this phenomenon of CSR reporting and communication happens in many other parts of the world and diverse fields, one of which is the high-tech field.

In fact, CSR, CSP, marketing, and branding have become closely related (Beise-Zee, 2011; Hayes et al., 2022; Lii et al., 2013; Moliner et al., 2019; Prasad and Holzinger, 2013; Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017). In the context of CSR promotional talks and communication (Morsing and Schultz, 2006), it can be asserted that the strong implementation of CSR practices by influential players in the technology industry is significantly present in society. The coordinated CSR messaging efforts of tech brands have the potential to contribute to public perceptions. In response to the challenge posed by the tech-clash phenomenon, tech brands today can integrate CSR into organizational corporate diplomacy, thereby creating a link to the nation's diplomatic endeavours and image management. In other words, establishing a framework for CSR within the technology sector effectively aligns corporate practices with national diplomatic goals and contributes to the cultivation of a positive national image.

2.4. From Corporate Diplomacy to Public Diplomacy

Corporate diplomacy involves implementing a range of strategic initiatives by an organization to foster positive relationships with various stakeholders and establish

trust. These diplomatic endeavours aim to enhance and fortify the organization's standing within the target audience (Asquer, 2012; Henisz, 2017; Ordeix-Rigo and Duarte, 2009). Notably, the predominant theoretical discourse in organizational diplomacy revolves around individual entities (such as a single company operating within a specific industry, market or segment). Nevertheless, the practical landscape frequently entails numerous entities collaboratively participating in organizational diplomacy, collectively steering towards a specific direction.

When multiple entities engage in diplomatic activities with a shared objective within a particular industry, their combined impact extends beyond individual entities (micro) and can contribute to broader objectives, including those on the political-national level (macro). The diplomatic initiatives undertaken by a consortium of companies within a particular industry, exemplified here by the high-tech sector, have the potential to influence political diplomatic efforts at the national level (Figure 1). Through the adoption of strong CSR discussions, public relations strategies, and effective communication practices, high-tech companies collaboratively highlight their socially responsible dimensions. According to Mashiah (2023), nations can strategically "utilizing various elements to present the state positively, encompassing technological products, companies, entrepreneurs, and buzzwords". This collective endeavour indirectly enhances the positive attributes of the locale. Consequently, countries engaged in public diplomacy can leverage the actions of industry companies to enhance their diplomatic marketing initiatives.

Figure 1. From Micro to Macro
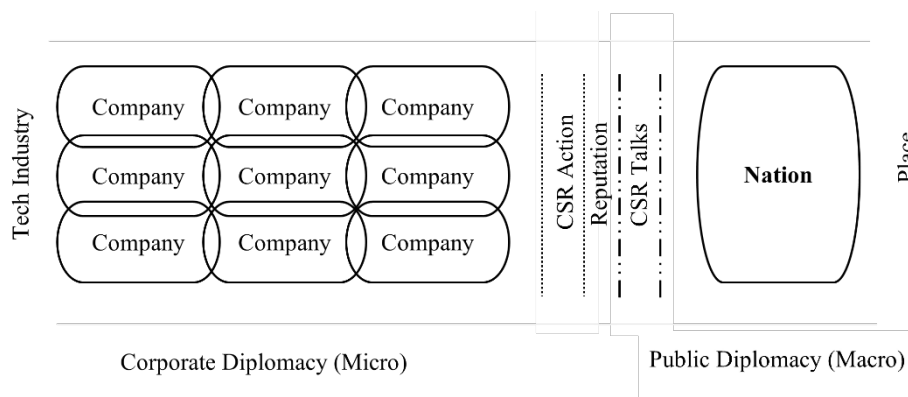
2.5. *Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)*

In situations where many technology companies within a country are subject to ongoing public criticism, the associated nation or region can experience an image crisis.

After delving into the practical application of CSR, it becomes apparent that a theoretical link is needed to connect corporate diplomacy (involving social activities and the talks of social action) with the public diplomacy of the state. Given that this concept has emerged in response to the challenges posed by the tech-clash and criticism of tech entities, one applicable theory to contemplate is the established Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). This prominent theory in public relations, devised by Coombs and his colleagues, has its "evolved from a number of studies that examined how a crisis might shape the selection of crisis response strategies" (Coombs, 2004: 266). Coombs employed Attribution Theory as a framework to establish links between crisis situations and suitable crisis response tactics (Coombs, 1998, 1995). Over time, various studies delving into SCCT have associated the domain of crises with potential damage to the reputation of specific organizations (Coombs, 2017). Moreover, these studies have proposed strategies for responding to crises that align with the level of responsibility assigned to the organization based on the particular type of crisis (Ma and Zhan, 2016).

In the midst of an era marked by a profusion of crises, the question has evolved beyond the probability of a singular crisis occurring to the broader challenge of identifying industrial crises within a larger context. Both public relations practitioners and policy makers are intrinsically compelled to navigate through these crises (Coombs, 2007), encompassing not only those originating from organizational actions but also those arising within the broader industry framework. This accentuates the significance of examining SCCT from a sectoral perspective, extending beyond a confined view. This fundamental approach constitutes the essence of the current study, as exemplified by the analysis of the crisis confronted by the high-tech industry. More broadly, integrating CSR communication can serve as a practical strategy to effectively navigate ongoing tech crises. We, therefore, argue that this approach is not only beneficial for the specific entity involved but also contributes to addressing tech crises at the national level within countries.

Schultz and Wehmeier (2010) underscore the significance of institutionalizing CSR within an organization's communication framework. Consequently, technology entities, their management stakeholders, and PR professionals can effectively integrate CSR storytelling. So, relying on a wide prior knowledge of CSR communication (Verk et al., 2021), the current attempt intends to structure a theoretical and practical model for utilizing CSR efforts broadly. While existing studies have discussed CSR initiatives of individual companies at a micro level, the objective now is to expand the discussion and provide insights into how high-tech stakeholders and places can use corporate communication to promote their social initiatives and cultivate a positive reputation. As such, first, we need to get familiar with some key ideas of CSR communication and promotion (*Table 1*).

Table 1. Key Ideas of CSR Communication

| Themes discussed in the context of CSR	Example
The activism Mentioning of different types of CSR, examples of actual social actions	"Companies engage in CSR activities with various motivations and goals" (Shim et al., 2017: 818).
The process Processing information from an actual CSR action to a piece of corporate news	"Many corporations showcased the volunteer and donation efforts of their employees on their websites as part of the CSR culture of the organization" (Harrison, 2021: 346).
The timing When the CSR implemented (crisis, routine)	"Companies with higher CSR performance before the pandemic experience fewer losses and take a shorter time to recover" (Shang et al., 2022: 635).
The voices Who talking about CSR (company, CEO, employee)	"Nowadays, it is not uncommon for chief executive officers (CEOs) to make their positions on societal issues known" (Bojanic, 2023)
The topics Company CSR custom policy and social issues	"Companies in the Technology industry were the most likely to speak out on all three issues" [LGBTQ, racial injustice, immigration] (Sterbenk et al., 2022: 415).
The channels The platform for publishing CSR organizational actions (such as PR, website)	"Companies can convey their CSR messages through two types of communication channels, controlled and uncontrolled" (Lee, 2016: 438).
The formats Styles of communication to deliver the CSR news	"CSR messages often use visuals, such as illustrations, photographs, animations, and videos, to reinforce the messages' central content related to a CSR cause" (Lee and Chung, 2018: 354).
The outcomes Benefit of CSR action or/and the need for CSR	"Most corporations are pragmatic or utilitarian in their management, even in their use of corporate social responsibility (CSR), through which they shape the narrative to define responsible corporate behavior and sometimes to take a stand on social issues" (Erzikova and Bowen, 2019: 5).
The communication path CSR as a rooted strategy	"Since legitimacy is vital for the sustained success of a company, corporate legitimacy communication, including CSR communication, is an important issue of strategic communication" (Lischka, 2019: 10).

3. Tech and CSR Storytelling

According to Asquer (2012), the nation-diplomacy objective is "To build and sustain positive and constructive relations between states", and corporate-diplomacy objective is "To establish favourable conditions for business companies' activities" (p.56). In both scenarios, whether at the national or corporate level, the fundamental aim is

consistent: the improvement of the entity's competitive position. To facilitate this objective, we propose a conceptual framework for the proficient marketing communication of CSR messages by high-tech-related actors (*Figure 2*).

Through the application of corporate-diplomacy and a resolute commitment to gaining stakeholder support, organizations initiate and carry out CSR initiatives, followed by strategic communication and storytelling endeavours. The widespread adoption of this approach within the tech sector has the potential to make substantial contributions to national communication strategies, reshape international reputation, and foster enduring positive relations (Melissen, 2006; Ordeix-Rigo and Duarte, 2009). As Mashiah (2024) stated that: "marketing activity of individuals, organizations, and nations may ensure the body in question is promoted in a positive manner through suitable content. Moreover, each party can benefit from the transaction and spreading of content about the other party".

Figure 2. Tech CSR Marketing Communication Conceptual Framework
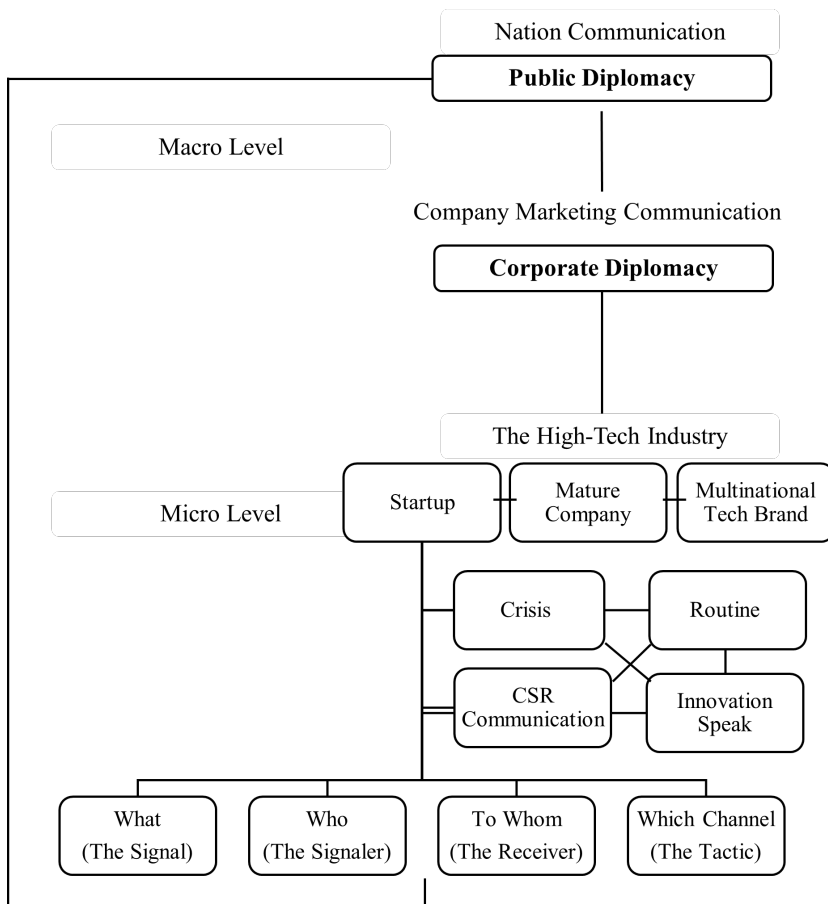
This chapter presents a clean model that incorporates the various types of CSR communication elements. This potentially serves and feeds tech entities' organizational storytelling and is a tool that serves the tech industry and the nation as a whole (Barker and Gower, 2010; Boyce, 1996; Morgan and Dennehy, 1997). However, prior to delving into the various elements of the model, it is crucial to bear in mind that CSR functions as a powerful storytelling tool employed by organizations to cultivate a positive reputation internally and externally (Hall et al., 2021). Moreover, tech companies use organizational rhetoric to convince others of their efficiency and necessity in society and to build trust with others.

The marketing effort of companies - at every stage of the organizational life cycle - focuses on creating an innovative image and creating a dialogue that focuses on the features and characteristics of innovation (Godin, 2019; Schramm, 2017). Or, in short, to publish 'innovation-speak' (Vinsel & Russell, 2020). That is, for a tech company, from the start-up stage, a growing company to a tech corporation with hundreds of thousands of employees, it is important to first use the rhetoric that places the organization in a technological-innovative position, as an organization that creates "disruptive innovation" as defined by Christensen (1997).

Disruptive innovation is an innovation that leads to the production of new paradigms repeatedly, disrupting and repressing the old. This effort is indeed bearing fruit and many technology companies are identified as good, rewarding, efficient companies and contributing essential tech products and services (Mashiah, 2022). Innovation is a main part of tech storytelling in everyday routines. Tech brands are required to push innovation narratives and stories to portray themselves as cutting-edge innovators (Mashiah, 2024). However, recently they have added another story type, which is the social impact narrative. As mentioned, this is due to the recent "technology clash" criticism that tech companies have received (Weiss-Blatt, 2021). There is a clear motivation for linking social issues to the tech brand. Indeed, CSR narratives have "emotional appeals" (Danciu, 2014: 24), and more stakeholders in tech industry implement CSR. Getting a better understanding of how CSR spending affects performance is important for tech companies, according to Okafor et al., (2021). Based on the prior studies of branding via CSR activity (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2020; Carlini and Grace, 2021; Polonsky and Jevons, 2009; Pratihari and Uzma, 2018), we may assume that tech brands can also use social oriented messaging and marketing to imply or promise they are good for society. Marketing teams will highlight that the technology, the people behind the development, and all organizational structures have a positive appeal.

Having to develop a versatile identity as well as a clean image is important since the business may be associated with negative issues. Tech companies balance business activity by adding, amplifying, or participating in soft activities, environment and community oriented. In practice, many companies run social initiatives, and community and environmental agendas. It is important to note that potentially

CSR communication is diverse in different types of stories that may serve tech entity. For instance, Verk and others (Verk et al., 2021) show the large scale of studies dealing with CSR communication. Vollero and others (Vollero et al., 2022) stated there are four types of potential CSR messaging, CSR identity, CSR organization and management, CSR interactivity, CSR as a business case (p.3). As of today, these four categorized types may be implemented in tech brands marketing activity.

In the current tech atmosphere, social action aims to do good for society, but also aims to create a positive image for those who do good (Carlini and Grace, 2021). Tech organizations publish stories and use storytelling to establish a positive perception. In a crisis, CSR stories are used to glorify the company and whiten its image (Coombs, 2017; Coombs and Holladay, 2002). According to Cho and partners (2017) approach, we can dichotomously divide the brand's messages into two types: (a) messages without a social context centred on content that includes: "product information - service", "corporate-organizational information", "holidays, events, greetings and best wishes", "content on policy and law" (p. 61). (b) Messages with a social context such as: "environmental protection", "philanthropic contribution", "educational commitments", "community / employee involvement", "commitment to public health", "cultural / sports sponsorship" and more. The question that arises pertains to the implementation and publication of these messages.

In our context, a discourse on crafting an effective message pertains to messaging strategies for a corporate brand (company) or a regional brand (place, country). Avraham & Ketter's (2013) model for reshaping brands' prolonged negative image of places is divided into two marketing strategies. "The cosmetic approach" (p.151) is when the brand solely tries to portray itself in a positive light with marketing activity. Moreover, the second one is "The strategic approach" when the brand "takes an active, comprehensive approach to the image problem and tries to relate to both the physical and communication sides" (p.156). In the strategic approach, a tech actor implements a proper CSR activity (physical act) and then reports, pushes, and promotes the message (communication sides).

To explain the CSR communication sides we shall elaborate further on the signalling theory (Boateng, 2019; Connelly et al., 2011; Dunham, 2011). Signalling theory "focuses primarily on the deliberate communication of positive information in an effort to convey positive organizational attributes" (Connelly et al., 2011: 44). Signalling theory consists of three main characteristics: "the signaler (the service provider), the receiver (the customer), and the signal" (Boateng, 2019: 227). One of the main purposes of signalling theory is to understand information transmission (messages) from one side (brand) to another (stakeholder), (Dunham, 2011). In the CSR context, prior academic studies have examined the signalling process in different fields such as logistics, finance, and more (Carroll and Einwiller, 2014; Su et al., 2016; Uyar et al., 2020). The current review extends our knowledge by providing a schematic model for CSR marketing signalling in the tech sector solely.

Although tech actors are primarily interested in marketing positive messages about innovation, today some efforts should highlight their CSR efforts. In other words, in the tech sector, CSR promotion is a "neutralizing strategy" (Szybillo and Heslin, 1973: 396) intended to the neutral bad image of the tech entity in a strategic manner (Avraham and Ketter, 2013). Marketing CSR shapes and designs the public reputation (Golob and Podnar, 2019). Simply saying, this strategy is based upon the constant publishing of soft stories, mixing innovation stories with stories that hold a social viewpoint, as an effective marketing defence technique (showing the good sides). A variety of tactics can serve a brand, company or nation, to tell its story and defend its image, including PR, social media, websites, ads, etc., but more importantly, there are three core components more important than the tactics: the signal, the signaller, and the receiver.

3.1. What: The Signal of Tech-CSR

As the concept of 'innovation' gains popularity in our modern culture (Vinsel & Russell, 2020), brands frequently speak about innovations. Moreover, the tech idea (theme) can be the focus of strategic marketing and communication activities for brands and entities (Mashiah, 2021; 2022; 2023; 2024). While tech entities are committed to implementing 'tech' and 'innovation' in organizational rhetoric, it is also crucial to consider new signals nowadays (Cheney and McMillan, 1990). Thus, management can choose CSR-oriented rhetoric for marketing purposes. The marketing process here aims to define a specific symbol, sign, or social signature that the company can promote publicly. Credibility and relevance are the two factors that make a marketing message effective (Dunham, 2011). Thus, tech company images may rely on credible CSR designed to convey the simple message: "We are good for society", "We are good for you". For instance, the organization can publish content dealing with social initiatives it conducts outside the organization, such as volunteering or activities serving the community. Alternatively, the organization may report actions taken within its borders, such as a social act that benefits employees and managers, children, families, or any group within the company (Connelly et al., 2011). In addition, there are times when tech entity management can make a public statement regarding a social issue and push that same statement. To increase the credibility of the message - it is important to choose an initiative that the organization follows over a long period.

According to Connelly et al (2011) definition and examples for signals, we may generally consider CSR physical initiatives as a "quality" signal (p.53). Yet, it is important to remember that the current component refers to intelligently highlighting the CSR quality message. Lower the tone by adopting a marketing signal. According to Herbig & Milewicz (1995), Marketing Signal is "a marketing activity that provides information beyond the mere form of that activity" (p.38).

Therefore, tech firms can gain a positive reputation by constantly signalling CSR initiatives, CSR 'behind the scene', intention for new CSR fields, the people that do CSR, etc. In this element, whether the sender is a representative of a nation or a business company, there is a deliberate and informal disclosure of comprehensive information regarding CSR activities.

3.2. Who: Tech-CSR's Signaller

Within a nation's tech industry, there exists a spectrum of entities at different lifecycle stages. Despite this diversity, a tech actor can effectively communicate CSR messages throughout each stage. Therefore, it is imperative to expound on these distinct phases. Much like the life cycle of a living organism, the life cycle of a tech organization follows a parallel pattern (Samuel, 1996). Any innovative tech company is born, grows, and moves forward to growth. Largely speaking, the growth path is divided into three main categories: (1) Start-up: a newly born organization that makes its first steps. Small startups have dozens or sometimes hundreds of employees. (2) Mature company: A well-established organization with actual product sales and thousands of employees scattered in a few locations around the world. (3) Multinational organization: A multinational corporation (MNCs), usually with many branches around the world, employs hundreds of thousands of workers. Has strong brand and public recognition.

In each of these three types, CSR messages are used differently. Identifying, analysing, and formulating a message strategy based on the self-evolutionary stage is a critical part of corporate communication management for any tech organization. Upon developing a technological product, a privately held company wishes both to publish messages to promote and sell the product and in parallel to shape its public image. Therefore, in recent years, we have seen rapid adoption of a social approach by non-social private businesses across sectors and industries, types and sizes of organizations, small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), and large corporations. Many are motivated to assimilate content about social activity and voluntary actions (Stanwick and Stanwick, 1998; Udayasankar, 2008).

Previous studies discussed CSR messaging an organizational prism of corporation on Asia, Europe, and North America (Vollero et al., 2022). Indeed, CSR messages and stories are perceived as a good basis for tech storytelling worldwide. Scholars also claim that the size of a company plays a pivotal role in shaping its level of CSR. The social activity may impact the organization's overall success, encompassing not only financial accomplishments but also wider societal perception (Ferrat et al., 2023).

Ham and Kim (2019) stated that CSR message "may be very effective and positively affect consumer behaviour when a company has a long history of CSR involvement or when the company shows intrinsic motives behind its CSR communication

if the CSR history is short" (p.369). From a long-term marketing perspective, it is now evident that combining social messages serves the purpose of balancing straightforward messages, creating a more diverse image, and thereby presenting the company in a new light. Social signals, which stem from physical activities in the social environment, are intended to counterbalance marketing efforts and provide an alternative to the typical business image.

Any tech entity can publish different CSR narratives but no less important, each entity has a different scale of CSR messages. The volume of the promotion is also divided into three main classes: (1) High volume: strong integration of CSR stories and content in the marketing activity and full use in the social agenda as a storytelling component. (2) Medium volume: mid-integration of CSR publications. The social agenda is sporadically used in tech marketing activity. (3) Low volume: weak integration of CSR messaging in the promotional activity of the tech brands. Other messaging highlighted whereby the CSR messaging arises from time to time.

Signallers carefully need to define the tempo of CSR messaging and the timing, aiming to portray the as one that contributes to the masses. By linking and engaging in areas that are publicly perceived as good, a tech company strives to be portrayed as a "good company" (Epstein, 2007). Morsing and Schultz stated: "communicating messages that claim to represent a true image of corporate initiatives such as CSR will benefit from a proactive third-party endorsement, i.e. that external stakeholders express their support of corporate CSR initiatives" (Morsing and Schultz, 2006, pp. 333–334). Aside from third-party endorsements, the signaller component also refers to the identity of the persona in the brand. A variety of factors within the organizations are busy with CSR. In parallel with the production of a product or service that generates economic profit by selling it – different factors engage, do, promote activities with a social orientation, and take responsibility for addressing issues for the community and environment. Hence, having established that tech firms employ this technique, it becomes essential to identify the potential sources driving this message. These sources may include CEOs, founders, or other high-level managers within the organization, mid-level managers, and the employees themselves.

In this context, an individual from a specific company has the potential to align with numerous counterparts similar to them (other tech actors in the industry). This alignment results in a powerful message emanating from the collective stance of these entities. Essentially, the individual disseminator of the CSR message, motivated by corporate diplomacy, is not only advancing the interests of the company by promoting a positive message. When many individuals engage in this effort out of utilitarian motives, the country can benefit from a widespread diplomatic initiative, creating an image of an innovative technological industry with significant societal contributions.

3.3. To Whom: The Receiver of CSR Messages

The element of the 'target audience' is crucial in the global context. When tech industry companies undertake CSR initiatives on a broader scale, it becomes evident that nations can leverage these messages to communicate with international stakeholders. Yes, the fundamental purpose of a business is to promote and sell its products or services to specific target audiences through marketing operations aimed at persuading diverse groups of individuals. Therefore, every organization is obliged to communicate and persuade others regarding a particular matter. In the context of CSR, effective signalling can significantly impact the perception of the business among the intended audience, thereby shaping its image (Amoako and Dartey-Baah, 2020). A successful marketing campaign in the tech CSR domain is contingent upon not only the sender and message but also on the receiver's ability to comprehend and interpret the signal (Dunham, 2011).

In high-tech cases, the receiver component includes diverse audiences inside and outside of an organization. We can divide CSR receivers into two types in the tech industry. According to Wang & Huang (2018), the first is "internal CSR" (p. 328). A promotion of this kind is intended to persuade employees. According to Tangngisalu et al., (2020): "transparent CSR implementation and the link between company reputation and company performance can be optimal as long as the level of employee trust is also obtained" (p.179). Moreover, the internal receiver includes managers, midlevel managers, board members, suppliers, marketing service providers (public relations representative), Human resource department, etc. Furthermore, there is "external CSR" (Wang and Huang, 2018: 328), namely diplomatic actors, investors, business partners, regulatory agencies, government agencies, potential employees, clients, and the public.

The CSR signal is both intended for "insiders" and "outsiders" of the organization (Connelly et al., 2011). For better optimization of the signal to the potential receiver, tech organizations can adopt a marketing segmentation approach which "involves clustering a whole market into several meaningful segments. It is clear that different people have different needs" (Huang et al., 2007: 316). Hence, marketing teams, management, and decision-makers, in tech entities, need to define the target audience and aim the signals accordingly. That way the signals can effectively reinforce "firm values" in their eyes (Wang et al., 2015: 2236), during routine (Lawal et al., 2017), and during a crisis (Chang et al., 2021). As previously mentioned, the promotion efforts of individual companies can ultimately yield benefits at the national level. Representatives on behalf of the state should strategically convey the societal message to the relevant target audience in diplomatic engagements: ambassadors, presidents, administrative officials, and policymakers. Consequently, the message extends from regional initiatives to the international stage.

3.4. Which Channel: The Tactic

The study of CSR communication focuses on the tactics employed by organizations to disseminate information about their CSR actions but it lacks a coherent structure definition. In line with this, this study proposes to strongly integrate the well-established PESO model (Dietrich, 2014; Macnamara et al., 2016; Xie et al., 2018) into the concept of CSR communication. The PESO model encompasses "four 'quadrants'-paid, earned, shared, and owned" (Macnamara et al., 2016: 377). While many CSR initiatives have historically relied on sporadic tactics, both in theoretical and practical realms, it is prudent to adopt a structured and strategic media model. Consequently, actors can strategically select and define which of the four tactics is most suitable for CSR communication at any given time: (1) Paid media: "Traditional advertising and other forms of content commercially contracted" (p. 377). (2) Earned media: "Editorial publicity that is generated by organizations through media releases, interviews" (p. 377). (3) Shared media: "Popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, Instagram, and Pinterest, national networks" (p. 378). (4) Owned media: "Publications and digital sites established and controlled by organizations, such as corporate magazines, newsletters, reports" (p. 377).

Table 2. The CSR Components

What (The Signal)

- What is the primary social sign, signature, or symbol associated with the brand?
- What is the CSR story the brand aims to convey and what narrative does the brand intend to emphasize?

Who (The Signaller)

- Who within the brand serves as the source of communication of the CSR symbol? (e.g., managers, mid-level employees)
- Who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of CSR communication efforts?

To Whom (The Receiver)

- To whom does the brand intend to deliver the CSR messages? (e.g., internal stakeholders or external audiences)
- To whom are the messages specifically tailored for in the long term and short term?

Which Channel (The Tactic)

- Which communication tactics does the brand employ for CSR story?
- Which communication channel is deemed most appropriate for the publication of the brand's CSR narratives?

Governments and officials should persist in promoting innovation while simultaneously fostering social initiatives that can be seamlessly integrated with technology producers within their jurisdictions. Yet, while this brief review article introduces a tool for enhancing reputation and image management through CSR for stakeholders in the high-tech field, it is essential to acknowledge the potential risks associated with its misuse. The concept of "greenwashing", which has been extensively examined in the business and CSR contexts (Bazillier and Vauday, 2009; Delmas and Burbano, 2011), holds relevance to the present discussion on technology and CSR communication. Greenwashing refers to the practice of disseminating misleading or false information, creating an illusion that lacks substantive actions. In other words, when there exist disparities between rhetoric and actions in the CSR domain, it may result in perceived hypocrisy (Christensen et al., 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize that the use of communication tools to portray CSR-related virtues should only be employed when genuine actions substantiate the conveyed message.

With their motives under constant suspicion, exploring the tech industry through the lens of SCCT highlights the necessity for technology actors to embrace a CSR strategy from the outset to shape their reputation. This could potentially help nations' diplomatic efforts, and by highlighting good tech-industry, the nation wins a positive point in global reputation.

To assist diplomacy practitioners in achieving this objective, we propose a conceptual model of Tech-CSR communication (from micro to macro). The model incorporates essential components such as the company lifecycle, symbol (message type), source, audience, and communication tactics, which collectively form the foundation of the model and significantly contribute to its overall effectiveness. Yet, it is crucial to ensure that these components are aligned with actual CSR actions within the tech organization and industry to avoid situations of perceived hypocrisy. Moreover, messages promoting social issues may be met with scepticism by certain target audiences (or during specific periods). Opportunistic CSR marketing can elicit further criticism from critics, accentuating the perception of tech companies exploiting social actions solely for reputation building. As we have seen, integrating the CSR communication model is crucial for technology entities, benefiting both the tech companies and the overall industry and nation. Subsequent research can delve into various tech brand categories, and examining specific nations will provide valuable insights into the efficacy of the suggested model.

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