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CSR in a mediatized world: The challenges of communicating CSR across cultures

The contribution will highlight three aspects of the current CSR debate from a communication studies perspective:

1. CSR is a relevant topic in many communication strategies - internally to motivate employees, externally to increase brand value and customer loyalty, to attract investments, as part of PR and lobbying strategies to avoid regulation, as part of branding concepts and to justify a price premium or just to make a symbolic difference (where there is no other difference) or even to accept responsibility beyond shareholders (e.g. for stakeholders) and to prove ethical commitment beyond (strategic) philanthropy. CSR Communication has become a part of integrated communication in many corporations.
2. This communication takes place in changing landscapes of communication- which will be briefly outlined in the second part. Media usage changes and moves from legacy media to digital and "social" media. This meta process (communication studies refer to as mediatization) differs within societies and globally: both in terms of access and technical backbones and in terms of media literacy. But in any case empirical studies show that new forms of communication are not simply new channels but also form new expectations, new perceptions of priorities and new forms of social interaction (e.g. dislocated communities) and thus challenge the concept of traditional organizational communication (e.g. to be more dialogic and more fact based, to be faster and proactive) in general and especially when it comes to the communication of values and norms as it is the case when questions to whom a corporation is responsible in the first place- and why the license to operate is justified are addressed. But also the fact that the boundaries between internal and external communication are blurring and consumers can fact and norm check almost any information (and almost everywhere via a mobile device even at the POS) - changes something.
3. What do these changes indicate for CSR communication? Even if a corporation operates regionally the public exposure is much larger and moves across cultures and value settings. In closing we want to discuss which values could be a solid basis for communicating CSR in a mediatized world. It boils down to old questions: which norms for whom? Should corporations imply universal standards ("normative imperialism") or adopt culturally shared beliefs ("when in Rome")? And which role does a changing media environment in this process? How far has CSR communication be self reflective (does the end justify the means, what is an appropriate wording)? – but maybe new answers are needed...