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Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication patterns in an emerging market
An exploratory study

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication. This paper specifically aims at introspecting into CSR communication patterns in the Egyptian context, where the top ten companies in the Egyptian Stock Exchange–Environmental, Social and Governance Index (EGX-ESG) are sampled.
Design/methodology/approach – The paper presents an exploratory study where content analysis of the communications of the ten top-listed companies in the ESG Index in Egypt was analyzed.
Findings – The results showed that most companies are using the "stakeholder information" strategy, with the "stakeholder involvement" strategy being the least used.
Research limitations/implications – The results are limited to the use of the content analysis method which is a qualitative methodology. Hence, the results should be generalized with caution.
Practical implications – CSR communication is crucial to the success of companies, regardless of business size, industry or culture. Several aspects of CSR communication, to this day, remain vague for academics and practitioners alike. Therefore, additional insights about the topic should be generated. The present work aids in the understanding of CSR communication as a facet of organizational change and a new trend in emerging markets.
Social implications – The current exploratory study sheds light on the topic of CSR communication in an important emerging market in transition, namely Egypt. The results of the communication strategies utilized by the top-listed companies can be generalized to other similar contexts.
Originality/value – The majority of the studies conducted on this particular topic took place in the USA and Europe; hence, few insights are provided about the concept in emerging markets.
Keywords Egypt, Emerging markets, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), CSR communication, Communication channels, CSR message content, ESG-EGX
Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Amidst corporate scandals and business unethical behavior cases such as child labor, and the Enron affair, among others, organizations are facing more pressure to behave responsibly. Indeed, nowadays, companies are required to be environmentally, socially and ethically responsible toward society, as well as become more transparent, in order to restore the trust of stakeholders (Amaladoss and Manohar, 2013; Arvidsson, 2010; Ingenhoff and Sommer, 2011; Bonson and Bednarova, 2015). Therefore, corrective actions taken by companies to improve consumer attitudes toward and perceptions of them include the implementation of codes of conduct, as well as the engagement in corporate social responsibility initiatives, hereafter referred to as CSR (Amaladoss and Manohar, 2013; Arvidsson, 2010). In fact, CSR is a phenomenon that has received significant attention in recent years and is repeatedly assumed

to play an integral role in enhancing corporate image (Huijstee and Glasbergen, 2008; Golob and Podnar, 2014; Ingenhoff and Sommer, 2011).

The European Commission defines CSR as "a concept by which companies decide voluntarily to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment by going beyond compliance and investing more into human capital, the environment and the relations with stakeholders" (Arvidsson, 2010, p. 339). Another definition proposed for the concept, by Du *et al.* (2010, p. 8), interprets it as "a commitment to improve (societal) well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources." As demonstrated, there are various definitions supplied in the CSR literature to conceptualize CSR; however, it is the definition proposed by Carroll (1991) that is referenced the most by researchers. According to Carroll (1991), "the total corporate social responsibility of business entails the simultaneous fulfillment of the firm's economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. Stated in more pragmatic and managerial terms, the CSR firm should strive to make a profit, obey the law, be ethical, and be a good corporate citizen" (Arli and Lasmono, 2010, p. 46).

An important facet of CSR is "stakeholder dialogue". Indeed, CSR efforts will not lead to any business returns and will go unnoticed by stakeholders if they are not communicated (Huijstee and Glasbergen, 2008, p. 298; Golob and Podnar, 2014, p. 248). Hence, CSR communication is a topic that is rapidly gaining attention and becoming widely recognized as crucial to the success of companies, by virtue of the fact that it alleviates consumer skepticism and provides information about companies' financial as well as non-financial performance (Bonson and Bednarova, 2015; Amaladoss and Manohar, 2013). According to Du *et al.* (2010), CSR disclosure is distinctive, because, in contrast to information published about the company's core business and abilities, CSR communication sheds light about the company's identity.

As will be discussed throughout the current paper, CSR communication is crucial to the success of companies, regardless of business size, industry or culture. However, the majority of the studies conducted on this particular topic, according to Amaladoss and Manohar (2010), took place in the USA and Europe. Hence, few insights are provided about the concept in developing countries. Furthermore, many controversies surround CSR and CSR communication, by virtue that stakeholders are skeptical as to whether socially responsible actions are taken and communicated by companies because they actually care for the welfare of society and others or for publicity sake (Morsing *et al.*, 2008). Third, several aspects of CSR communication, to this day, remain vague for academics and practitioners alike; therefore, additional insights about the topic should be generated (Du *et al.*, 2010).

The aim of the current research is to synchronize the literature on CSR communication as well as provide an introspect on the CSR communication strategies in the Egyptian context. Specifically, the research aims at identifying the most used CSR communication content as well as channels adopted by leading companies in Egypt in addition to highlighting the communication strategies used.

Literature review

The literature review of the current paper will consist of three sections; the first will tackle the main topic of the paper; CSR communication and discuss the CSR communication process; message content and message channel. The second section will present three distinct CSR communication strategies, which are heavily addressed in the CSR literature, and those are stakeholder-information strategy, stakeholder-response strategy and stakeholder-involvement strategy. Finally, the third section will discuss different CSR communication tools such as annual reports, corporate websites and social media, among others.

Corporate social responsibility process
Nowadays, consumers expect companies to be socially responsible in all aspects of business, as well as disclose their CSR information to the public (Podnar, 2008). Despite CSR communication being an increasingly demanded concept, it is highly complex and difficult to define. Indeed, CSR communication does not have a distinct definition, according to Walter (2014), and is considered complex, because some perceive CSR communication as a method by which companies "brag" about their social responsibility activities (Walter, 2014, p. 62). Nonetheless, CSR communication is crucial, because it has the ability to influence company reputation and image, as well as build consumer trust (Striteska and Bartakova, 2012; Nielsen and Thomsen, 2009).

The better part of the CSR literature discusses CSR communication between relationship partners, with inconsiderable focus being given to the CSR communication process between companies and their remaining stakeholders, despite the fact that establishing transparent CSR communication with all stakeholders is recognized as important in many CSR theories. According to the agency theory of CSR, managers are agents assigned to make decisions on behalf of stakeholders, who are the principles; hence, information regarding company's dealings, including CSR strategies, should be regularly communicated externally. The signaling theory is an additional CSR theory that specifies the importance of CSR communication, which proposes that disclosure of information is a market norm that signals to stakeholders that companies are profitable and sustainable (Amaladoss and Manohar, 2013).

It is reported, though, by Amaladoss and Manohar (2013) as well as Bonson and Bednarova (2015) that the stakeholder and legitimacy theories are most commonly cited in explaining voluntary information disclosure. The stakeholder and legitimacy theories recognize the concept of CSR communication as a method through which companies reduce information asymmetry, since managers have more information than stakeholders, and establish themselves as legitimate entities among stakeholders (see also Graafland and van de Ven, 2006). Although communicating CSR efforts to stakeholders is crucial, it is a difficult task, as few stakeholders are interested in that domain (Kesavan *et al.*, 2013). In an attempt to simplify the concept of CSR communication, a thorough examination of its process will be examined.

Message content. In regards to message content, companies should carefully examine what they want to communicate to stakeholders in their CSR messages. According to Arvidsson (2013), companies should not communicate too much information regarding their CSR initiatives, as it can rebound and lead to consumers being skeptic of the company's behavior. Indeed, companies should aim to communicate CSR activities that are in progress and for which there are measurable outcomes, or else companies would be at the risk of sounding dishonest by communicating much but acting little. Furthermore, companies should equally disclose in their CSR messages favorable and non-favorable information regarding their CSR activities, similar to companies such as Novo Nordisk and Vodafone (Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

According to Striteska and Bartakova (2012), the content of the CSR message varies according to the audience, for which it is intended. Generally, there are four primary areas; market, company environment, workplace and the environment, with corresponding four types of audiences; external stakeholders, organizations and associations, internal stakeholder and public-sector trade unions and elements in the surrounding environment of the company, such as partners, consumers and non-profit organizations, respectively. With regard to the content of the CSR message intended to the market area, companies should disclose their day-to-day conscious behavior, while for the company environment area, CSR messages should emphasize only philanthropic activities partaken by the company and its employees. As for the workplace area, CSR messages should communicate the work environment of the company, and, finally, messages directed to the environment area should highlight the environmental and sustainability initiatives of the company.

Moreover, CSR messages can emphasize the support of companies to particular social causes, even if they do not actively address them through CSR activities. In fact, this support could serve to increase the awareness of stakeholders to these particular causes and lead them to take initiatives and address these social issues on their own. On the other hand, companies can also communicate in their CSR messages their active contribution to social issues in the society, not just their support (Du *et al.*, 2010). Finally, with regard to the message content, Podnar (2008) claims that it can be structured either in a persuasive or an informative manner, depending on whether companies aim to influence the opinions of stakeholders, or merely inform them about the CSR activities of the company.

Message channel. According to Golob and Podnar (2014), there are two types of communication channels through which companies can disclose their CSR information; traditional communication channels, and contemporary communication channels. Traditional communication channels allow companies to reach masses of stakeholders through mass media marketing tools such as corporate advertising and press releases. Furthermore, these message channels adopt an indirect communication strategy, in the sense that companies disclose their CSR information to the public through intermediaries. As for the contemporary communication channels, they give companies the opportunity to directly communicate with stakeholders through communication channels such as corporate websites and annual reports (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Du *et al.*, 2010). It is important to note that contemporary communication channels are considered more effective than conventional channels, as the latter give the impression that companies only want to publicize their philanthropic activities to establish a favorable company image among the public. Yet, despite their relative ineffectiveness, conventional channels are heavily used by firms (Kesavan *et al.*, 2013).

Eberle *et al.* (2013) highlight that communication channels that allow companies to directly communicate with stakeholders increase message credibility, because there are no middlemen in the communication process that can distort the message. Therefore, it is in the researchers' opinions that modern communication channels are more preferred than conventional channels. However, Du *et al.* (2010) argue that CSR messages communicated directly by companies result in consumer skepticism, because companies will naturally be biased and self-motivated in their CSR information disclosure. Hence, in accordance with this argument, it is preferred to communicate CSR messages through unbiased, impartial intermediaries to alleviate consumer skepticism and increase message credibility. Traditional communication channels serve well as unbiased intermediaries, as well as consumers of the company, who can also communicate CSR information through word-of-mouth.

Media channels have become, lately, a highly interesting, widely-studied topic in the CSR literature. Indeed, in the context of CSR communication, a specific area of interest is, as examined previously, the effect of media channels on consumer skepticism, or, alternatively, consumer trust. As discussed by Eberle *et al.* (2013) and Du *et al.* (2010), traditional and contemporary communication channels influence CSR message credibility, and, in turn, consumer trust. This particular finding is further complemented by Saat and Selamat (2014) who reveal that media richness also has the ability to influence consumer trust. Indeed, findings report that rich media significantly influence consumer trust, as opposed to non-rich media. To be more specific, rich media signifies interactive communication channels that emphasize both verbal and non-verbal communication cues, such as video conferencing and corporate websites. On the other hand, the delivery of CSR messages through non-rich media such as audio conferences and computer-based communication only relies on verbal communication cues, which does not influence consumer trust as significantly as rich media (Saat and Selamat, 2014).

Corporate social responsibility communication strategies
The CSR literature offers different CSR communication strategies, by which companies can directly communicate their CSR efforts to stakeholders. However, three strategies in particular are most frequently examined by researchers, and these are stakeholder-information, stakeholder-response and stakeholder-involvement. These strategies, which will be discussed in the following section, highlight a fundamental shift in the approach to two-way communication strategies, rather than one-way. Indeed, although, early statistics report that the better part of companies follow one-way models to communicate their CSR efforts, a demand for two-way communication models is rising (O'Riordan and Fairbrass, 2014; see also Walter, 2014).

The argument for two-way communication models is that they emphasize the need for sense-giving, as well as sense-making, in contrast to one-way models, which emphasize sense-giving only (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; see also Nwagbara and Reid, 2013). According to Smerek (2009), companies that attempt to communicate their CSR information in a sense-giving approach are aiming to influence the opinion and perception of stakeholders. While companies that follow a sense-giving and sense-making approach in their communication strategies are aiming to collectively reach a mutual understanding with stakeholders regarding their CSR initiatives, without exerting an influence.

Stakeholder-information strategy. In the stakeholder-information strategy, companies follow one-way models to communicate CSR information. This particular strategy, as mentioned previously, emphasizes the approach of sense-giving, in which companies aim to objectively inform stakeholders about their CSR activities without allowing feedback or promoting stakeholder interaction. Accordingly, CSR information is disclosed through mass media, which gives companies the opportunity to reach stakeholders using a standardized generic message (Morsing and Schultz, 2006). The underlying foundation of the stakeholder-information strategy is the belief that stakeholders have the ability to control company behavior whether by rewarding them for a responsible behavior through their purchasing power, or by punishing them for an irresponsible behavior through boycotts. Hence, in this strategy, companies want to influence the perception and behavior of stakeholders through their CSR messages to earn their approval (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Walter, 2014).

Criticisms directed at the stakeholder-information strategy include the impracticality of influencing the opinion of stakeholders, as among the characteristics of one-way communication models is that they vary according to the subjective understanding of each receiver, and it is impossible to establish a mutual understanding among all stakeholders. Furthermore, the stakeholder-information strategy is considered a linear communication model, in which companies only want to disseminate favorable information about CSR activities to the public to establish a specific corporate image in the mind of stakeholders, which, in turn, increases consumer skepticism (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Schoeneborn and Trittin, 2013; Walter, 2014).

Due to these criticisms, a demand for interactive communication strategies has risen, in which the transmission of information regarding CSR initiatives can go both ways between the company and the stakeholders without passing through any middlemen. Findings report that consumer perceptions of an interactive CSR communication strategy increase message credibility, by virtue that it is directly communicated by the company rather than a middleman that can distort the message. Furthermore, this particular type of communication strategy is claimed to reduce consumer skepticism, since interactive strategies give stakeholders the opportunity to publically comment on the company's CSR messages, which leads stakeholders to perceive the company as being transparent (Eberle *et al.*, 2013; Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Walter, 2014). Examples of interactive communication strategies are the stakeholder-response and stakeholder-involvement strategies discussed in the following sections.

Stakeholder-response strategy. In contrast to the stakeholder-information strategy, the stakeholder-response strategy follows a two-way communication model, in which information flows both ways between companies and stakeholders. However, the two-way communication process in this particular strategy is asymmetrical, in which companies frequently communicate favorable information regarding their CSR activities and stakeholders are only required to react to those information by evaluating the performance of the companies based on the information provided. In the early stages of this strategy, companies aim to give sense to stakeholders through CSR reporting, while allowing for regular feedback to assess the degree of stakeholder understanding of companies' activities, until stakeholders reach the same meaning that companies aimed to deliver, in the last stages (Walter, 2014; Schoeneborn and Trittin, 2013; Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

Hence, this strategy emphasizes sense-giving and sense-making, and stakeholders are not proactively participating in the communication process. Similarly to the stakeholder-information strategy, though, companies recognize the importance of stakeholders and their ability to influence company behavior through their actions. Therefore, in this strategy, they also aim, to an extent, to positively influence the opinion of stakeholders (Walter, 2014; Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

Stakeholder-involvement strategy. As for the stakeholder-involvement strategy, which is the last CSR communication strategy discussed here, it concurs with stakeholder-information strategy in recognizing the stakeholders as influential groups that should be informed about companies' engagement in CSR initiatives. It also concurs with the stakeholder-response strategy in recognizing the need to regularly examine consumer perceptions of companies' CSR initiatives, until a mutual understanding is reached. However, the stakeholder-involvement approach further complements these strategies by acknowledging the need to proactively involve stakeholders in the communication process, in the sense that they are able to communicate their expectations regarding companies' CSR activities and their support for particular social causes to corporates, upfront. Hence, this strategy realizes that companies are not only influencing the opinion of stakeholders, but are being influenced by it as well, as the expectations of stakeholders communicated ahead may lead companies to change their CSR activities to meet these expectations (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Walter, 2014; see also O'Riordan and Fairbrass, 2014).

Thus, in this particular strategy, stakeholders' engagement is proactive, rather than reactive, and the two-way communication process is symmetrical, in which the amount of information transmitted is equal between both parties; stakeholders and companies. For those reasons, the stakeholder-involvement strategy is preferred by researchers and is considered to increase consumer-company identification as well as strengthen message credibility, as the message would be created with the help of stakeholders, rather than merely communicated to them. However, it should be noted that if companies only pretend to actively involve stakeholders in their CSR activities, but do not actually take their expectations and suggestions into consideration, then this strategy would backfire and lead to consumer skepticism (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Walter, 2014). A demand for this particular strategy is rising, in comparison to stakeholder-information and stakeholder-response strategy. Indeed, O'Riordan and Fairbrass (2014, p. 123) state the following; "the impetus behind the use of the term "engagement" in the stakeholder theory and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) literatures is the need to emphasize that, for firms merely to interact with stakeholders is no longer sufficient, if, in fact, it ever was. Interaction with stakeholders is a logically necessary activity of business."

Corporate social responsibility communication tools

Companies have a wide variety of tools through which they can communicate their CSR information to stakeholders. Therefore, the current section will be dedicated to CSR

communication tools, with a particular focus on contemporary tools employed, nowadays, by companies, such as annual and sustainability reports, corporate websites and social media, among others.

Annual and sustainability reports. As reported by Ligeti and Oravecz (2009), Striteska and Bartakova (2012) and Podnar (2008), annual reports are the most widely-used CSR communication tool by companies. Generally, companies can disclose CSR information in their annual financial reports, which are required by law, or establish annual non-financial reports, commonly referred to as sustainability reports, dedicated for social and environmental information (Ligeti and Oravecz, 2009; Ziek, 2009). The structure of the sustainability reports is, regularly, as follows; a section containing environmental information, followed by a section dedicated for social information, such as health and safety issues, as well as an economic section. Hence, the information presented in annual and sustainability reports is in consonance with the Triple-bottom line approach of CSR (Hagen, 2008). Due to the fact that annual reports have general standards that detail their format, Ligeti and Oravecz (2009) consider them highly credible.

Corporate websites. Websites are also commonly used by companies to disclose CSR information. To publish CSR information on corporate websites, companies, can adopt two distinct strategies; either establish a separate CSR web page dedicated for CSR initiatives alone, or integrate their CSR information with remaining corporate information, in corporate profile (Amaladoss and Manohar, 2013; Ziek, 2009). If companies choose to adopt the latter strategy, CSR themes will be, often, found in the "About Us" menu under links such as, "Corporate Governance", or "Our Commitment" (Amaladoss and Manohar, 2013). Despite the wide application of annual reports and corporate websites, nowadays, in disclosing CSR information, it is important to note that the interest in these two particular CSR communication tools is recent. Indeed, these tools were previously overshadowed by mass media. However, mass media, soon, became recognized by stakeholders as aggressive and methods of propaganda, which is why companies shifted to annual reports and corporate websites, because they are considered discrete and credible (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Podnar, 2008).

Social media. In the age of new media, CSR communication is rapidly changing. Indeed, new media such as the internet, Twitter and Facebook enable corporate visibility, in the sense that stakeholders have a plethora of information about companies available online that they can access anytime and anywhere. For this reason, a noticeable shift toward social media channels has been recently observed in CSR communication, which allows stakeholders to be constantly, and rapidly updated about companies' CSR activities (Nwagbara and Reid, 2013; Eberle *et al.*, 2013). According to Kesavan *et al.* (2013), Twitter is the most applied social media tool, by companies, in CSR communication, while blogs are the least.

An important point of difference between annual reports/corporate websites and social media is the fact that the latter allows stakeholder engagement. Social media tools give stakeholders the opportunity to post comments and, instantly, provide feedback to companies' CSR messages, which is argued to increase consumer-company identification as well as increase message credibility. However, it is essential to note that this particular characteristic of social media has a drawback and that is the fact that both positive and negative comments, posted by stakeholders, would be visible to all others. On the one hand, only positive comments enhance corporate image and reputation, on the other hand, stakeholders are more influenced by negative comments and may develop negative attitudes toward companies as a result (Kesavan *et al.*, 2013; Eberle *et al.*, 2013; Nwagbara and Reid, 2013).

Other tools. Aside from annual and sustainability reports, corporate websites, and social media, there are other tools used by companies in CSR communication. Among these tools are CSR reports, these reports consolidate information about companies' CSR initiatives in

one place, which benefits individuals that are only interested in companies' CSR activities and do not want to go through irrelevant information about other aspects of the business (Striteska and Bartakova, 2012). Companies can also disclose their CSR information in annual shareholders letter, and corporate codes of conduct and codes of ethics (Ziek, 2009). It is important to note that the previous section focused on contemporary channels of CSR communication, even though companies can still adopt traditional channels, as well, such as press releases and corporate advertising. However, traditional channels are not favored by companies and stakeholders, alike, because they are perceived as methods of propaganda (Eberle *et al.*, 2013).

Methodology

This research is exploratory alongside descriptive in nature as it taps the CSR communication, which had not been earlier addressed. The population framework is identified as the Egyptian Stock Exchange index–Environmental, Social and Governance EGX-ESG top 30 ranked companies in the EGX, which are abiding to the ESG compliance that are issued by the Egyptian Corporate Responsibility Center (ECRC) in its latest report (ECRC, 2015). The sample was selected to be the top ten performing companies as per the ECRC for ease and convenience of analysis.

The research had adopted content analysis methodology, which is defined by Harris (2001, p. 193) as an "objective analysis of messages by means of explicit rules. These rules are used to classify the signs occurring in a communication into a set of appropriate categories." Moreover, Hood (2006) identified that content analysis enables the identification of hidden patterns in qualitative data; therefore, by adopting it, the researchers were able to identify common CSR communication strategies emphasized by companies in CSR information disclosure.

The adopted technique is the primary "starter coding system" as Bazeley (2007) referred to and as in Yin's (2009) terms is known as "descriptive/inferential/pattern codes." It is identified as a first-level coding that provides a basic description for the data collected, where it serves in summarizing the data collected. The second type is known as "inferential codes/second-level coding/metz-code" (Punch, 2009). The latter categorizes data into more narrowed, focused meaningful categories, which had not been used as this is an exploratory research conducted on secondary data. Moreover, as Bell and Bryman (2007) acknowledged that there is no standardized way to code data, the researchers had opted to use the "starter coding system." In this research, the data set had been the sums of the corporate websites, annual reports and other CSR communication tools used and publicized by the companies selected in the sample. Hence, our analysis was limited to the information available online by each company.

Findings

This research had targeted identifying the operational CSR communication strategies adopted by the top ten companies as nominated by the ECRC (2015) in Egypt. Two of the companies' reviews were merged; Amer Group & Porto Group as they have the same ownership and management, where four companies had had their own foundations running their CSR operations. From earlier literature, the CSR communication strategies had been identified to match the empirical application with the sample selected. Moreover, the main channels used in the CSR communication process by the sample had been identified.

For the CSR communication channels, the main findings were as follows:

- The "website reporting" had been a uniformly used channel throughout the sample, where each of the ten company lists its CSR within its web page, and some enlist it under a separate section on their basic website interface. One major finding that came out of this research is that five out of the ten leading ones; CIB, Amer Group,

Porto Group, Citadel Capital and EFG-Hermes, have founded separate foundations to run their CSR operations and handle all related activities. This variation comes under the website reporting channel. This finding poses a question of the organizational structure of the corporations, and how CSR is handled strategically in the first place and further communicated.

- The second most used channel had been the "published annual sustainability reports" issued by the companies in the earlier years. Some corporations adhere to publishing a separate sustainability report where others integrate the sustainability report within the overall annual reports issued. A total of four corporations employed this channel.

- A set of "other tools" had been favored by many companies, like the United Nations Global Compact Communication on Progress Report—"UNGC COP", which is a part of the prerequisite of pledging to the UNGC basic ten principles pertaining to attaining corporate sustainability through infusing sustainability in the corporate strategy and value system targeting CSR implementation. Two companies had posted their UNGC COP. Also, one had posted its code of conduct. All ten companies had reported their different practices using different terms other than CSR like corporate governance, corporate citizenship and others. This direction shows that companies preferred indirect communications about CSR activities. This can be attributed to the stigma and negative image they fear they might develop in the eyes of the public in negative connotation to CSR disclosure and communication, especially after the Egyptian revolution of 2011 (Darrag and Crowther, 2017).

- The least used communication channel in the sample had been the social media; mainly surveying Facebook and Twitter accounts. Only three companies had been adopting this channel, which came as a variation from the literature that reported a corporate favoritism toward the adoption of this channel, as it tends to offer high exposure and visibility at low costs with minimum time lag. Moreover, the main advantage of consumer engagement showcased in literature had not been a focal point or even an outcome of the companies who had employed this channel. Table I highlights the main outcomes.

In reviewing the corporate websites and online publications, as well as their related social media portals, a "starter coding system" had been adopted. The aspects subjected to content analysis had been corporate websites (inclusion of links or tabs for code of conduct and/or code of ethics and/or corporate governance and/or sustainability and/or corporate citizenship and/or corporate citizenship and/or sustainable development), availability of

Communication channels	Number of companies employing such channels
Website reporting	10
Website reporting—corporate foundation	4
Annual and sustainability reports	6
Other tools	
UN Global Compact Communication on Progress report (COP)	2
Code of conduct/Code of ethics	1
Corporate governance/Corporate citizenship/Sustainable development/ Civic engagement/Anti-fraud policy/Responsible business/ISO certifications	10
Social media (Twitter and Facebook)	3

Table I.
Summary of the CSR communication channels adopted by the sample

sustainability and/or annual reports including sustainability sections, and other CSR communication tools used by the companies selected in the sample. The research showed that all three main CSR communication strategies enlisted in literature had been witnessed by the top companies in Egypt. Nonetheless, "stakeholder information strategy" showed highest prevalence, followed by "stakeholder response strategy" and the least prevalent one had been the "stakeholder involvement" one. Table II shows the adoption rate.

The main coding terms used are enlisted in Table III, where they were employed to classify the adopted respective strategy in each company. The coding terms reflect the CSR message content relayed to stakeholders of each company. The researchers' review of the ten companies' portals and accounts on different social media; alongside skimming all of the earlier aspects to pinpoint the precise CSR communication strategy employed by each had resulted in the following:

- Commercial International Bank (CIB): the CIB bank had established its own foundation to run its CSR activities. Its main areas of CSR had been "sponsoring talents," "partnering with ENACTUS," "community health," "environmental awareness," and "employee development." Its website highlighted its sustainability reports that included how the bank aims at "developing a trusted brand," thereby showing a clear "stakeholder information" strategy.

Table II.
Summary of the CSR communication strategies adopted by the sample

CSR communication strategies	Number of companies adopting each respective strategy
Stakeholder-information strategy	5
Stakeholder-response strategy	3
Stakeholder-involvement strategy	2

Table III.
Summary of the main coding terms extracted from online review, channels of communication and communication strategies employed by companies

Company	Communication strategies coding (message content)	Communication strategy
CIB	Trusted brand, commitment to community, work environment, community health, employee development, corporate governance, code of conduct (CIB values)	Stakeholder-information strategy
Citadel Capital	Sustainable investments, bottom-line, corporate governance, anti-fraud policy, supporting education via Al Qalaa foundation	Stakeholder-information strategy
Egyptian Kuwaiti Holding	Education infrastructure support, technology awareness, corporate governance, responsible business, corporate citizenship	Stakeholder-information strategy
Amer Group Holding and Porto Group	Education support, community development	Stakeholder response strategy
Raya Holding	Corporate citizenship, education support, sustainable development, corporate volunteerism, civic engagement, gender diversity, women empowerment, corporate governance	Stakeholder involvement strategy
Suez Cement	Sustainable development, environmental protection, social initiatives, responsible production, ISO 14000, ISO 9001	Stakeholder-information strategy
Egyptian Transport	Responsibility toward community, environment, employees, and stakeholders, corporate governance	Stakeholder-information strategy
Global Telecom	Social investment, stakeholder engagement	Stakeholder response strategy
EFG-Hermes Holding	Sustainability, values, green policies, sustainable development	Stakeholder involvement strategy

- Citadel Capital (Al Qalaa Holdings): Citadel Capital had established its own foundation to be responsible for its CSR activities under the name of "Al Qalaa Foundation." Its main area of activity had been within the educational support through the scholarships-funding it offers. Moreover, Citadel Group used social media as a channel when it promoted a part of its vision for growth and sustainability through its Twitter account. This activity implied "stakeholder information" strategy adoption.

- Egyptian Kuwaiti Holding (EKH): as a financial company, EKH had adopted a one-way communication stream informing its stakeholders of its initiatives undertaken, through their corporate governance and corporate citizenship section on their websites. The main activities they tackled had been education infrastructure and technological awareness. This implied a straight-forward "stakeholder information" strategy adoption.

- Suez Cement: a "stakeholder information strategy" had been adopted by Suez Cement, that as a production facility had mainly environmental and production sustainability.

- Amer Group Holding & Porto Group: both companies; with joint ownership and operations; created their foundation "Egyptian *Waqf* (Trust)" to cater to projects in the fields of education, development and community service. In contrast to the previous companies, content analysis reveals that Amer Group used a "stakeholder response" strategy as its foundation is geared toward receiving feedback from local community on needed projects and checking compliance with *shari'ah* laws (Islamic legislation) for acceptability of potential investments. According to their website, "it is worth mentioning that the "WAQF" or "Trust" holder has the right to invest in other projects; not related to Amer Group, since the "Trust" itself belongs to each and every Egyptian. Nevertheless, the Bank must check with the Sheikh of Al-Azhar prior to any investments, to confirm the validity/compliance of such desired investments to *shari'ah* laws." (Amer Group—Egyptian Waqf, 2017).

- Raya Holding: Raya has had a diversified portfolio of activities to cater for its sustainable development objectives, intertwined with corporate governance, citizenship and civic engagement. From their overview, they tend to be classified to follow "stakeholder involvement strategy," as they continuously partner with NGOs from the local community to further engage in CSR strategies and serve the civic societal purposes.

- Egyptian Transport (EGYTRANS): A "stakeholder response strategy" was found to be adopted by EGYTRANS company. As the nature of the company's CSR initiatives had been noted to be dynamic and in continuous flux depending on the needs of the local community and the company resources, it is classified to be responsive to stakeholder needs.

- Global Telecom: though the company had stressed on the importance of CSR communication for further developing its initiatives, its communication is asymmetrical hence also pointing direction toward the utilization of the "stakeholder response strategy."

- EFG-Hermes Holding: a standalone foundation was developed by the leading financial group to serve in its CSR operations. This foundation had continuously engaged with stakeholders to ensure the adaptability of its initiatives to the needs of the local community. Hence, a "stakeholder involvement strategy" had been in place.

The outcome of two-way communication strategies, as mentioned in the literature review, is more interaction with stakeholders, which leads to better credibility. One-way communication messages lead to consumer skepticism that companies are only conducting CSR for publicity reasons rather than for genuine societal purposes.

In the stakeholder-involvement strategy, stakeholders communicate their particular interest in certain social causes upfront, which influences the CSR strategies of companies and aids in the process of societal development. As noted in the literature, the stakeholder-involvement strategy is preferred by researchers and is considered to increase consumer-company identification as well as strengthen message credibility, as the message would be created with the help of stakeholders, rather than merely communicated to them.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the present research aimed to synchronize the relevant literature on CSR communication as well as explore CSR communication reporting practices in terms of the CSR message content, CSR media channel, and the strategies that leading companies from a sustainability point of view adopt in practice. This serves as a cursor in setting the overall trends in the Egyptian context for that matter that had not been reviewed earlier.

Consumers are reportedly skeptical as to what drives companies to engage in CSR initiatives; profits or ethics, which is why companies need to engage in CSR communication practices to reduce consumer skepticism and establish trust. Subsequently, the CSR communication process was examined, in which the researchers highlighted important issues that should be considered in the process, such as, the CSR message content and CSR media channel. Three commonly-cited CSR communication strategies were examined in this research, which are stakeholder-information strategy, stakeholder-response strategy, and stakeholder-involvement strategy. These strategies highlight a shift from one-way communication models to two-way communication models in the CSR reporting practices, as well as recognize the need to involve stakeholders in identifying the CSR initiatives and social areas that need to be addressed. Despite the importance of two-way communication and subsequently of stakeholder involvement communication strategies, this is currently lagging in the Egyptian context. Based on our sample of the leading ten companies in the EGX-ESG index, the majority of the companies employ a stakeholder-information strategy; thereby favoring one-way communication.

Our research can be further expanded by exploring the advantages and drawbacks of each communication strategy in the Egyptian context. The research could also be extended to other developing countries in order to expand the literature on CSR in developing countries.

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Online Resources

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Amer Group—Amer Charitable Foundation, available at: www.amer-group.com/corporate-social-responsibility/amer-charitable-foundation

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