

Lipstick on a Pig: Is CSR Communication Authentic or Cosmetic?

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Abstract

With increased scrutiny of business and its activities, many companies have put corporate social responsibility (CSR) on the top of their agenda. However, the push for CSR has also given rise to the assumption that companies make false claims about their practices and policies. This paper explores how the six multinational telecommunications giants in Ghana present their CSR initiatives online. Using discourse analysis methods, the study examines and compares the CSR communication strategies the industry players adopt. The study finds that the companies demonstrate commitment to communicating CSR, emphasising more ethos than logos strategies which suggest credible CSR messages to a large extent.

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Relational values and the organisation of CSR messages were quite similar across the companies, although some strategies differed. The study not only suggests a linguistic framework for analysing CSR communication messages, it also provides new empirical data that adds to the growing body of literature on CSR communication particularly in the Ghanaian context where studies have been found to be sparse. Again, the findings deepen our understanding of CSR communication issues and its dynamics which will help managers identify potential gaps that may need improvement particularly in developing country contexts. With a few exceptions, a linguistic approach to examining CSR communication content has not received much scholarly attention.

Key words: communicating CSR, corporate website, discourse analysis, Ghana, social responsibility claims.

Introduction

There is rising prominence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) globally (May, 2011). Previous scandalous activities of corporate giants such as Enron, WorldCom, Parmalat and more recently Volkswagen have left in their wake increased public awareness and demands for businesses to be more socially responsible. In the last decade, in particular, the long standing argument that companies should pursue only shareholders' economic interest, as championed by Friedman (1970), has given way to the stakeholder concept, where organisations seek to broaden their responsibilities to many other groups (Clarkson, 1995). As advanced by Freeman (1984), different stakeholders (such as employees, customers, suppliers, the media and the community), affect or can be affected "by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p. 31). Indeed, empirical studies have again highlighted the business case for CSR for companies in terms of gaining competitive advantage, reducing risk, strengthening stakeholder relationships, building strong reputation, among others (e.g. Carroll and Shabana, 2011; Porter and Kramer, 2002). Within these contexts, scholars have emphasised the value of communication in CSR scholarship (Golob *et al.*, 2013); given that such information has the potential to stimulate positive attitudes from stakeholders (Morsing and Schultz, 2006). At the same time, however, there is the 'catch 22' or the paradox of CSR communication (Morsing *et al.* 2008). The biggest

challenge that confronts companies is that efforts to communicate about CSR may create stakeholder skepticism. Many organisations ‘green wash’ their communication to appear more responsible than they really are (Elving and Van Vuuren, 2011). Amid such a climate of distrust, stakeholders become wary of companies’ motives when CSR efforts are popularised and branding such deeds seen as merely cosmetic (Elving, 2013).

Of the varied streams of research within which CSR communication is advanced, May (2011) draws insights from Deetz’s (2001) theoretical conceptualisations and distinguishes four dimensions in the organisational communication field: normative, interpretive, critical and dialogic (also see Gond and Matten, 2007 for paradigmatic streams of CSR understandings). Within this tradition, recent discussions in the CSR communication literature have focused on constitutive perspectives (Schoeneborn and Trittin, 2013). While some researchers relate this concept to the complexities of networked societies and argue for a communication view on CSR (Shultz *et al.* 2013), others have taken an interpretive approach, with some studies analysing web-based CSR communication content (May, 2011). In the wake of growing attention to new forms of media, researchers have examined the content of companies’ CSR information online, through various techniques such as interviews (Adams and Frost, 2006), surveys (e.g. Birth *et al.* 2008), and largely, content analysis procedures (Amaladoss and Manohar, 2013; Capriotti and Moreno, 2007; Esrock and Leichty, 1999). In spite of the supposed ‘linguistic turn’, however, the examination of the language of CSR in such studies is relatively scant (Pollach, 2003).

Our aim in this paper, therefore, is to fill in the gap in the literature by proposing a contextually-oriented linguistic-based approach to analysing CSR communication content. Drawing on a functional approach to discourse, particularly on Fairclough’s (1993; 2001) perspective, we explore how the six multinational telecommunications giants in the Ghanaian market present their CSR initiatives on their websites. Do these companies inflate their communications about CSR? Our reliance on Fairclough’s (1993) framework is based on its focus on Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1978). Although the kinds of approaches to discourse are enormous in terms of their aims and procedures, (see for example, Foucaultian structuralism, Foucault 2000; Wodak’s 2001 discourse

historical approach; and Van Dijk 2001 sociocognitive interface of discourse), whichever approach analysts adopt, there is usually reference to Hallidayan (1978) concepts either implicitly or explicitly, implying that, an understanding of the basic claims of Halliday's (1978) theory is essential for a proper understanding of discourse analysis (Wodak, 2001). Fairclough's (2001) framework also focuses on the socially constructive nature of CSR communication, where companies negotiate responsibility processes with their stakeholders (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

This study particularly concentrates on the telecommunications sector in Ghana, which is one of the largest and the most competitive in the West African sub-region. With just a population of about 29 million, Ghana accommodates a total of six multinational telecommunication players who have popularised the concept of CSR through their activities with the view to attracting and retaining customers (Ofori, 2010). The aggressive competition has further been compounded by the Mobile Number Portability (MNP) concept which was introduced in the country in July 2011. Under this process, dissatisfied customers of one service provider can conveniently switch to another, while still retaining their old mobile numbers (National Communications Authority, NCA, 2015). This study provides new empirical data that adds to the growing body of literature on CSR communication, particularly in the Ghanaian context where studies have been found to be sparse. We specifically look at the following research questions:

Research questions:

1. What discourse strategies do companies adopt in their CSR messages?
2. In what ways do the companies involve their stakeholders in CSR communication?
3. How are CSR messages organised?

In the section that follows, we discuss the theoretical foundations of this paper. We then go on to offer an illustration of our linguistic framework which we draw on for our analysis. The findings from the companies' websites are detailed after this, and finally, some conclusions are presented.

Theoretical Foundations

Communication and Corporate social responsibility

This section critically summaries theoretical foundations in CSR and CSR communication to provide a context for this present study. As a contested concept, CSR has no unified definition (Okoye, 2009). However, attempts have been made to identify essential characteristics of the concept. Carroll (1979, 1991), for instance, described four key components of companies' responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical and discretionary. On the other hand, Dahlsrud's (2008) study identified economic, social, environmental, stakeholder and voluntariness as the five main concepts incorporated in thirty-seven CSR definitions. Elkington (1998), on the other hand, framed CSR within the context of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept which extends the conventional economic notions of responsibility to include social and environmental concerns. From Elkington's (1998) perspective, the TBL largely aims to ensure development that is increasingly sustainable (e.g. World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Although CSR is largely voluntary, countries like Denmark and France have regulations that mandate companies to disclose social and environmental activities (Schmeltz, 2012).

Garriga and Mele (2004) provide a useful way of mapping the plethora of CSR theories and approaches into four broad categories: instrumental, political, integrative and ethical. For organisations which follow instrumental theories or functionalistic (Golob *et al.*, 2013) conceptions, Friedman's (1970) economic motives are adhered to, and profit seeking becomes the chief concern in CSR and its communication practices. On the other hand, political theories basically emphasise the social power of corporations and its manifestation in society (e.g. Newell, 2005). With integrative theories, which embody concepts such as issues management, stakeholder management and corporate social performance, societal demands are framed within the context of business's responsibilities given that, "business depends on society for its existence, continuity and growth" (Garriga and Mele, 2004, p. 57). Such a perspective affirms the theory of the social contract and brings to the fore the idea of legitimacy (an implicit negotiation or agreement), where organisations gain some level of acceptance if their actions are congruent with societal values (e.g. Suchman, 1995). Similarly, this viewpoint mirrors the idea of CSR as a stakeholder-oriented concept by recognising the complex and dynamic relationship

between organisations and those groups that they are expected to consider in their social responsibilities (e.g. Vos, 2003). As far as a modern-day conceptualisation of CSR is concerned, the stakeholder theory has been dominant. Proponents of CSR, for example, argue that, “there is a natural fit between the idea of corporate social responsibility and an organisation’s stakeholders” (Carroll, 1991, p.3). Since Freeman’s (1984) notable publication on the theory in 1984, a number of stakeholder theorists have contributed extensively to the development of the concept from various lenses including stakeholder classifications (e.g. Clarkson, 1995), frameworks for stakeholder analysis (e.g. Mitchell *et al.* 1997) and stakeholder communication strategies (e.g. Morsing and Schultz, 2006). Significantly, Garriga and Mele’s (2004) ethical theories draw on principles of established systems of ethics (e.g. Kantian assumptions), human-rights-based approaches (e.g. UN Global Compact), or other value-based guidelines for CSR (e.g. Global Reporting Initiative) to justify the responsibilities of business towards and within society. In this group also, the normative core of the stakeholder theory is substantiated (CSR as the right thing to do).

Critical to the stakeholder approach is communication, where dialogic principles are integrated premised on involvement, co-creation and consensus (Golob and Podnar, 2014). The stakeholder theory, thus, stands out as an ideal theoretical framework to draw upon in a pragmatic approach to understanding companies’ CSR communication, defined by Podnar (2008) as the “process of anticipating stakeholders’ expectations, articulation of CSR policy and managing of different organization communication tools designed to provide true and transparent information about a company’s or a brand’s integration of its business operations, social and environmental concerns, and interaction with stakeholders” (p. 75). Podnar’s (2008) definition emphasises the ever-changing expectations and information requirements of stakeholders, which necessitates the need for organisations to become more engaged with these groups in the CSR communication process. More importantly, it underscores transparent disclosure as a necessary condition for CSR. As emphasised, scholars have acknowledged key challenges associated with communicating CSR including stakeholder skepticism and its accompanying hostile reactions (Elving, 2013). Coupled with this, is the complexity of disseminating CSR

messages in a way that is meaningful to multiple stakeholders. The literature suggests that, stakeholders seek information about CSR (e.g. Cerin, 2002). However, when communication on CSR issues is done too aggressively, there is the tendency for the rationality behind the discourse to be judged negatively, what Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) describe as the ‘self-promoters paradox’.

Skepticism generally involves an attitude of doubt towards companies’ CSR motives (Mohr *et al.* 2008). Du *et al.* ’s (2010) study, for instance, identified two kinds of stakeholder attributions: extrinsic (where stakeholders perceive organisations as pursuing CSR in their own interest (enlightened self-interest), and intrinsic (where practices are regarded as reflecting genuine social concerns). Another study by Ellen *et al.* (2006) suggests that stakeholders develop positive attitudes towards companies whose CSR engagements are perceived as credible. Studies suggest that, skeptical attitudes pose reputational risks for companies (e.g. Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004); for this reason, researchers have suggested various strategies that companies can adopt to minimise such skepticism, including the use of credible messages (e.g. Pomeroy and Dolnicar, 2009), stakeholder involvement practices (e.g. Morsing and schultz, 2006), third-party endorsements (e.g. Morsing *et al.* 2008), and a fit between CSR claims and actual practice (e.g. Elving, 2013). From a legitimisation perspective, it has been observed that responsible organisations are those whose claim to legitimacy is based on a moral mission (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990).

At the same time, the recognition of a myriad group of stakeholders and the need to meet their ever-changing demands has presented a new set of challenges for organisations to use alternative ways of communicating CSR (e.g. Zerfass *et al.* 2012). The emergence of the website (and the current Web 2.0 technologies) has not only transformed how companies traditionally communicated CSR, it has provided an ideal platform for companies to engage in active two-way communication with their stakeholders (e.g. Korschun and Du, 2013). Morsing and Schultz (2006), for instance, outlined three communication approaches through which companies can essentially engage in CSR with their stakeholders: stakeholder information, stakeholder response and stakeholder involvement strategies. The first two models largely reflect the ‘conduit metaphor’ of

communication (Reddy, 1979). The underlying metaphor in this conduit framework is of organisations, as essentially transmitters of CSR information into ‘containers’ to be unpacked by stakeholders, treating the overall process as a means to an end. At the other end of the spectrum, the stakeholder involvement strategy highlights the contemporary view of CSR communication as constitutive, where organisations and their stakeholders negotiate a mutually satisfactory process (Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

The CSR communication literature emphasises two main constitutive perspectives: the social constructionist orientation (e.g. Christensen and Cheney, 2011) and the Communication Constitutes Organisation (CCO) standpoint (a relatively new area of CSR communication) which is situated within organisation studies (See for example Brummans *et al.* 2014; Schoeneborn *et al.* 2014 for critical discussions). While the CCO approach views organisations as communication-centred (e.g. Koschman *et al.* 2012), the focal point of social constructionism, in which Fairclough’s (2001) approach is based, is ‘constructive action-in-context’, where companies jointly produce CSR with stakeholders (e.g. Schultz *et al.* 2013). Many scholars (e.g. Capriotti, 2011) have observed that, the flexibility and interactive nature of the website help to promote this “organisation-stakeholder dialogic relationships” (p. 362). Both Studies by Esrock and Leichy (1998) and Capriotti and Moreno (2007) of Fortune-500 and Spanish companies respectively affirm that, there is widespread use of the website by companies to address CSR issues.

Besides, previous studies have also shown that context is relevant to CSR communication practices. Studies in both developed (e.g. Matten and Moon, 2008) and developing countries (e.g. Visser, 2006) have confirmed that national and institutional frameworks heavily impact on CSR practices (e.g. Baughn *et al.* 2007; Tschopp, 2005). For instance, Matten and Moon’s (2008) implicit and explicit CSR conceptualisations in Europe and the US respectively clearly justify this viewpoint. Similarly, Maignan and Ralston (2002) found that variations exist in CSR practices in France, the Netherlands, the UK and the US. In a related development, Lattemann *et al.*’s. (2009) study in China and India, and Wanderley *et al.*’s (2008) study in six emerging economies, have both concluded that country and firm-level factors affect CSR communication practices. As these studies show, CSR

communication principles cannot be understood in isolation from social and cultural contexts. This means that differences exist in terms of how developing countries and their developed counterparts formulate and incorporate practices. In recent years, globalisation has integrated societies and cultures with differing values. Issues about the activities of multinational companies in their host countries have further necessitated an examination of how specific countries with varying systems practice CSR-related activities.

In Ghana, for instance, companies of all sizes strive to adopt responsibility practices in fulfilment of their social and environmental goals (Amo-Mensah and Tench, 2015). Although CSR is not mandatory, environmental policies and other regulations provide the legal framework for such initiatives (e.g. Atuguba and Dowuona-Hammond, 2006). Plans are also far advanced to develop a national CSR policy to guide the conduct of business and its operations. As CSR practices become more relevant in the Ghanaian context, multinational companies, particularly those in the telecommunications sector, have been at the forefront of the responsibility agenda. At the same time, these multinationals have been far more exposed to public scrutiny; the push for CSR has given rise to the assumption that these companies make false claims about their practices and policies. Drawing on our linguistic framework, which we set out in the next section, we examine how the six telecommunication companies in Ghana communicate their CSR activities online.

Corporate Social Responsibility Communication: A linguistic Framework

This section sets out our linguistic framework for analysing CSR communication content. We draw insights from Fairclough's (1993; 2001) perspective which focuses on a functional approach to discourse. We concentrated on linguistic analysis for the reason that, it is through social and linguistic relationships that companies construct the meaning of CSR with their stakeholders. The depth of analysis involved in such an approach also offers researchers the opportunity to go beyond surface meanings and make sense of the content of companies CSR information using all possible linguistic knowledge and interpretation to understand implicit meanings (Titscher *et al.* 2000). The literature also makes clear that, linguistic

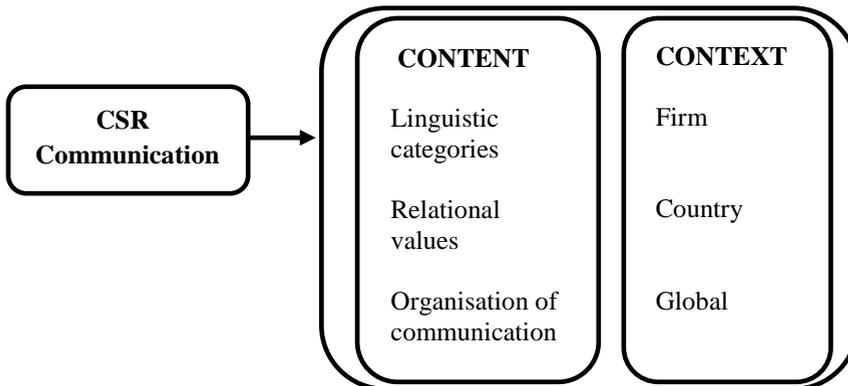
properties may also signal and illuminate companies' real intentions, motives and perspectives on CSR through self-presentation and impression formation (Van Dijk, 2001). In simplified terms, the fit between CSR claims and actual practice can be elucidated. It should be stressed that there is no one-size-fits-all methodological approach to discourse analysis (Meyer, 2001). Hence, we do not here produce a rigid how-to-do procedure (the linguistic framework only serves as a guide), since an important aspect of discourse perspectives is its flexibility (Wodak, 2001). Fairclough's (1995) perspective particularly advocates transdisciplinary integration of various theories to suit a particular research aim (Jorgen and Philips, 2002). It is also important to note that an exhaustive analysis of a large corpus of discourse is practically impossible; researchers therefore need to demarcate the boundaries of linguistic elements to consider based on epistemological orientation and the research focus (Van Dijk, 2001).

As noted earlier, the approach to discourse advocated by Fairclough (1993) draws heavily upon Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). In addition, Fairclough (1993) also pulls together ideas from the Frankfurt school (most notably in the work of Jürgen Habermas), and other philosophical traditions to shape his thinking (Fairclough, 2001). According to Halliday's (1978) systemic theory, language has an ideational function which embodies experiences and representations of the world. Secondly, language is characterised by social interactions between participants in a communicative event; hence, there is an interpersonal function. In addition, Halliday (1978) talks about a textual function which provides for connections within itself and integrates this with situational contexts (Halliday, 1978). In Halliday's (1978) view, these three interrelated metafunctions of language (ideational, interpersonal and textual) are characterised by social and cultural contexts, corresponding to what he refers to as the field "what's going on in the situation", tenor "who is taking part in the situation", and mode "roles of language and other semiotic systems in the situation" respectively (Halliday and Hassan, 2013. p. 33).

Following Halliday (1978), Fairclough (1993) developed a three-dimensional model of communicative events while also highlighting the different dimensions of analysis: 1. Text analysis (descriptions), 2. Discursive practice (interpretation) and 3. Social practice (explanation). The

first level, which relates to Halliday's (1978) ideational function, examines the linguistic properties within the communicative event 'text'. Fairclough (1995) posits that, at the text level, analysis is primarily descriptive. Next, is an interpretation of the relationship between the text and discursive practice (interaction). In reference to Halliday's (1978) interpersonal function, Fairclough (1995) differentiates between the identity function (the constitution of personal and social identities) and the relational function (text in the constitution of relationships at the level of interpretation). Finally, there is an explanation of discursive practice and social practice where the socio-cultural context of the discourse is addressed in relation to the previous levels of analysis (Fairclough, 1995). From the above, Fairclough's (1993) approach basically sees discourse as text, interaction (the content of CSR information) and context, thus, highlighting two key assumptions that are central to CSR communication: 'socially constitutive' and 'socially determined' (Golob *et al.* 2013). We show how this model can be operationalised in the context of CSR communication (see, figure one below), focusing on two broad interweaving categories: the content of CSR information (at the micro level) and the context of communication (at the macro level).

Figure 1: CSR communication: A linguistic framework



Source: (authors)

The content of CSR information (Micro-level of analysis)

At the micro-level of analysis, internal constituents of CSR messages are analysed focusing on representations of meaning (how words are used to conceptualise CSR actions). Three mutually inclusive considerations are emphasised at this level: linguistic categories relevant to the analysis, relational values within the text, and the form of the CSR message. As regards the linguistic elements to address as already emphasised (whether at the phonological, semantic or syntactic levels), researchers need to delineate the scope based on the research focus. Linguistic choices and strategies constitute companies' reflections, which provide cues for their perspectives, knowledge, values, attitudes and motives for CSR engagements. The second consideration, (relational values), focuses on how those linguistic elements reflect the complex and diverse company-stakeholder interactions. In other words, this level examines all the ways in which companies create social relationships or interact with their stakeholders through CSR information. The final consideration at the micro-level highlights the form, structure or organisation of the CSR message, that is, how these have been ordered. Issues to consider may include placement of the CSR information, sections devoted to CSR and the number of pages dedicated to such information.

The context of CSR communication (Macro-level of analysis)

Context generally refers to the circumstances which give meaning to the CSR communication process. It depicts the "mental representations of the structures of the communicative situation that are discursively relevant" (Meyer, 2001 p. 21). The contextual environment, therefore, is the situation in which the CSR information is embedded as part of the whole process of communicating to stakeholders. These circumstances inform the researcher's mental modes or representations, which not only influence the analytic choices that are relevant (in the content of CSR information), but also, how information about CSR is interpreted (Fairclough, 1995; Halliday and Hassan, 2013). There are institutional practices, country-specific opportunities or constraints, global forces and trends, all of which tend to define how companies communicate CSR. In order to understand the context in which CSR communication takes place, we distinguish firm-level factors, country-specific factors, and global factors (beyond firm and country level). At the firm level, practices may be informed by corporate values, mission, vision, policies and procedures, codes of conduct, and

governance or leadership practices. Regulatory requirements and laws within a country impact companies' CSR communication practices. Finally, global contexts are defined by guidelines, indexes and initiatives for CSR communication. The empirical illustration presented next is to briefly demonstrate the application of our linguistic framework.

Empirical Illustration

The study explored how the telecommunications companies in Ghana present their CSR initiatives online. All six of the multinational companies were included in the study: Millicom Ghana Limited (Tigo), Espresso Ghana Limited, Mobile Telecommunications Network (MTN) Ghana Limited, Vodafone Ghana Limited, Airtel Ghana Limited and Globacom (Glo) Ghana Limited. We used the Google search engine to locate the official websites of these companies, following which data were collected from March 5 to May 8, 2015. The criteria for the selection of information included all pages on websites that had CSR information. Links to pages with information about CSR were also accessed. Both the context and the content of data were taken into account in this analysis. Each of the companies' profiles was examined for the context of communication. Again, information on the websites of the parent companies, the industry regulator's website (NCA) and various other credible sources such as GhanaWeb, Ghana News Agency and Ghana Business News were read to provide useful background information and the social contexts within which this study is situated. The web pages of the companies were then examined in relation to the context of CSR communication. As a point of departure from the many previous studies that have utilised content analysis procedures (e.g. Esrock and Leichty, 1999; Maignan and Ralston, 2002), we used discourse analytic concepts. Drawing on our linguistic framework which we developed from Fairclough's (1993) three-dimensional model of analysing discourse, and Halliday's (1978) functional approach to language, we examined the websites of the six companies for CSR messages that addressed our research questions. First, we looked at discourses that are articulated around CSR on companies' websites and the modes of persuasive appeals (how companies portray themselves as credible in their CSR messages). In looking at what discourses companies draw on, we focused on two of Aristotle's appeals that are relevant to this analysis: Logos (arguments on CSR that are premised on reason) and Ethos (where

companies demonstrate that CSR actions are values-driven). For companies' CSR communications to be seen as credible, ethos plays a critical role and should surpass logos (Ihlen, 2011). We relied on Ihlen's (2011) five ethos strategies for assessing multinational corporations' CSR messages: that they improve the world through their products/leadership roles; that they have cleaned up their own act; how third parties give them praise for their CSR actions; that they associate with the CSR movement; and that they care about stakeholders (Ihlen, 2011). Next, we focused on relational values on websites, that is, how the companies include their stakeholders in addressing their CSR messages, and finally, we explored how these messages have been organised and their relationships.

Findings and Discussion

The content of CSR information on companies' websites

An examination of the companies' websites indicates the level of importance telecommunications companies in Ghana attach to communicating CSR through this platform. Consistent with research by Borglund *et al.* (2008) which found that 97% of companies in Europe used the website to communicate their responsible initiatives, all six of the companies (100%) present information on CSR on their websites, with specific sections fully devoted to such information. MTN, during our three-month period of analysis, dedicated the highest number of pages to CSR information online (36), followed by Airtel (15). Tigo (12) and Vodafone (12) came next with the same number of pages, while Expresso (5) and Glo (4) assigned the least amount of space on their websites for CSR and its related issues. The context of communication and the historical conditions of these companies give rise to these indications. The size of Glo and Expresso (least number of subsidiaries) possibly could have affected their ability and willingness to communicate CSR. On the other hand, MTN has been the industry leader since 2003, according to figures from the NCA, with a current market share of 47.54% as of January 2017; hence, its size (in Ghana) perhaps influences its approach to CSR communication as previous studies have found (e.g. Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Four of the companies (Tigo, Glo, Airtel and MTN) representing more than half, use the term 'corporate social responsibility' to describe their CSR sections. While Vodafone names it corporate responsibility, Expresso calls it sustainability. This is an indication that the term CSR has become more widespread in

Ghana as opposed to its related constructs, suggesting that possibly, companies adopt a much broader approach to their societal responsibilities. Extant literature has noted concepts that overlap with CSR such as sustainability, corporate responsibility, corporate philanthropy and business ethics (Garriga and Mele, 2004). Across all six of the companies, there were other areas on the websites such as ‘About Us, ‘Press/News’ that contained a wide range of CSR information in line with Capriotti and Moreno’s (2007) finding that CSR information on the websites of Spanish companies were strewed.

Appeal to reason: The analysis indicates that the companies adopt various strategies to appeal to their stakeholders’ reason through the evidence they provide of their engagements in CSR. In addition to illustrative structures that detailed backgrounds, histories, products and services (e.g. the About Us columns), companies also used logical arguments (logos appeal) to provide supporting evidence of CSR claims through mission/vision statements, CEO statements, values and codes of ethics. The companies relied on already existing discourses on CSR, for example, language that emphasises principles of commitment, transparency and impact (See table 1 below).

Table 1: Logos strategies

Company	Examples to depict Logos strategies
Tigo	Underpinning Tigo Ghana's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agenda is our commitment to improve living standards" "With a seed capital of \$20,000 annually for 3 years...we have created incredible change-makers that are making a difference in various communities across Ghana"
Expresso	"Our code of conduct ensures that we do business in a lawful, ethical and transparent manner", "projects are directed towards long-term activities with particular focus on health and education"
MTN	Vision: "to be the benchmark for Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiatives in Ghana and within the MTN Group" "Invested GHC 15.5 million in various CSR projects since 2007"
Vodafone	"Being an admired company is not just about our performance and achievement, it's also about acting in a responsible, ethical and lawful way", CEO statement. "investing hundreds of thousands of Cedis through the Vodafone Ghana Foundation in social causes"
Airtel	Our vision is "to be a distinguished and reputable corporate social responsibility entity regionally and globally..." Mission: "to produce an overall positive impact on society and our stakeholders..."
Glo	"Our focus includes job creation initiatives, youth empowerment, event sponsorships, sports development..." ..."over \$ 23 million to the sponsorship of Ghana national teams and the Premier League..."

Such discourses, perhaps, aim to create positive stakeholder perceptions about companies' social and environmental responsibilities. These discourses were supported by numerous links to sources of CSR information (e.g. Press/News/Press releases, reports) which presented facts about CSR accomplishments/awards, certifications to international standards and audited sustainability reports. For example, almost all the companies (Tigo,

Expresso, MTN, Airtel, Vodafone), with the exception of Glo, demonstrated commitment to CSR through their codes of conduct (online); in addition, they build and maintain a culture of compliance in these codes. All the five companies further exhibit through their strategies a high degree of compliance with relevant local regulations and other international guidelines. Two of the companies (MTN and Vodafone) expend much effort through their independent CSR foundations which provide comprehensive and structured corporate plans for such programmes. The companies displayed considerable similarity regarding the areas of CSR engagements. Among the various focus areas of CSR addressed on companies' websites (e.g. economic and environmental discourses), the prominent ones related to social issues (mainly education and health related), mostly in the form of charitable contributions (e.g. provision of educational materials to various schools, refurbishment of schools/hospitals). Studies in developing country contexts have found similar conclusions (Visser, 2006). From the data, Expresso, MTN and Airtel mainly focused on issues that influenced health and education. Vodafone described its foundation as the 'charity arm' and highlighted charitable contributions as its main focus, just like Tigo whose messages emphasised donations to various groups and individuals. Glo's website represented an exception; its CSR activities are mainly in the areas of sports development (sponsoring the national football teams and premier leagues).

Appeal to ethos: Our study also revealed that, arguments on CSR on companies' websites were not just an assemblage of logical claims supported by evidence (appeal to logos), but a series of assurances and words of promise of how these companies commit to their responsibilities. As well as drawing on ethics vocabularies or moral words (such as 'transparent', 'accountable', 'responsible', 'integrate', 'life enhancing', 'sustainable', 'highest ethical standards', 'compliance'), companies demonstrate strategies to reduce the impact of their activities on the environment through positive self-presentation (Table 2 below shows ethos strategies and some examples/phrases to depict these). Guided by Ihlen's (2011) five ethos strategies as already highlighted, table 2 shows that linguistic strategies on all the companies' websites indicate a willingness to improve the world through their products and leadership roles (Ihlen, 2011).

Table 2: Ethos strategies

Company	Improve the world	Clean up their own act	Praise from third parties	Associations with CSR movements	Demonstration of goodwill (feedback)
Tigo	“integrate corporate responsibility in our business processes”	“safe disposal and recovery of materials from electronic waste”	e.g. Best CSR company of the year 2015, Ghana Telecom Awards)	e.g. OECD guidelines, GRI	“...our willingness and readiness to assist...”
Expresso	“...conduct our business fairly, honestly and with integrity”	“energy, water and waste management programmes are central...”	–	–	“Here are our company details...”
MTN	“integrating sustainable business practices into our day to day operations”	“leverage synergies to reduce duplication of resources ...as well as costs”	e.g. Best CSR company in Ghana 2009 (Ghana Club 100 awards)	e.g. UN Global Compact, GRI	“If you have any queries, do not hesitate to contact us on...”
Vodafone	“...Approaching our business aims responsibly ...”	“reduce carbon emissions by...”	e.g. CSR initiative of the year 2013, (Ghana Telecom awards)	e.g. UN Global Compact, OECD	“Follow us...”
Airtel	“...to contribute towards a sustainable future”	“reduce our energy consumption and consequent emission...”	e.g. Best CSR company of the year 2014, (Ghana telecom Awards)	e.g. UN Global Compact, AA1000AS	“If you prefer to see someone face-to-face, visit...”
Glo	‘life enhancing products and services’	Cut down energy use...friendly environment	–	–	“...cater for your queries, complaints, and resolution of challenges encountered at any point in time”.

Without exception, all the companies claim to solicit feedback from their stakeholders in an attempt to demonstrate goodwill. Contact information and support are detailed (for example, help/telephone lines, FAQs, live chats, email addresses/forms, complaints procedures, social media platforms) to provide a platform for queries and comments to be addressed. Companies such as MTN, Tigo, Vodafone and Airtel show recognitions in the form of various awards for their unrivalled CSR initiatives, as well as associations with several international CSR schemes (e.g. Global Reporting Initiative). A minority of two companies (Expresso and Glo) display no exemplification in the form of praise or affiliation to any CSR movement. In total, five of the companies (Expresso MTN, Tigo, Vodafone and Airtel) talk about environmental management strategies that clean their own acts. In a related development, Expresso emphasises on its website that, its “corporate strategy and sustainability strategy are not mutually exclusive - they are one and the same”. Airtel describes this as “anchored deeply into its business strategy”; Vodafone explains that “CSR is the right thing to do”; MTN “embed good sustainability practices at every level...”; Glo strives for “significant positive impact”; while Tigo “is committed to giving back” to its communities. These extracts, among others, reflect values-driven justifications for CSR. On the other hand, CSR was also described as “good for business”, helping companies to maintain a “successful financial performance” and “competitiveness” in addition to others, depicting the business case for CSR as some authors have advanced (Porter and Kramer, 2002). Overall, a large number of the companies (4 out of 6) adopted more ethos strategies than logos strategies, possibly as a legitimisation approach or as a way of demonstrating company values that epitomise good conscience. Notwithstanding, this varied to a great extent for two of the companies (Glo and Expresso) whose ethos strategies were less.

Relational values: With regard to relational values, all the six companies acknowledged responsibilities to a broad range of stakeholders; however, customers were unanimously the companies’ major priority as opposed to other groups. This is in line with Kim *et al.*’s (2014) finding of Fortune 100 companies, that, the “corporations prioritized customers’ needs over other stakeholders’ needs” (p. 357). Other groups included employees (which came next), shareholders, investors and community groups. There were various structures on the websites that suggested that, companies involved

stakeholders in their CSR communication activities (e.g. “in conjunction with our stakeholders”, “Stakeholder engagements”, “listening to our stakeholders helps identify the key issues”). From a social constructionist perspective, companies, thus, seem to negotiate CSR discourses with their stakeholders. Constant use of the first person plural ‘we’ on companies’ websites evoke partnership and an all-inclusive tone that suggest close affinity with stakeholders or an opportunity to build relationships with these groups. Also, this personal point of view reflecting a sense of connectedness may have been used to get readers to identify with companies’ CSR engagements. Clearly, stakeholder engagement processes assure meaningful CSR communication practices, in that, insights derived from such connections are rich promise for effective outcomes. Many CSR communication scholars endorse stakeholder engagement concepts (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Podnar, 2008).

Structure and presentation: We found that the style of presentation of CSR information on the companies’ websites were mostly narrative, where readers can visualise those initiatives being highlighted. Their reason for the narrative technique could be to enable stakeholders assimilate CSR messages more easily since they can, to a large extent, identify with such a common form of genre. Expresso places its CSR section on the top of its home page making it more visible. Just like Expresso, it was easier to locate Tigo’s CSR section; at first glance, the word ‘CSR’ appears about the middle of the home page with a very large font size. MTN and Vodafone place theirs below their home pages (moderately visible). Airtel places it under (second level) the About Us column, and the structure on its website does not allow for easy identification. Glo’s CSR section is placed broadly under sponsorship (second level) on the main tab. From this finding, it worth mentioning that CSR sections/messages on corporate websites are more discoverable if they are well placed. Goals of CSR communication are likely to be compromised when such messages are buried under several layers of contents on websites. The final section concludes the paper.

Conclusions

This paper examined how the six multinational telecommunications companies in Ghana present their CSR messages on their websites. Drawing on our proposed linguistic framework which we developed from

Fairclough's (1993) three dimensional model of analysing discourse, and Halliday's (1978) functional approach to language, we explored the discourse strategies that the companies adopt, along with the relational values and the organisation of CSR messages. In general, our investigation revealed that, telecommunications companies in Ghana demonstrate commitment to CSR communication on their websites, with all six companies having specific sections fully devoted for such efforts. Our analysis also revealed a very high level of ethos strategies. Linguistic categories related more to responsibilities that focused on ethos than logos, and by presenting arguments this way, companies CSR messages are highly perceived as being credible (Ihlen, 2011). We also identified that companies acknowledged responsibilities to a broad range of stakeholders to a great extent. With regard to the structure and presentation, CSR messages appeared dispersed at various sections online. Overall, we have also shown that, text context relationships are crucial in CSR communication since it contributes to a wide variety of implicit meanings that provide in-depth understanding of companies' messages. Our study demonstrates that, firm, country and global level factors are important considerations in CSR communication which have useful implications for researchers to be mindful of transporting Western concepts and models in developing country contexts and vice versa. This initial exploratory study further contributes to our understanding of CSR communication practices in the Ghanaian context; it provides insights on how companies employ linguistic strategies to present their CSR information to their stakeholders. Our proposed linguistic framework also has implications for CSR communication theory and practice. The framework does not only provide a lens for managers, companies, rating agencies and other stakeholders to ascertain the fit between social/environmental claims and actual actions, it is also a useful starting point for researchers to build upon to help improve companies communications about CSR. We have also emphasised the fact that untruthful or misleading CSR claims only have short-term results. For this reason, the critical question for companies to reflect upon is: are they cynically putting lipstick on a pig or genuinely upholding ethical and sustainable business practices? Crucially, the examination only focused on one component of the multiple approaches to analysing discourse. Further research can consider other discourse strategies such as communication moves or other CSR communication dimensions at various linguistic levels:

historical, semantic, syntactic. It is also important to emphasise that, the research only concentrated on companies' websites which is only one of the mediums for communicating CSR. Findings should therefore be considered as such.

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