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Communicating CSR: The practice in the top 300 companies in Switzerland

Gregory Birth works as a Communication Specialist in the Brand Management unit at BSI SA (www.bsi.ch) since August 2005. Since he joined BSI he followed the bank's rebranding project that went public on April 2006. In 2005 he got his degree in Communication Science at the University of Lugano specializing both in corporate communication and technology of communication. His master thesis, entitled "Communicating CSR: the practice in the top 300 Swiss companies" won in 2005 the "Angelika Meyer Terlizzi Award" awarded by the Swiss Italian chapter of the Swiss Public Relations Society (SPRG).

Laura Illia is researcher at the Institute for Corporate Communication (ICA). After having concluded the Executive MSc, Master of Science in Communications Management, she is currently following the PhD course Programme in Business Studies and Communication as well as working on her Phd under the supervision of Francesco Lurati. In 2003 she graduated at the Executive MSc, Master of Science in Communications Management. In 2000 she got her degree in Communication Science at the University of Lugano. Her master thesis won in 2001 the "Angelika Meyer Terlizzi Award" awarded by the Swiss Italian chapter of the Swiss Public Relations Society (SPRG) and in 2002 the "Jos Willems Award" awarded by European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) for the best european research work in PR. (Laura.Illia@lu.unisi.ch)

Francesco Lurati teaches in the field of communications management at USI, where he is also the academic director of the Executive Master of Science in Communications Management (Executive MSc) and of the MS full-time program in Corporate Communication. He is a member of the Foundation Board of the Swiss Public Relations Institute. He was educated as an economist at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland where, in 1992, he received his doctoral degree in economics. At the University of Fribourg he also taught International Economic Relations. Before joining the Faculty of Communication Sciences at USI, he was a visiting scholar at the University of California, Riverside, USA and he taught Marketing at the University of Applied Science in Lugano. He has also held positions at the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics and in the banking sector and today he regularly consults in the field of communications management. (Francesco.Lurati@lu.unisi.ch)

Alessandra Zamparini is researcher at the Institute for Corporate Communication (ICA). She is currently following the PhD course Programme in Business Studies and Communication as well as working on her Phd under the supervision of Francesco Lurati. She joined the University of Lugano in 2005. Prior to that she has worked within the International Relations Centre at IULM University, Milan, where she also completed her studies. In 2005 she graduated at the Master of Science in Management of External Relations and of Communication in Public Administration and Public Services and in 2003 she got her degree in Communication Science. Within her bachelor programme she spent a semester as visiting student at the Loughborough University, UK in the department of Communication and Media studies. (alessandra.zamparini@lu.unisi.ch)

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Abstract

This paper documents the empirical results of a field study conducted among top Swiss companies. The survey investigates their practices in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication as well as their opinions about how favorable the Swiss context is for this kind of communication. Results show CSR communication in Switzerland as a practice in evolution, still needing expertise. In this regard the paper gives examples of improvements that permit the development of a CSR communication strategy focused on dialogue and transparency, making companies aware of the potential of conscious CSR communication. Moreover, results show that gaining expertise can be an easy task, since the Swiss context emerges as open to CSR communication. Interesting results show that this openness is due to an Anglo – Saxon orientation of the Swiss cultural context, which is, however, in some aspects called into question by a Latin cultural influence

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Introduction

Nowadays it is becoming more and more important for companies to communicate their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). There is evidence supporting this idea. CSR activities need to be communicated because they may influence opinion leaders' behavior regarding a target organization (APCO Worldwide 2004) and because of the technological and communicational revolution of these last ten years. Indeed, global communication creates a context where public opinion does not trust organizations that overstate their social behavior (Watts & Holme 1999), which is why public opinion is itself becoming an important gatekeeper of organizational CSR (Esrock & Leichty, 1998). Apart from this reason, global communication creates a context where organizations are more open to external expectations (Elikington 1998)., CSR communication is therefore becoming increasingly important.

Despite this growing importance of CSR communication, organizations still have to learn how to communicate their CSR. Indeed, a recent study shows that although the public to which organizations communicate their CSR activities is very attentive and demanding, it is nonetheless very uninformed on the topic (APCO Worldwide 2004). In fact, in spite of the research on CSR being 50 years old, there is still no common definition of CSR (Göbbels 2003). This field of study is not only theoretically and conceptually poor, but is also empirically unexplored (Hopkins 1999). This is also true for CSR communication.

The potential for exploring CSR communication has led us to develop a study that focuses on CSR communication practice in Switzerland. The aim is to understand how common CSR communication is among the top 300 companies in Switzerland and how they communicate CSR, if they do. We have chosen to develop the survey in the Swiss context since Switzerland is a country where the values of universalism and benevolence are very important among its citizens (Schwartz 2003). It is therefore interesting to also see how the top 300 companies consider the Swiss context with regard to CSR communication.

To achieve this aim the paper is organized as it follows. After a brief definition of what it means for organizations to communicate their corporate social responsibility, we first present the literature review that allowed us to identify the three main levels of analysis according to which we designed the survey. In the literature review we firstly we discuss CSR communication channels and issues according to previous research such as CSR Europe 2000, WBCSD 2000, Ku et Al. (2003), Drumwright (1996) and the Esrock & Leichty research of 1998. Basing our understanding on these and other sources and studies, we define some criteria that permit the communication of CSR issues in a more credible and efficient way using typical CSR channels. Secondly we discuss CSR communication strategy with regard to three typologies of

stakeholder: clients, employees and shareholders. We define CSR communication objectives and the strategic roles of clients, employees and shareholders according to a multidisciplinary mix of literature such as: Corporate Social Responsibility & Customer care (e.g. McWilliams & Siegel 2001; Dawkins & Lewis 2003); Corporate social responsibility and employer reputation (Joyner & Payne 2002; Bauer & Smith 1996; Turban & Greening 1996; Mowday 1979); Socially responsible investing (Hockerts & Moir 2004 Keeler 2003; Mainelli 2004). In this part we integrate these different backgrounds with empirical bases such as MORI. Finally, we discuss the context for CSR communication. As some studies have shown (Tixier 2003), organizations in Anglo-Saxon countries are more likely to communicate than those operating in Latin countries. In the present research we define a set of criteria that help us to understand if Swiss companies consider the Swiss context more Anglo-Saxon- or Latin-oriented. After the literature review, we present the results of the survey among the top 300 companies in Switzerland and, finally, we discuss the results and draw conclusions on CSR communication practice in Switzerland.

1. The three levels of analysis of CSR communication

Despite the heterogeneity of definitions of CSR, it is possible to identify three recurring arguments defining CSR and consequently also CSR communication: the relationships between companies and society, the relationships between companies and their stakeholders, and the orientation of CSR to ethics. Frederick (1978) considers that the fundamental idea embedded in corporate social responsibility is that corporations have an obligation to work for social betterment. This definition is similar to the one given by the WBCSD - the World Business Council for Sustainable Development - which considers that CSR management means acting responsibly with other stakeholders and ethically towards society (WBCSD in Watts & Holme 2000). In the same way, it is similar to the definition given by Andrews (1987), Carrol (1979) and Sethi (1975) who classify CSR into economic legal, ethical and discretionary activities that include the expectations of society. Deegan et al. (1996;1999) and Brown & Degan(1998) translate these concepts into CSR communication and underline that it is aimed at providing information that legitimises an organization's behavior by trying to influence stakeholders and society's image of the company.

The above definition of CSR communication helps us to understand why the central problem in CSR communication is to develop conscious communication so as to communicate what Carrol (1999) calls the right level of transparency. As Carrol underlines, the level of transparency is very difficult to achieve and should not be arbitrary. On the contrary, it should be the outcome of conscious communication that allows a company's image and reputation to be protected in all cultures and countries. The difficulty of achieving conscious CSR communication is also

discussed by Schoenenberger (2000). He underlines that CSR communication implies the difficulty of giving information about data which cannot easily be verified. Indeed, communicating CSR means not only communicating a company's behavior through standards or codes of conduct, but also communicating about very long projects which do not have any evidence of the outcome. From these two arguments we draw the conclusion that conscious communication of CSR is difficult, but necessary. As the next paragraphs show, conscious CSR communication can be achieved with a definition of clear communication objectives, content and channels and by understanding the communication context. These elements are presented in the next paragraphs as discussed in the current studies on CSR and CSR communication.

1. 1 CSR communication, issues and channels

Looking at recent studies, three channels particularly have been investigated and discussed: **social reports, websites and advertising**. Following these studies we were able to identify the elements for communicating efficiently through these channels.

Social reports are the main channel for communicating “the social and environmental effect of organizations' economic actions to particular interest groups within society and to society at large” (Gray et al., 1996). It was widespread during the nineties and in Western Europe 68% of big companies produced social reports (CSR Europe, 2003). Nonetheless there is a certain level of dissatisfaction among stakeholders, and companies are often accused of writing arbitrary reports, not based on quantifiable data. Current studies show that there are two ways to avoid that and to write an efficient report. First the *adoption of international reporting standards*, created as publishing guides to good-quality social reports. According to Tschopp, a social report that is not regulated by standards or external guidelines risks becoming part of marketing strategy and nothing more, thus not meeting the requirements of investors, lobbyists, NGOs and customers. Reporting on social actions is voluntary, but stakeholder groups are applying pressure to get social reports from corporations. Some European governments are implementing mandatory laws on reporting (France, Spain), while in other countries the adoption of international reporting standards is growing fast, even if there are no mandatory regulations from the EU at the moment (Tschopp, 2005). The most used standards in Europe are GRI, SA8000, AA 1000 and ISO 1400 (The Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College).

A step towards gaining credibility is *third-party certification*. According to Chris Moon, Director of Essex, “the best way to convince stakeholders that a company is as good as its corporate citizenship report is to have the report audited by an independent consultant” (Keeler, 2003). The APCO Worldwide research on opinion leaders also shows that 90% of those interviewed think that third-party independent certification gives credibility to the social report.

CSR communication via **web** is the second channel considered, and in particular this research focuses on the web's agenda-setting potential. According to the results obtained by recent studies, even though the exact relationship between websites' agendas and the public agenda has not yet been discovered, there is strong evidence of the fact that they converge (Ku, Kaid and Pfau; 2003). The indicators for seeing how it is possible to influence agenda setting were found by Esrock and Leichty (1998), i.e. *editorials, comments, taking positions*. They indeed permit us to illustrate a company's position on specific corporate issues, thus showing transparently the company's involvement through a website that is not used only as a referential channel. Furthermore, a way to influence agenda setting is the integration of *third-party opinions* in the website. This gives credibility to the company's position, increasing the transparency of CSR communication even further. Using corporate websites to influence public opinion on issues has great potential that few companies seem to have understood in the past (Esrock and Leichty, 1998). Of course considering the rapid evolution of the web and of attention to CSR, those data could be considerably changed.

Quite the contrary has happened to **advertising**; in fact campaigns containing social elements have been abundantly used in the last decades, but the evaluation of their success has been quite controversial. Drumwright has studied the relationship between the social objectives of a campaign and its economic objectives. He found that they can often be in harmony, nevertheless the social dimension gives the advertising campaign a series of additional difficulties. On one hand those campaigns are often *criticized by the public* for the social dimension itself: companies are actually accused of making use of social problems for business purposes. On the other hand they often have to face management distrust of CSR advertising outcomes and processes. According to Drumwright (1996), campaigns with a social dimension are often *accused of not having short-term economic results*, although they clearly have long-term objectives; moreover management considers the *creative process to be longer and more complex* and consequently that *much more time is needed for a social campaign*; finally they believe *measurement of results to be more difficult*.

Apart from these three channels, empirical surveys investigate **other channels**, reporting only on their use and not analyzing in depth how they are used. For example, the study "Communicating corporate social responsibility" (CSR Europe, 2000a) and "The first ever European survey of consumers' attitude on corporate social responsibility" (CSR Europe, 2000b) provide the following list: *social reports, thematic reports, codes of conduct, websites, stakeholder consultation, internal communication, prizes and events, cause-related marketing*,

communication on product packaging, interventions in the press and on TV, communication at points of sale. The studies show that companies use a wide range of these channels.

With regard to **CSR issues** that are communicated by companies, current studies use the same approach, i.e. the communication of issues is reported without consideration of how they are communicated. Apart from CSR Europe, other studies focused on issues – “Corporate social responsibility making good business sense” (WBCSD, 2000) and “Social responsibility on web pages” (Esrock and Leichty, 1998) – and the following list is an integration of these issues: *mission, vision and values, workplace climate, social dialogue, human rights, community involvement, development of the local economy, environment, market relations, ethics.*

1.2. CSR Communication objectives with regard to strategic stakeholders

To have conscious CSR communication, it is necessary to define clear communication objectives for each stakeholder. In the present research we focus on three specific types of stakeholder: clients, employees and shareholders. This choice is based on the current state of the art: there are previous discussions or empirical research about these stakeholders, whereas there are not about others. Therefore it was not possible to design the empirical investigation more broadly.

The literature highlights that organizations may have different **communication objectives with regard to clients**, depending on the industry and typology of product. Such objectives may help the organization to respond to a client’s request for information.

A first objective can be *to improve reputation through CSR*. As McWilliams and Siegel underline (2001), firms that are socially responsible are considered by consumers to have a good reputation. This interrelationship between CSR and reputation is confirmed by a recent study conducted by British Telecom (2002) that underlines how CSR represents 25% of the reputation asset of the company. The improvement of reputation through CSR is an important objective in particular with regard to consumers since a good reputation influences consumer satisfaction, i.e. products are considered more reliable and of a higher quality (McWilliams and Siegel 2001). This affirmation is also supported by MORI, which underlines how a good corporate reputation leveraging on behavior of citizenship increases customer satisfaction.

A second objective with regard to consumers is *to achieve product differentiation through CSR*. As APCO’s (2004) worldwide study underlines, communicating CSR has an important influence on selling a product since CSR characteristics differentiate the product, also giving it a premium price.

A third objective is *to reach a high level of customer loyalty through CSR*. As Jacoby and Kyner (1973) and Keller (1993) underline, socially-responsible organizations increase customer loyalty since such organizations relate to clients with greater respect, monitor client satisfaction giving

fast responses to their claims, and have high standards of security as well as transparent communication about their products.

Unlike the cases of other stakeholders, **CSR communication with regard to employees** may leverage on internal communication (Dawkins & Lewis 2003). CSR communication objectives are therefore very linked to overall internal communication objectives. The first objective concerning employee CSR communication is *to create publicity and a good reputation through word of mouth using CSR*. As a recent MORI study underlines (Dawkins & Lewis 2003), employees represent a powerful channel through which it is possible to communicate in positive terms about the company. As the study shows, 85% of employees are more likely to initiate spontaneous word of mouth promotion when they are involved in the CSR initiatives of the company, and 65% of them are more likely to do so when they are informed about such corporate initiatives.

The second objective of CSR communication with regard to employees is *to increase employees' satisfaction and commitment through CSR*. Previous studies show that there is a relationship between employees' loyalty and their company's CSR (Bevan & Wilmott 2002). Indeed, employees working in an ethical and socially responsible company are more committed to it (Joyner & Payne 2002), since work activities become more enjoyable (Mowday et al. 1979). This objective is very linked to the previous one since higher satisfaction and commitment due to CSR engender publicity through word of mouth.

The third objective discussed in the literature with regard to employees is *to increase the appeal of the company as a future employer through CSR*. Employees consider that a corporation's ethical integrity and socially responsible behavior towards society is an important element in the choice of employer (Joyner & Payne 2002; Bevan et al. 2004; Keeler 2003). Therefore, to communicate the company's CSR activities is important within the company's employer-branding strategy.

The fourth CSR communication objective is *to reduce employee turnover through CSR*. When employees consider their organization as socially responsible they are less likely to leave (Bevan & Wilmott 2002) since they perceive they have similar values to those of the organization they work for (Maignan 1999).

CSR communication objectives involving shareholders are linked to overall financial communication objectives, i.e. achieving and maintaining a favorable climate for the financial quotation of the company, increasing and maintaining share price, and increasing the volume of share trading. A literature review highlights the following two main objectives of CSR communication that support such financial communication objectives.

The first CSR objective is *to increase the awareness of socially responsible investing (SRI) in the company*. SRI takes place when shareholders are willing to consider corporate behavior in terms of its response to multiple stakeholders (Hockerts & Moir 2004). This kind of investment is called positive screening. One CSR communication objective is therefore to increase sensitive shareholders' awareness of the company's socially responsible behavior to attract investment. This type of communication is important since losing such investments would mean being cut off from a large part of the financial market. Indeed, as current data show, in 2004 this kind of investment increased to 300 million Euros, thus confirming the tendency of these last five years of a 14-billion-euro increase in socially responsible investment.

The second communication objective with regard to shareholders is *to communicate the tangible advantages of the company's CSR strategy*. Despite a lack of strictly scientific confirmation, empirical evidence suggests that socially responsible organizations produce more profit than others. One reason for this is given by Mainelli (2004), who considers the importance of CSR in reducing earning volatility as a result of the reduction in activist action. As a consequence, we believe that communicating CSR becomes crucial.

1.3. CSR communication and the cultural context in Switzerland

Organizations from different countries have diverse perspectives on how important it is to be perceived as socially responsible by the public (Maignan, Ralston, 2002). The approach mostly depends on the cultural context in which an organization operates. According to Tixier (2003) there are two alternative strategies in communicating CSR: total discretion or "high-risk" communication, the first being typical in Latin countries, the second in Anglo-Saxon countries. Interpreting Tixier's discussion on this dichotomy, we can identify three elements that help to determine if an organization operates in a Latin or Anglo-Saxon context:

- **Integration of CSR into the corporate strategy:** when a company separates CSR activities from business and considers them to be discreet and disinterested generosity, it is in a Latin cultural context, whereas when a company integrates CSR activities within its strategy, considering it a win-win approach, it is in an Anglo-Saxon cultural context.
- **Media context and companies' reaction to it:** when the media are suspicious of companies that communicate CSR and companies therefore fear their criticism, the cultural context is Latin, whereas when the media tend to support businesses that communicate CSR and consequently companies do not fear their criticism, the cultural context is Anglo-Saxon.
- **Management tendency to take risks:** when the management thinks that it is too risky to build corporate image on CSR activities because of the boomerang effect emerging as soon as a problem arises, it is within a Latin cultural context, whereas when the management

thinks that CSR can have a positive effect on corporate image since full disclosure is an important part of CSR strategy also when facing problems, it is within an Anglo-Saxon cultural context.

An example of the opposition of the two cultures is reported by Tixier. The silent approach is typical in France, where 61% of organizations with a turnover of over 20 billion French francs decide not to communicate CSR (UDA, 2001 cited in Tixier). The cultural context in France constitutes an obstacle to communication on CSR. On one hand, managers do not want to take risks, as CSR is not considered a value for the corporate strategy as a whole, on the other hand, the media and public opinion are culturally reluctant to recognize the positive aspects of social actions taken by companies. In the Anglo-Saxon context, the “high-risk” approach is much more diffuse. Here “...social corporate responsibility generates value, just as the other policies of Anglo-Saxon companies do” (Tixier, 2003), and socially responsible activities carried out by companies are seen by the media as a benefit for both organizations and society. Furthermore, even if the media watch over organizations’ behavior, there is a higher tendency to take risks on the part of the management. Other authors, without analysing the opposition between Latin and Anglo-Saxon countries, investigate CSR in countries that are categorized as Anglo-Saxon by Tixier, confirming the typical elements which define the context. For example, Lewis (2003) says that it is worth taking the risk because, even if it is true that there is a lack of esteem for companies’ actions among stakeholders, it is also true that organizations acting responsibly have a better chance of winning the trust of the public, which is becoming more and more demanding about information on CSR. Data collected by MORI in 2003 support this statement; in fact 74% of the British public declare that having more information on companies’ social, environmental and ethical behavior can influence their purchasing decisions (Dawkins, 2004).

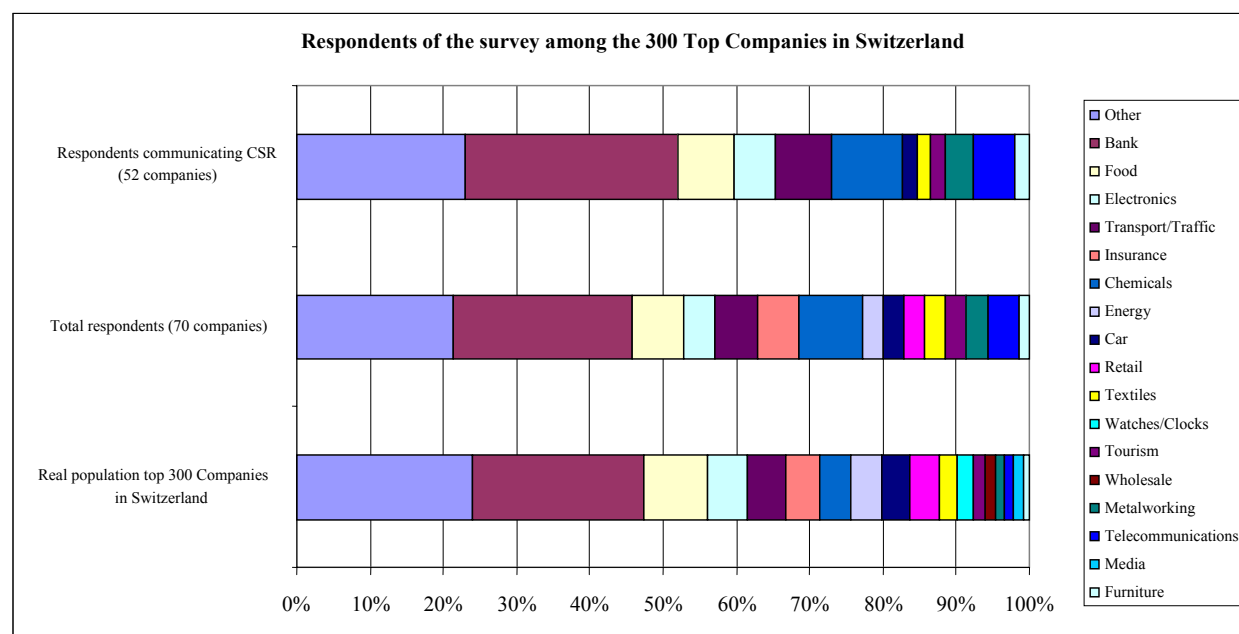
2. Analysis of CSR communication practice among the top 300 companies in Switzerland

In the previous paragraph we presented the three levels for investigating CSR communication practice among the top 300 companies in Switzerland. The Swiss context can be investigated among all respondent companies, since companies can give an opinion on the Swiss context independently from their communication activities. All other dimensions can instead only be explored among companies that do CSR communication. As a consequence, results about the Swiss context will be reported on the basis of the total sample of respondents, whereas all other dimensions will be reported only on the basis of the sample of respondents that communicate CSR. The survey was conducted in April 2005 among the top 300 companies in Switzerland quoted in PME Magazine (2004). The answer rate of the survey is 24%, i.e. 70 companies. Of these 70 companies, 52 (74%) communicate CSR whereas 18 (26%) do not. In particular 62% of

the respondents communicating CSR are multinationals, i.e. produce or sell their products on more than one continent. It is important to notice that the reasons given for not communicating CSR indicated by 26% of the total sample are: 1) No resources to spend on CSR communication or a small size that limits public interest; 2) There is communication on CSR, but it is not organized and managed organically; 3) CSR communication is planned for the future; 4) the company is part of a multinational group that communicates CSR at central level (2 answers); 5) CSR is not a strategic/profitable objective so not communicating CSR is a deliberate choice. (2 answers). This shows that CSR communication in big Swiss companies is a diffuse practice with a positive trend and a favourable context.

Sample

Among all the respondents, only three industries in the total 300 top companies are not represented: media, retail and the watch industry. These industries represent only a small number of companies of the top 300 in Switzerland, i.e. 5 watch, 3 retail and 3 media companies. In addition, among our survey respondents that do CSR communication, there are no companies from the following industries: insurance, energy and retail. All other industries are represented among the respondents. Companies that do CSR communication have significantly higher revenues than those that do not communicate CSR (Asymp. Sig. 2-sided .030). It is important to notice that answers are representative but also subject to the procedure of ex post sampling.



Among respondents communicating CSR, multinationals communicate CSR more than companies operating only in Europe. The percentage increases particularly for those companies that sell on multinational markets, while companies that only produce at multinational level communicate CSR in the same percentage as companies producing and selling only in Europe.

This induces us to think that the factor which most influences communication on CSR is the greater need for visibility of those companies that not only produce, but also sell at multinational level, with a consequent higher need for communication. This leads to the formulation of a hypothesis that should be confirmed by further studies: globally, communication on CSR is more closely linked to communication objectives than to CSR strategy itself.

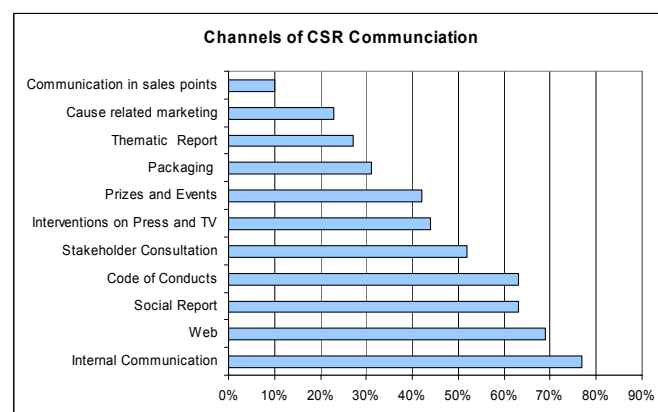
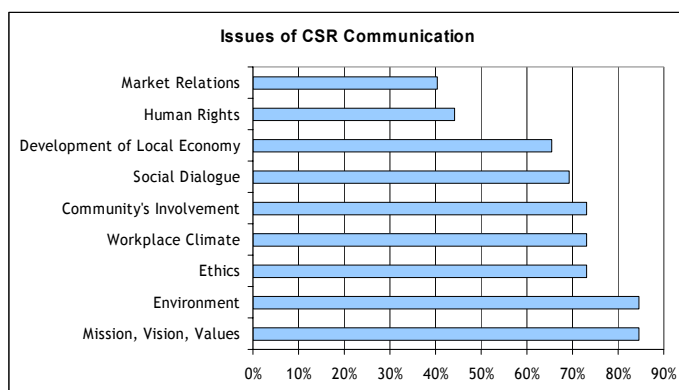
The majority of questionnaires were filled in by the head of communication (40% of total respondents and 44% of respondents that communicate CSR), and many were filled in by a person with a specific CSR role (14% of both the total and of the respondents communicating CSR). Other questionnaires were filled in by the following professional figures: head of IR, head of HR, head of PR, CEO. One third of the companies participating in the survey have fewer than 3,000 employees, the other third have from 3,000 to 10,000 employees. The rest of the respondents either did not specify the number of employees, or vary between more than 10,00 and 130,000 employees. Most of the companies that participated in the survey have a turnover of more than 5,000 million CHF (29% of total respondents and 37% of respondents communicating CSR); the participating companies from the second largest group have a turnover from 1,000 to 2,499 million CHF (26% of total respondents and 27% of respondents communicating CSR). The rest of the sample is composed of companies with a turnover of less than 1,000 million CHF or between 3,000 and 4,999 million CHF or of companies that did not reveal their annual turnover.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained 25 questions. 1 question is a preliminary question to identify which companies do CSR communication, 7 questions are about communicating CSR issues and channels, 8 questions are about strategic stakeholder CSR communication, 2 questions are about the Swiss context, and the remaining 7 questions are about company information. Only the questions on the Swiss context measure the Latin or Anglo-Saxon orientation of the Swiss context on the basis of a semantic scale from -3 to 3. All the other questions are either dummy or qualify the level of CSR communication.

2.1 CSR communication, issues and channels among respondents

The results of the research show that a wide variety of issues and channels are taken into account by Swiss companies.



All the issues considered are communicated by Swiss companies, with a range that varies from 40% (“market relations”) to 90% (“mission, vision and values”, “environment”). The average number of issues communicated is 6 out of 9; 30% of the companies communicate all the issues and all but one company communicate at least four issues. These results mean that Swiss CSR communication is active on many fronts and that a process of experimentation and innovation is probably taking place. The most communicated issues are classical subjects like “mission, vision, values” and “environment”, immediately followed by “ethics”, “workplace climate” and “community involvement”. We also notice that multinationals communicate more on some particular issues compared to the total respondents. Much more importance is given to “human rights”, “development of local economy”, “ethics” and “community involvement”.

For what concerns channels, it seems again that Swiss companies are experimenting, as the whole spectrum of channels is used. Internal communication is the most used channel (77%), and this highlights the importance attributed to CSR communication for internal stakeholders. It would, however, be risky to say that Swiss companies communicate CSR more internally than externally, because internal communication is actually composed of a set of different channels (intranet, newsletters, house organs, meetings...) which were not investigated separately. It is particularly interesting to notice that stakeholder consultation is used by 52% of the companies; this shows that a large percentage of the respondents are really involved in doing proactive CSR communication that is not only a façade.

Mission, Vision, Values	
Internal Communication	84%
Web	66%
Social report	74%
Environment	
Social report	70%
Web	70%
Workplace Climate	
Internal Communication	87%
Social report	61%
Ethics	

Internal Communication	
Mission, Vision, Values	93%
Workplace Climate	83%
Social Dialogue	65%
Web	
Mission, Vision, Values	92%
Environment	86%
Social Report	
Environment	94%
Mission, Vision, Values	88%
Community involvement	82%

Codes of Conduct	76%	Codes of Conduct	
Internal communication	63%	Ethics	88%
Social Report	61%	Mission, Vision, Values	79%
Community involvement		Stakeholder consultation	
Social Report	71%	Environment	78%
Web	61%	Community involvement	74%
Internal Communication	58%	Development of local economy	70%
		Communication Packaging	
		Environment	75%
		Interventions in Press and on TV	
		Development of local economy	74%
		Community involvement	65%

“Mission, vision, values” and “environment”, the most common issues, are communicated by means of the web and social reports, which are themselves the most used external channels. “Mission, vision and values” is also one of the favourite issues of internal communication together with “workplace climate” and “social dialogue”. Codes of conduct usually convey “ethics” and again “mission, vision and values” that are directly related to the corporate culture, while consultation deals more with “environment”, “community involvement” and “local economy”, which are considered relevant to the closest corporate stakeholders. Finally, all major issues are included in the social report that is the main and most complete communication channel for CSR. 79% of respondents communicating CSR report on it, either in a social report or in the annual report (6 companies). This is an interesting percentage considering that in 2003 the European percentage was 68% (CSR Europe, 2003). Nevertheless only 54% of respondents communicating CSR use an international reporting standard. The GRI standard, the most diffuse worldwide (The Center for corporate citizenship at Boston College), is also the most used in Switzerland (24%) followed by ISO 1400 (23%), which is more concerned with the environment, one of the most communicated issues in Switzerland, but which was also the most considered long before the diffusion of CSR practices.

Only half of the social reports are drafted following an international reporting standard (54%), 72% of standardized reports are also approved and certified by third parties. This leads us to note that companies concerned with the credibility of their social reports in most cases use both instruments at their disposal, considering them complementary and not alternatives. The motivation for not producing a social report is not apparently the cost, since only 23% of the 46% of companies not producing a social report consider cost a reason. Despite these results, we found a correlation between the publication of social reports and turnover. Indeed companies that do not write a social report are those with lower revenues (Asymp. Sig. 2-sided .001).

Companies have understood the potential of the web as a channel for agenda setting. In fact their websites contain editorials (50%), comments (58%) and third party opinions (15%) and also take

positions 65%). 75% of company web sites contain at least one of these elements and 56% contain three of them. So, we can assume that the majority of Swiss companies communicating CSR try to use their websites as a means of influencing agenda setting and not only for presentation purposes.

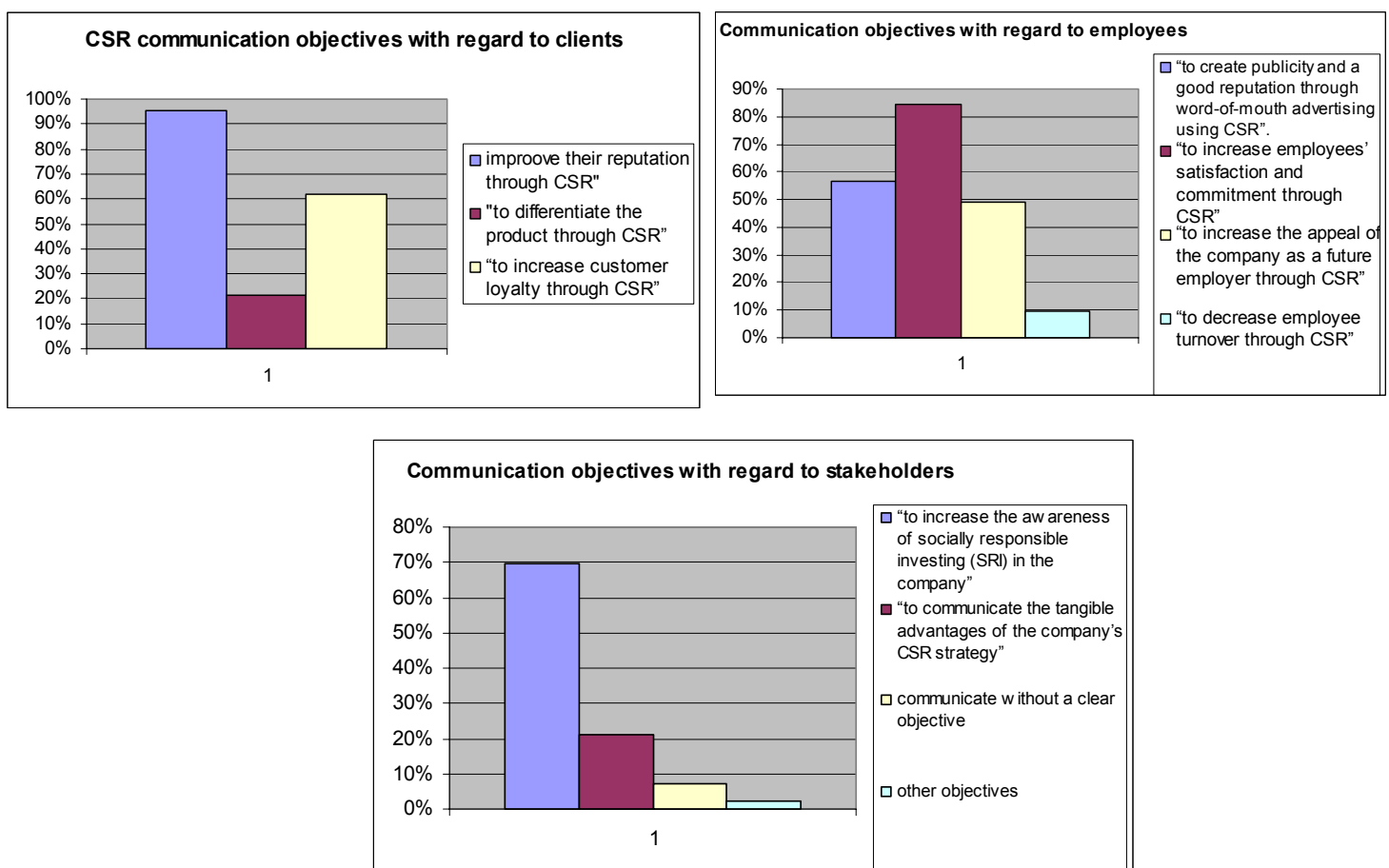
Considering the results obtained so far, the least developed practice for communicating CSR is advertising: 44% of the companies that communicate CSR have experimented advertising campaigns with a social dimension, but only 36% of them declare they found no difficulty. For the remaining 64%, the main difficulties were a longer and more complex creative process (35%), evaluation of results (30%) and criticism of the public (21%). Only 4% of respondents doing CSR advertising campaigns declare that the campaigns were blamed for not achieving short-term results. Our research asked respondents who do not use CSR advertising to motivate their choice with the same criteria as before. 39% consider their choice as the consequence of other reasons, 27% believe that there are difficulties in evaluating the results of the campaign, 14% find the creative process longer and more complex, 10% assert that campaigns are subject to public criticism and the rest of respondents not using CSR advertising indicate other reasons. Taking all these results together into consideration, it is possible to note that the principal difficulties in doing or not doing CSR advertising are similar.

2.2 Communication objectives with regard to stakeholders among respondents

Results show that among total respondents communicating CSR, 81% address their CSR communication towards clients, 98% towards their employees, and 83% towards shareholders. In the following paragraphs we present the objectives of their CSR communication with regard to these stakeholders.

Among the respondents that communicate CSR to clients, 95% say that their first communication objective is “to improve their reputation through CSR”, whereas 62% consider their first objective is “to increase customer loyalty through CSR”. Only 21% have as a primary objective “to differentiate the product through CSR”. Such a low number of respondents looking for a premium price, like, for example, Body shop or Max Havelaar, might be due to the fact that in Switzerland there is the tendency to avoid the exclusion of mainstream customers, i.e. to avoid a niche positioning. Among respondents who communicate to employees, 84% consider that their first communication objective is “to increase employees’ satisfaction and commitment through CSR”, while 57% consider that it is “to create publicity and a good reputation through word-of-mouth advertising using CSR”. 49% consider that it is “to increase the appeal of the company as a future employer through CSR” and only 10% consider that it is “to decrease

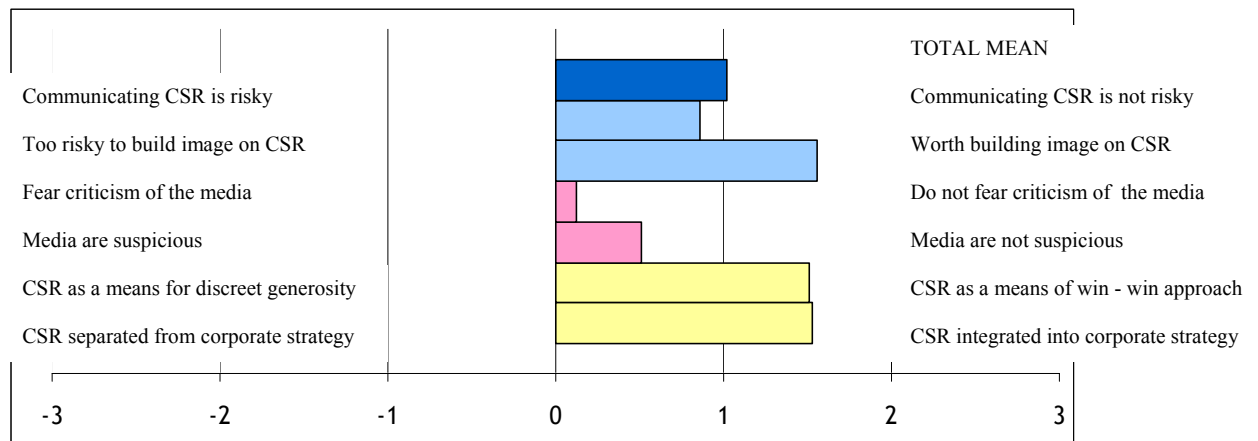
employee turnover through CSR”. Among respondents that communicate to shareholders¹, 70% aim “to increase the awareness of socially responsible investing (SRI) in the company”, only 21% aim “to communicate the tangible advantages of the company’s CSR strategy”, 7% communicate without a clear objective, and the remaining 2% have other objectives. The low percentage of companies that communicate about tangible advantages could be due to the difficulty in measuring the outcomes of CSR projects and therefore reporting on them. Apart from these results, our research shows that SRI is growing in importance in Switzerland. Indeed 44% of the respondents that communicate CSR and that are listed on the stock exchange consider that they sometimes receive a request for information from the financial community about their CSR and 19% of them receive one very often. Moreover, the importance of SRI is revealed by the fact that 70% of respondents listed and not listed on the stock exchange think that the dialogue between their company and shareholders on CSR issues has somewhat improved and 25% of them consider that it has definitely improved.



¹ It is important to underline that, unlike for other questions on employees and clients, respondents qualified shareholder objectives on the basis of exclusive choices, and not multiple choices. The reason is that for shareholders there are only two objectives for which multiple choice was not considered suitable.

2.3 CSR communication and the cultural context in Switzerland according to respondents

Switzerland seems Anglo-Saxon oriented, in fact all the answers, to different degrees, go in the same direction. Only the answers concerning media attitudes are very close to 0, so really in between the two cultures. Specifically, the distribution for “fear of media criticism” is :-3 (4%); -2 (17 %); -1 (16%); 0 (40%);1 (4%); 2 (10%); 3 (9%). Furthermore, the distribution for “the media are suspicious” is as follows: -3 (0%); -2 (4 %); -1 (16%); 0 (31%); 1 (29%); 2 (13%); 3 (7%).



It can be concluded that Switzerland is an open and favourable context for CSR communication. This result is further confirmed by the percentage of companies declaring they communicate CSR and by the future intention to communicate CSR declared by companies that at the moment do not do it. Our results show that companies communicating CSR see the Swiss context as significantly more Anglo -Saxon than those that do not communicate CSR. This is true for all dimensions (Asymp. Sig. 2-sided .022; .006; .049;.017;.001), except for suspiciousness of the media for which there is no significant difference (Asymp. Sig. 2-sided .551). It is also worth noting that for the other dimension relating to the media the significant difference is only .049.

3. Discussion of the results and conclusions

The results of our survey allow us to draw two main conclusions on how widespread CSR communication is among the top 300 companies in Switzerland, on how they communicate and on the way they see the Swiss context with regard to CSR communication. First, there are specific characteristics that show how CSR communication is a practice in evolution still needing expertise. Second, Switzerland emerges as a favorable context for CSR communication, which is good for the evolution of a practice that still needs expertise.

3.1. Swiss CSR communication as a practice in evolution, still needing expertise

There are many reasons leading us to say that CSR communication among Swiss companies exists, but that its practice can be improved. In particular we notice that companies are starting to become aware of some CSR communication potential, but often waste their efforts because of a lack of expertise.

Starting with issues, we note that CSR communication might be improved since there is a wide range of issues for each company. This denotes that the company is not clearly positioned. Companies should therefore learn how to select issues in order to avoid wasteful communication efforts and to achieve greater effectiveness. Nevertheless, the issues on which there is a lot of communication, i.e. “ethics”, “workplace climate” and “community involvement”, have a strong social dimension and are considered by many authors as “hot” issues, which very often are involved in scandals (Schwartz & Gibb, 1999; Klein, 1998; Elkington, 1998). Therefore, even if there is not a very strict selection of issues, communication principally addresses the more relevant ones. This consideration is confirmed even further when looking specifically at Swiss multinationals. Indeed, they communicate more on “human rights” and “development of local economy”, issues which are recognized by many authors as catalysts for criticism of multinationals (Schwartz & Gibb, 1999; Klein, 1998; Elkington, 1998). Swiss multinationals also pay much more attention to responsibility in “market relations” and this is probably caused by the fact that they have structures organized at the global level, so relations become crucial.

The same considerations we made about issues might also apply to channels; indeed a wide range of channels is used, which denotes low expertise. Again, companies should learn how to select channels to avoid useless communication efforts resulting from poor planning of the use of channels. Despite this, the potential of some channels is exploited effectively. For example the Web is used in a conscious way, since Swiss companies’ web sites usually include those elements that Esrock & Leichty (1998) consider crucial for influencing agenda through the web - i.e. editorials, comments, positions taken, and third party opinions. Moreover, they use it much more than companies did in 1998 when the Web was seen principally as a referential medium (Esrock & Leichty 1998). With regard to advertising, our results show that there is a certain consciousness in using it. Indeed, our study underlines that Swiss companies have recognized the difficulties listed by Drumwright (1996) in her study on the relationship between CSR advertising and economic results - i.e. the length and difficulty of measuring the campaign, the criticism of the general public for the social dimension itself. On this basis, companies choose whether to face such difficulties or to exclude CSR campaigns from their communication strategies. The results of our analysis of social reporting allow us to say that the potential of CSR communication might be improved since, even though most companies communicating CSR do

social reports, only half of them use international reporting standards. Despite that, almost all companies using international reporting standards also use third party certification. We can thus deduce that anyone who is concerned about the credibility of social reporting has understood that these two elements are not alternatives but complementary. Therefore, as for issues and channels, awareness of the effective use of social reports for CSR communication is only partial.

Finally, considering which issues are conveyed through different channels, we can assume that synergies are exploited. Indeed, external issues are communicated through external channels, whereas internal issues are conveyed through internal channels. The combination of issues with channels denotes a certain effectiveness of Swiss companies' CSR communication.

With regard to CSR communication strategies concerning clients, the high number of companies communicating to clients led us to indirectly conclude that Swiss companies are conscious of clients' considerable demand for information on CSR that previous studies in Switzerland have identified. Indeed, a study conducted by CSR Europe (2000) on consumers' attitudes towards CSR demonstrates that in Switzerland consumers are sensitive to companies' CSR: 31% of Swiss consumers consider that the socially responsible behavior of companies influences their decision to buy a product, and 51 % of them have the habits of a typical CSR activist. Since Switzerland is a Self Transcendent country (Schwartz 2003), it is characterized by consumer behavior that follows the community ideology of the country (Maignan 2001). Despite the high number of companies addressing their communication towards clients, we are not able to assume that their communication is effective. Indeed, whether Swiss companies satisfy the previously mentioned demand for information can be only indirectly deduced by the present research in light of previous results about channels and issues. Among the four types of channels most used by companies - internal communication, social reports, codes of conduct and the Web - only the Web can be consulted by clients easily. Channels more suited to communication with clients, i.e. product packaging, media and the TV, are not much used among Swiss companies. In light of these results it is possible to argue that, despite the high orientation of CSR communication towards clients and the specific communication objectives, client communication could be improved with planning that considers communication objectives together with the channels. These deductions are to a certain extent confirmed by a previous CSR Europe survey that shows a general dissatisfaction of Swiss consumers. In fact, 62% of them consider that the corporate world does not pay enough attention to CSR issues.

Swiss companies' tendency to define communication objectives concerning employees is congruent with the high use they make of internal communication. Companies address their communication towards their internal audience more and more as a means to communicate their

CSR indirectly to the external public. This tendency might be explained by the fact that opinion leaders emphasize the way companies treat their employees when judging their reputations (Burson Marsteller 2000). Thus, we can indirectly draw the conclusion that Swiss companies consciously balance internal communication according to both its internal and external effects.

The importance that Swiss companies attribute to shareholder communication denotes that they are aware of the added value they might gain in leveraging on SRI investments. Indeed, apart from revealing the possibility of SRI to financial markets, Swiss companies are aware that there is great demand for information from the financial community, and therefore they are trying to build constant dialogue with it. As a consequence, Swiss companies put the opportunity to conduct investor relations through CSR communication into practice.

3.2. Switzerland as a favorable context for CSR communication

The above-mentioned opportunities for CSR communication find a fertile context in Switzerland. Indeed, companies denote an Anglo Saxon cultural profile to their management style, which is more likely to integrate CSR into the corporate strategy and does not consider using it for image purposes too risky. These results are further elements confirming the Swiss orientation towards an Anglo-Saxon cultural context illustrated by the previous study of CSR Europe which considers Switzerland as a non-Latin country (CSR Europe, 2000) based on other dimensions. Indeed, this previous study shows that Swiss consumers are more likely to be activists, which is not the case in a Latin context. A very interesting observation we can make on our results concerns the media context. To a certain extent Swiss companies fear the media's judgment when using CSR for business purposes and consider them suspicious of corporate social communication. These results that weaken the Anglo- Saxon profile of Switzerland can be related to previous studies showing how Swiss companies are reluctant to communicate directly about their social foundations' projects (Westhues & Einwiller 2004). These results might be explained by the multicultural context in Switzerland. In fact, as Tixier (1994) underlines, where there are heterogeneous cultural contexts, profiles are not unilaterally defined. Our results are therefore not contradictory, but understandable for such a multicultural country as Switzerland that includes Latin characteristics. This hybrid nature of Switzerland is supported even more by other findings. In fact, our results show that the Swiss companies which communicate CSR have a significantly different point of view of the context in which they operate from those companies that do not communicate CSR: they consider the Swiss context more Anglo-Saxon. This does not happen for what relates to the media, where these two groups of companies do not have different opinions. Indeed, in this case they both consider the Swiss context in the middle between an Anglo-Saxon and Latin profile.

Apart from these considerations, our findings lead into how CSR communication fits into discussions on management's general tendency to take risks. Although the Swiss managerial culture is the most adverse to risk in Europe (Tixier, 1994), it is not so for what concerns CSR communication. As a consequence, our study underlines that it is necessary to carry out specific studies on the culture underlying CSR management that go beyond the previous research analyzing the general orientation of business management. Nevertheless, we must consider that our study includes many Swiss multinational companies and therefore their market context might well be at least as influential on their management culture as their national context.

We believe it is important to stress that altogether these final considerations give a first picture of CSR communication in Switzerland. Indeed, since our results confirm previous studies, some of the conclusions could be a lesson or a starting point for other companies that are trying to build up a CSR communication strategy or that are operating in a multicultural context. Although we believe that these could be useful suggestions, we are aware that further research is needed to confirm such findings given the ex post sampling procedure. Apart from that, we believe that more efforts should be made to deepen understanding of other channels and stakeholder objectives which we did not consider in our research. Moreover, it could also be interesting to investigate the monitoring and evaluation processes of CSR communication and their relationship with the overall effectiveness of communication plans.

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