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Sora Kim[a] and Mary Ann T. Ferguson[b]

[a]School of Journalism and Communication, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, Hong Kong;
[b]Department of Public Relations, College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

ABSTRACT

Through surveying a representative sample of the general public about what they expect from companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, this study empirically examines predictors to evaluate CSR communication. An initial measurement was identified through an exploratory factor analysis, and the initial measurement model was refined via a confirmatory factor analyses. The study identified six essential CSR communication dimensions: (1) informativeness, (2) third-party endorsement, (3) personal relevance, (4) message tone, (5) consistency, and (6) transparency. These six constructs revealed satisfactory reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity. The findings offer an integrated theoretical and methodological basis for evaluating effective CSR communication practice, filling an important missing link between CSR activities and their outcomes.

Despite an increasing need for companies to communicate their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in the market, CSR communication remains 'the missing link' (Dawkins 2004, 108) between a company's CSR initiative and its outcomes. Practitioners often vent their frustrations to communicate an organization's CSR activities due to strong public skepticism toward conspicuous CSR communication (e.g. Morsing and Schultz 2006), and they have expressed challenges to demonstrate the strategic contribution of CSR communication to the organization.

Previous academic research has also provided a limited ground on which to measure effective CSR communication or to develop a valid measurement of CSR communication despite an ever-growing emphasis on CSR over the past 20 years (Kim 2011; Page and Fearn 2005; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz 2006). For instance, previous research on CSR communication has predominantly emphasized the current status of CSR communication practice such as extents, formats, and prominence of CSR communication using either case study (Chaudhri and Wang 2007; Fieseler, Fleck, and Meckel 2010) or content analysis methods (Chen and Bouvain 2008; Hartman, Rubin, and Dhanda 2007; Maignan and Ralston 2002)

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or it has focused on providing normative perspectives for CSR communication such as the importance of stakeholder involvement (Maignan and Ferrell 2004) or inside-out approaches (Morsing 2006) through extensive literature reviews. As such, there has been little framework development for how to evaluate CSR communication or little agreement on the dimensions of effective CSR communication.

This study intends to fill the void in the existing knowledge of CSR communication through proposing theoretical domains of CSR communication based on consumer expectations. Since it is difficult to measure CSR communication itself, this study explores consumer expectations toward CSR communication to identify possible dimensions of effective CSR communication. In other words, as an initial step to develop a valid measurement of CSR communication, this study attempts to identify the dimensions of successful CSR communication through surveying consumers' expectations for companies' CSR communication. If we have a better understanding regarding what consumers expect for CSR communication, organizations can better plan to communicate their CSR initiatives, and meeting public expectations will result in better outcomes of CSR communication. By identifying significant predictors or antecedents of effective CSR communication, the findings of this study will provide valuable tools to both academics and practice regarding how to measure and evaluate CSR communication. In addition, the findings will add to the CSR communication literature by proposing an integrated theoretical and methodological basis for the dynamic process of effective CSR communication practice.

Literature review

CSR communication

CSR communication has been defined as 'communication that is designed and distributed by the company itself about its CSR efforts' (Morsing 2006, 171). Although communicating CSR activities is an essential part of companies' CSR process, relatively little attention has been given to the CSR communication area itself, compared to CSR activities' general consequences on financial performance or reputation (Maignan and Ferrell 2004; Wanderley et al. 2008). However, without active and successful communication about a company's CSR activities, its stakeholders may not acknowledge the company's CSR endeavors, and when stakeholders are not aware of the company's CSR initiatives, the company will not fully enjoy reputational and financial benefits from its CSR activities.

Previous research suggested that companies tend to fear actively communicating their CSR activities due to a 'CSR promotional communication dilemma' (Coombs and Holladay 2011, 110) despite their acknowledgement of its importance (Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005; Wanderley et al. 2008) and strong stakeholder demand for CSR communication (Dawkins 2004; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009). To wit, companies' fear of consumer skepticism that might result from self-promotional CSR communication may be related to insufficient and ineffective CSR communication. As such, CSR communication is a complicated and challenging process. Previous research identified several CSR communication challenges such as diverse interests among different stakeholders (Dawkins 2004), credible communication sources (Maignan and Ferrell 2001; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009), different preferences toward communication or media channels (Maignan and Ralston 2002; Matten and

Moon 2004; Morsing and Schultz 2006), and low stakeholder awareness for CSR initiatives (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004; Maignan 2001).

The fact that there are diverse CSR information requirements among different stakeholders presents communication challenges. To address this concern, much research suggests that CSR communication messages should be tailored to target different stakeholders (e.g. Dawkins 2004). In addition, stakeholders' mixed perceptions toward CSR communication channels add another layer to CSR communication challenges and complexities. That is, some stakeholders think companies should communicate their CSR openly and broadly with them, while others prefer more subtle CSR communication (Morsing and Schultz 2006). Based on these mixed perceptions of stakeholders toward CSR communication, Morsing and Schultz (2006) pointed out that CSR communication should be treated as a double-edged sword, meaning it is necessary, yet companies should avoid conspicuous attempts of CSR communication. They argued that too conspicuous CSR communication through may be 'counter-productive' (332).

To overcome the consumer skepticism issues in CSR communication, previous research suggested several directions for CSR communication. For instance, Maignan and Ferrell (2004) suggested that stakeholder identification should be incorporated in CSR communication to proactively involve with external stakeholders. When stakeholders identify themselves with the company doing CSR, they tend to reveal more favorable attitudes toward the company. In addition, by applying Grunig and Hunt's (1984) public relations models to CSR communication, Morsing and Schultz (2006) proposed three types of CSR communication approaches: stakeholder information, response, and involvement strategies. Stakeholder information strategy is equivalent to the public information model, while response and involvement strategies are equivalent to the two-way asymmetric and symmetric models of public relations. They argued that one-way communication for providing CSR information is necessary, but not good enough for CSR communication effectiveness, suggesting that two-way communication should be incorporated, employing stakeholder response and involvement strategies.

Similar to stakeholder identification strategy in CSR communication (Maignan and Ferrell 2004; Morsing 2006), previous research proposed an "inside-out approach," emphasizing the importance of employee involvement in CSR communication process (Morsing, Schultz, and Nielsen 2008). This inside-out approach basically suggested that organizations should secure employee commitment to CSR activities before communicating the company's CSR with external stakeholders and should relate to employees when communicating such CSR activities.

In addition, much research emphasized measuring stakeholder awareness of companies' CSR activities as it is directly related to positive stakeholder outcomes such as attitude and purchase intentions (Mohr, Webb, and Harris 2001; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009). And most of these previous studies found a lack of stakeholder awareness in terms of companies' CSR activities (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009). Although the lack of stakeholder awareness and understanding in terms of companies' CSR activities indicates insufficient or unsuccessful CSR communication practice (Pomering and Dolnicar 2009), relatively little research has empirically examined what stakeholders expect for CSR communication or what makes CSR communication successful. Rather, most of CSR research either focused on examining outcomes of CSR activities (Kim 2011; Page and Fearn 2005; Wigley 2008) or proposed normative approaches for CSR communication through conceptual or

qualitative methods (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010; Morsing 2006; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009; Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005).

Though normative suggestions such as the inside-out approach (Morsing, Schultz, and Nielsen 2008) or stakeholder identification and involvement strategies (Maignan and Ferrell 2004; Morsing and Schultz 2006) in CSR communication are useful to plan CSR communication, they provide a limited basis to empirically evaluate or measure effective CSR communication. Thus, by investigating consumer expectations toward what and how to communicate CSR, this study provides more specific directions for effective CSR communication practice. Examining predictors of effective CSR communication through the lens of stakeholder rather than managerial perspectives can provide meaningful guidelines to practitioners and scholars who navigate this complex and challenging environment of CSR communication. Specifically, the following research question guides this study:

> **RQ:**　What are the significant dimensions of effective CSR communication based on consumer expectations?

Conceptualization of effective CSR communication dimensions

Previous literature seems to agree that effective CSR communication refers to communication that can improve consumers' CSR knowledge or awareness, trust, engagement, and their perceptions of corporate reputation while lowering consumer skepticism (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010; Morsing 2006; Morsing and Schultz 2006; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009; Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005). Based on the previous literature, possible dimensions that might contribute to effective CSR communication are drawn. These dimensions include informativeness, third-party endorsement, personal relevance, consistency, self-efficacy, self-promotional message tone, and transparency.

Informativeness

One of the fundamental aspects of CSR communication is to inform or communicate with the public about what exactly a company is doing to be socially responsible. CSR communication should thus contain detailed information about a company's CSR activities such as what kind of social issue the company supports, why the company supports it, how long the company supports it, what kinds of impact the company's CSR commitment can make, etc. However, much previous CSR research has suggested that stakeholders have low levels of understanding regarding a company's commitments to CSR and the social issues in which the company engages (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004; Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009). Some argued that typical CSR communication tends to focus on 'a company's involvement in various social causes, rather than on the social causes themselves' (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010, 10). However, scholars recommended that companies need to actively educate stakeholders about social issues themselves such as why society needs their commitments to a specific social issue, why the companies support the social issue, and what kinds of impacts or outcomes they have on the social issue (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009).

In this context, Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010) suggested several aspects to be emphasized in companies' CSR communication: commitment, impact, motives, and fit of CSR. In order to convince stakeholders about a company's commitment, the company should communicate its substantial supports for a specific social issue such as how much in donations

the company has contributed and the continuity of its commitments (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010). With regard to CSR impact, the company should address what outcomes it has achieved from its previous and current CSR activities. In addition, since stakeholder skepticism has been identified as one of the biggest challenges in communicating CSR (Morsing and Schultz 2006; Morsing, Schultz, and Nielsen 2008), the company should address why it supports a social issue (i.e. CSR motives) or how sincerely it supports the issue. Finally, CSR fit or congruency between a business's expertise and its supported CSR issues is an important factor to affect consumer responses toward the company (Trimble and Rifon 2006). When stakeholders perceive a low fit between the company and its supported social issues either due to lack of its expertise in the issues or lack of logical congruence, they tend to attribute ulterior CSR motives to the company, resulting in negative responses toward the company (Nan and Heo 2007; Trimble and Rifon 2006).

Thus, informativeness of CSR communication can be defined as information that should be conveyed in CSR communication regarding a company's CSR efforts themselves such as its CSR commitment, continuity or steadiness of its commitment, impact, motives, and fit. Given the lack of public awareness about companies' CSR activities (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009), informativenss of CSR communication should be considered one of the essential aspects of successful CSR communication.

Third-party endorsement

The concept of third-party endorsement is strongly related to public acceptance of CSR messages. Publics tend to evaluate trustworthiness of a message source before accepting the messages for attitude changes (Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005). When publics believe the source has ulterior motives for the communication or is not credible, they are not likely to accept the messages. Thus, one way to increase source credibility in the communication process of CSR is to employ third-party endorsements (Crane 2001). By having endorsements from credible third parties such as non-profit organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in an organization's CSR communication process, credibility of the third parties can be transferred onto the organization, and in turn, result in lowering public skepticism. For instance, Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz (2006) found that publics tend to reveal more positive responses when they learned about a company's CSR activities from an independent and third-party source. In addition, Wanderley et al. (2008) identified 'CSR partnership with companies, NGOs, and/or governments' (373) as one of the important factors in CSR information disclosure online.

Personal relevance

Many scholars argued that the success of CSR communication is highly related to 'people's willingness to accept the intangible characteristics' of a company (Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005, 270) as CSR is often considered the domain of a company's ethics and intangible characteristics. Thus, to increase public acceptance of CSR communication, companies should relate stakeholders to the CSR communication messages by including personally relevant examples. Previous research has suggested that when people find personal relevance in persuasive messages, they are more likely to accept the messages and change their behaviors recommended by the messages (Garcia-Marques and Mackie 2001). Personal relevance of CSR communication refers to communication messages that are either connected to people's personal life experiences or applicable to personal interests.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy has been defined as people's belief that they can produce an outcome or perform a suggested behavior, and it is closely related to people's belief that the suggested behavior will lead to a desirable outcome (Bandura 1995). Securing self-efficacy in persuasive messages has been considered one of the strongest predictors of behavior (Bandura 1995) since it affects people's decision to perform or complete the behavior. Previous research in multiple disciplines such as education, health communication, and organizational communication has suggested that ensuring self-efficacy in persuasive messages is a means to enhance the positive impact of the messages (Bandura 1995; Kim 2013). For instance, when health campaign messages promote self-efficacy, people tend to reveal enhanced efforts to manage threatening health situations (Kim 2013).

As such, including messages that could increase or ensure self-efficacy related to a company's CSR activities, such as providing how people can participate in the CSR or how their participation could make a difference in the results of the CSR, may be important in the success of CSR communication process.

Self-promotional message tone

Tone is defined as 'a quality, feeling, or attitude expressed by the words that someone uses in speaking or writing' by Merriam-Webster dictionary (Merriam-Webster online n.d.). A CSR communication message tone is highly related to public skepticism of a company's CSR communication. Especially, a self-congratulatory or promotional message tone in CSR communication may be viewed as too conspicuous, resulting in higher public skepticism (Coombs and Holladay 2011; Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005). Thus, previous research recommended that a self-promotional or self-congratulatory tone should be avoided in communicating a company's CSR efforts (Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005). When publics consider CSR communication to be too promotional or self-congratulatory, they may perceive the company as having greater self-serving motives in supporting social causes (Coombs and Holladay 2011).

Previous research also suggested that publics tend to believe that a company is not trustworthy when they perceive the company has high self-serving motives for doing CSR and is less sincere for serving society (Kim and Lee 2012; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz 2006). The self-promotional tone of CSR communication will lead people to attribute self-serving motives to the company. Kim and Lee (2012) also recommended 'an honesty is the best policy strategy' (170) for communicating the company's CSR without any intentional omission or exaggeration of its activities. Thus, CSR messages based on the honest presentation of factual CSR information should be considered in the success of the CSR communication process.

Consistency

Consistency in CSR communication can be treated differently from sharing information about the continuity of a company's CSR commitments or frequency of communication. While expressing the continuity of the company's CSR commitment is considered an important part of CSR communication contents about the company's CSR activity itself (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010) and thus included as part of the CSR informativeness dimension above, consistency in the company's CSR communication should be regarded as a crucial part of how to communicate CSR aspects. Consistency in this paper refers to how steadily the company communicates about its CSR goals, not about sharing the continuity of the company's

specific CSR activities or the frequency of communication. If a company communicates its CSR haphazardly such as "what the company is saying keeps changing from time to time," the company's CSR communication fails due to increased public skepticism and distrust (Coombs and Holladay 2011; Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005).

Frequency

In normal situations, frequent communication on a topic can increase public awareness of the topic. However, too extensive communication related to the company's CSR could be counterproductive as publics may become more suspicious about the company's sincere commitments in CSR (Morsing and Schultz 2006; Stoll 2002). In other words, due to relatively low public awareness of a company's CSR activities, frequent CSR communication seems to be necessary, but at the same time, frequent CSR communication may also result in an increase of public skepticism. This complexity of CSR communication is often referred to as 'self-promoter's paradox' (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990, 188). Frequency of CSR communication can be defined as the number of occurrences of a company's CSR communication attempts through interpersonal and mass media channels. In addition, previous research has suggested that publics tend to be sensitive to promotion cost, especially related to a company's CSR activities. Publics are more likely to reveal negative attitudes to the company spending a great deal of money on CSR promotion (Dawkins 2004; Morsing and Schultz 2006; Stoll 2002). A rise in promotion cost is closely related to frequency of CSR communication. Since previous research has suggested the public perception of a company's promotion cost and too often CSR communication tend to affect perceived CSR motives of the company, this aspect must be considered in the process of CSR communication.

Transparency

Transparency is identified as a prerequisite for relational elements of an organization such as trust, accountability, and commitment, and it is also part of environmental conditions that can affect internal and external decision-making processes of the organization (Jahansoozi 2006, 2007). Transparency of CSR communication can be defined as openness of CSR information disclosure including both good and bad. Many scholars have argued that transparency is an important factor in organization–public relationships and CSR communication as it is fundamental to build trust between the parties and to increase credibility of the communication process (Coombs and Holladay 2011; Jahansoozi 2006, 2007). Transparent disclosure of CSR communication can increase the level of trust and accountability toward a company, resulting in reducing public skepticism of its CSR activities. By providing both successes and failures of the company's CSR process, the company can ensure transparency in CSR communication (Coombs and Holladay 2011).

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to identify and validate significant predictors of effective CSR communication based on public expectations for CSR communication. An online survey was conducted by employing a representative sample of the US population. The sampling frame for the study was constructed from the list of consumer panels managed by Researchnow,[1] a US marketing research firm specializing in consumer surveys.

Procedure and sample

Email invitations for the online survey were deployed to systematically selected panel members based on the 2010 census representatives for gender, age, Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, and race categories. A total of 663 consumer-public panel members participated in the study (about a 30% response rate). In the online survey, all participants were asked about their general expectations for companies' effective CSR communication in addition to demographic questions. Demographics of the sample represented the 2010 US census (Kim and Ferguson 2014).[2] About 49% were male (*n* = 323), and a majority of the sample were Caucasian/white (71.3%), followed by African-American (14%) and others (Asian, American Indian, etc., 14.7%). Age groups of over 45 years old consisted of 43.2% (*n* = 353) of the sample. About 66.5% were employed full time (*n* = 349) or part time (*n* = 91), and 43.5% were retired (*n* = 120) or unemployed (*n* = 102). A majority (69.3%, *n* = 453) were college graduates or had some graduate work (master's or doctoral degree). About 20% (*n* = 133) identified the Republican Party as their political affiliation, while 35.6% (*n* = 236) identified the Democratic Party (Kim and Ferguson 2014). On average, the survey took 15 minutes to complete.

Survey instrument

Survey instrument items were developed based on previous CSR communication studies (e.g. Coombs and Holladay 2011; Morsing and Schultz 2006; Morsing, Schultz, and Nielsen 2008; Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005). A total of 40 items were included to measure the consumer-public's general expectations for CSR communication related to CSR informativeness, self-promotional message tone, consistency, frequency, personal relevance, third-party endorsement, transparency, and self-efficacy (Kim and Ferguson 2014; see Table A1 in appendix for all measurement items). All items were measured by a seven-point Likert scale anchored by (1) strongly disagree and (7) strongly agree.

Data analysis

Since the purpose of this study was to explore any latent factors that cause the manifest variables to covary, not to reduce data, this study used an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with principal axis factoring extraction and oblique rotation to extract factors that can predict publics' expectations for effective CSR communication (Costello and Osborne 2005). In addition, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to validate the latent factors and to test discriminant and convergent validities of the latent factors.

Results

Exploratory factor analysis

To identify possible predictors of effective CSR communication from the consumer-public's expectations, an EFA was first performed with all items, using principal axis factoring extraction and oblique rotation. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .96, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .0001$), indicating appropriate relationships among items to conduct a meaningful EFA. Communalities for all items were above .64. Ten items were eliminated from the EFA (i.e. Info 11, 12, 13; SE 1, 2, 3, 4; Freq, 1,

2, 3; Kim and Ferguson 2014; see Table A1 in appendix for deleted measure items) based on low factor loadings (<.50), cross-loadings onto two factors exceeding half the primary loading, or an item that loads at .32 or higher on two or more factors (Costello and Osborne 2005; Hair et al. 2006; Netemeyer, Bearden, and Sharma 2003).

The results of EFA identified six factors of public expectations for effective CSR communication: (1) informativeness (Cronbach's α = .96), (2) third-party endorsement (α = .93), (3) personal relevance (α = .95), (4) self-promotional message tone (α = .92), (5) consistency (α = .93), and 6) transparency (α = .95) based on eigenvalues greater than one and a scree plot. The total cumulative variance explained by the six factors was 76.66%. Informativeness explained the largest total variance (49.24%) among the six factors, followed by self-promotional message tone (6.9%), third-party endorsement (5.83%), personal relevance (5.3%), transparency (4.88%), and consistency (4.51%). Self-efficacy and frequency were not identified as significant factors as these factors explained less than 2% of the total variance (Hair et al. 2006). In addition, self-efficacy-related items were mostly cross-loaded with other factors such as personal relevance and third-party endorsement, and frequency-related items were also cross-loaded with consistency and transparency items. Table 1 presents factor loadings, means and standard deviations, and reliability coefficients.

Table 1. Factor loadings of effective CSR communication.

Items	M	SD	Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6
Info1	5.19	1.41		.72					
Info2	5.21	1.35		.73					
Info3	4.84	1.36		.79					
Info4	5.15	1.34		.79					
Info5	5.00	1.33		.83					
Info6	4.72	1.44		.80					
Info7	4.88	1.47		.90					
Info8	5.01	1.53		.89					
Info9	5.17	1.41		.90					
Info10	5.49	1.43		.74					
Third1	4.99	1.34			.73				
Third2	5.19	1.34			.98				
Third3	5.19	1.33			.95				
Third4	5.12	1.35			.72				
Third5	4.81	1.39			.53				
Tone1	5.86	1.35				.64			
Tone2	5.15	1.36				.92			
Tone3	5.25	1.39				.96			
Tone4	5.22	1.31				.80			
Tone5	5.76	1.33				.70			
Cons1	5.21	1.31					.84		
Cons2	5.07	1.33					.93		
Cons3	5.08	1.39					.82		
Rel1	4.91	1.41						.83	
Rel2	4.81	1.39						.90	
Rel3	5.04	1.39						.78	
Trans1	4.94	1.44							.90
Trans2	4.95	1.40							.91
Trans3	5.20	1.39							.88
Trans4	5.27	1.33							.52
Eigenvalues				16.80	2.92	3.92	1.64	2.30	1.85
Variance				49.24	5.83	6.90	4.51	5.30	4.88
Cronbach's α				.96	.93	.92	.93	.95	.95

Note: Info = informativeness, Third = third-party endorsement, Tone = self-promotional message tone, Cons = consistency, Rel = personal relevance, Trans = transparency.

Confirmatory factor analysis

To examine the efficacy of the factors and measurement items found in the EFA, a CFA using AMOS 22 program was followed with all six factors included. The initial CFA measurement model test revealed a moderate model fit: $\chi^2 = 1351.19$ with 373 df ($p < .01$) $\chi^2/df = 3.62 > 3.0$, CFI = .96, GFI = .89, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06 > .05, PCLOSE < .05. Since the chi-square/degree of freedom ratio a little higher than 3.0 and the RMSEA score higher than .05 indicated a moderate fit, the initial measurement model was refined using factor loadings, item-total correlations for each construct, and modification indices. Seven items (five items from the informativeness factor: info1, 2, 3, 6, and 7; one item from third-party endorsement factor: third 5; and one item from the self-promotional message tone factor: tone 4) were eliminated based on modification indices due to high covariances with the other factors and low factor loadings (see Table 2 for refined measurement items: see Table A1 in appendix for removed items). The refined CFA measurement model with the six factors revealed a good fit: $\chi^2 = 522.99$ with 182 df ($p < .01$) $\chi^2/df = 2.87 < 3.0$, CFI = .98, GFI = .93, RMSEA = .04 < .05, PCLOSE = .04 < .05. Table 2 presents refined measurement items. Thus, the final measurement model for effective CSR communication dimensions included the following six constructs: (1) informativeness, (2) third-party endorsement, (3) personal relevance, (4) self-promotional message tone, (5) consistency, and (6) transparency (see Table 2). Figure 1 presents the results of the CFA in the final measurement model. As seen in Figure 1, factor loadings for all items to corresponding factors were above .74.

Reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity

The final measurement model was then examined for reliability, and discriminant and convergent validity for all constructs. All constructs revealed acceptable reliability, discriminant,

Table 2. Refined measurement items of CSR communication from CFA.

	Label	Measures
1	Info4	I want to know what kinds of things a company has achieved from its previous CSR activities
2	Info5	I want to know potential results of a company's current CSR activities
3	Info8	I want to know a company's motives or intentions for doing CSR activities
4	Info9	I want to know what a company wants to achieve by doing CSR activities
5	Info10	I want to know who is benefiting from a company's CSR activities
6	Tone1	CSR communication messages from a company should be based on facts
7	Tone2	I don't like CSR messages from a company that are promotional
8	Tone3	I don't like CSR messages from a company that are self-congratulatory
9	Tone5	I like a company's CSR messages to focus on facts
10	Cons1	What the company is communicating about its CSR activities should be consistent
11	Cons2	Consistency in CSR communication of the company is important to me
12	Cons3	A lack of consistency in the company's CSR communication is problematic
13	Rel1	I want to know if a company's CSR activities are relevant to me
14	Rel2	I want to know how a company's CSR initiatives are personally relevant (to me).
15	Rel3	I want to know how a company's CSR activities affect my personal life.
16	Trans1	I want to know information about the company's CSR failures, not just successes.
17	Trans2	I want to be informed if the company's CSR initiative fails
18	Trans3	I want to know both good and bad information about the company's CSR activities
19	Thrid1	I want to know if any other organizations or public figures endorse the company's CSR initiatives
20	Third2	I want to know if non-profit organizations are partners of the company's CSR activities
21	Third3	I want to know if non-governmental organizations are partners of the company's CSR activities
22	Third4	I want to know if the company has received CSR-related certifications such as 'Fair Trade' certification or 'Forestry Stewardship Council' certificate if there's any.

Note: Info = informativeness, Third = third-party endorsement, Tone = self-promotional message tone, Cons = consistency, Rel = personal relevance, Trans = transparency.
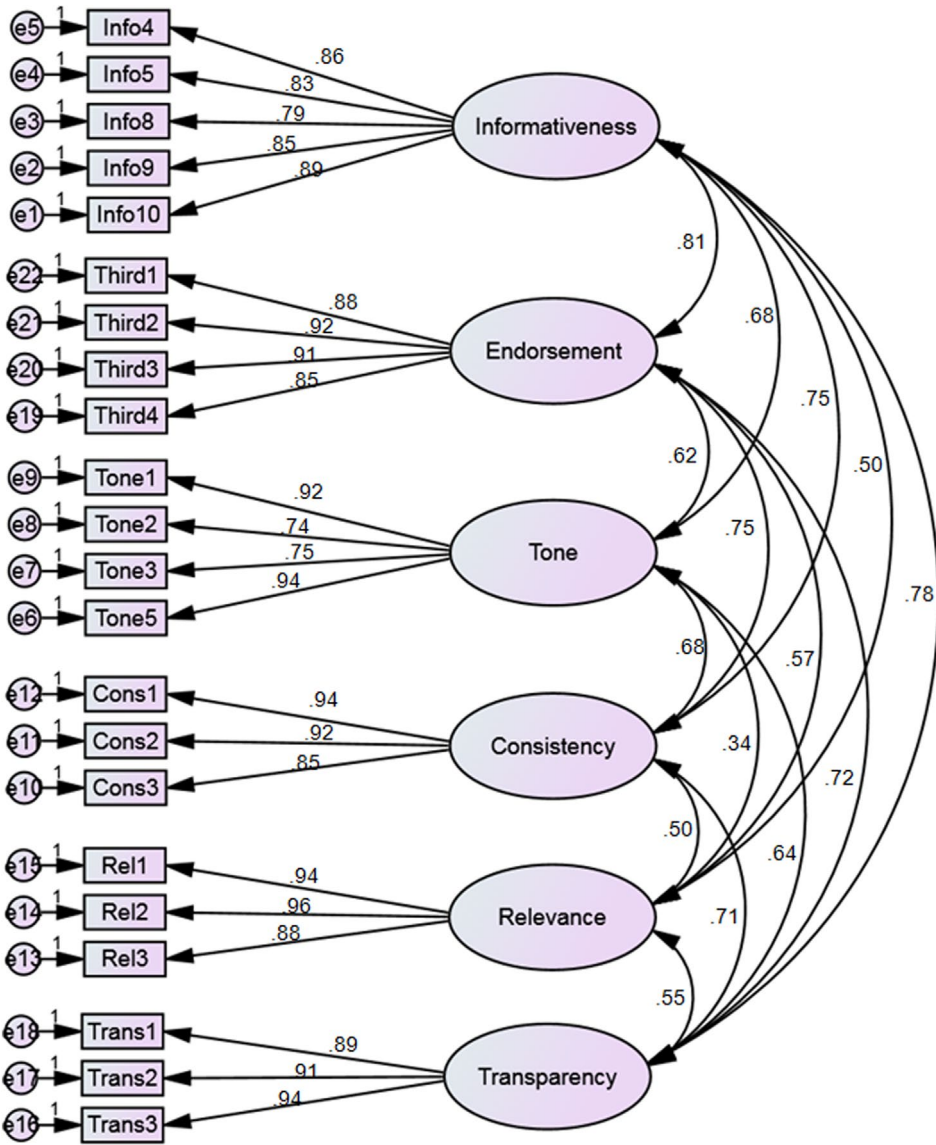
Figure 1. The results of CFA for the final measurement model.

and convergent validity with no concerns. Composite reliabilities for all constructs were higher than .70. Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing average variance extracted (AVEs) with the square of the correlation (ϕ^2) between the construct and each of the other constructs. AVEs for each construct were greater than the square of the correlation (ϕ^2) for all latent constructs: AVEs > maximum shared variances (MSVs) and AVEs > average shared variances (ASVs) (see Table 3 for details). Convergent validity for each construct was examined with four criteria: (1) factor loadings for all measures were >.70 and significant ($p < .001$), (2) composite reliability for each construct was >.70, (3) AVE for each construct was >.50, and (4) composite reliability > AVE (Fornell and Larcker 1981; Hair et al. 2006). Thus, the results of the final CFA measurement model confirmed six essential constructs of CSR communication:

Table 3. Discriminant and convergent validities of all constructs.

Factors	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Informativeness (Info)	.925	.711	.648	.507
Third-party endorsement (Third)	.939	.794	.648	.489
Personal relevance (Rel)	.948	.858	.323	.248
Message tone (Tone)	.877	.647	.466	.369
Consistency (Cons)	.931	.818	.567	.468
Transparency(Trans)	.940	.840	.607	.466

Correlations matrix and the square root of AVE on the diagonal

Factors	Info	Third	Rel	Tone	Cons	Trans
Info	.843					
Third	.805	.891				
Rel	.503	.568	.926			
Tone	.683	.623	.342	.804		
Cons	.749	.753	.496	.683	.904	
Trans	.779	.719	.551	.636	.705	.916

Note: CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted, MSV = maximum shared variance, ASV = average shared variance.

(1) informativeness, (2) third-party endorsement, (3) personal relevance, (4) self-promotional message tone, (5) consistency, and (6) transparency with acceptable reliabilities and convergent and discriminant validities. Among the six CSR communication factors, the mean score of the self-promotional CSR message tone factor ranked the highest ($M = 5.50$, SD = 1.19), indicating people expect CSR communication to be less self-promotional, followed by informativeness ($M = 5.16$, SD = 1.25), consistency ($M = 5.12$, SD = 1.25), third-party endorsement ($M = 5.12$, SD = 1.23), transparency of CSR communication ($M = 5.02$, SD = 1.30), and personal relevance ($M = 4.91$, SD = 1.33) factors.

Discussion

As an exploratory effort to develop a valid measurement of effective CSR communication, this study examines public expectations of effective CSR communication. The findings of this study identify six dimensions of effective CSR communication and confirm satisfactory reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity of the constructs. Though more work is needed to validate the measurement of effective CSR communication dimensions and identify other possible dimensions, the findings of this study provide a valuable theoretical and methodological basis that helps demonstrate CSR communication's contribution in the process of a company's CSR.

Dimensions of effective CSR communication

Previous literature on CSR communication has largely failed to empirically test factors or dimensions of CSR communication. Through the development of a measurement model for effective CSR communication, this study attempts to address the shortcoming of the previous research on CSR communication (e.g. Dawkins 2004; Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010; Morsing 2006; Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005). Based on examining theoretical domains of effective CSR communication through consumer expectations, this study identifies six essential predictors of effective CSR communication: informativeness, third-party endorsement, personal relevance, self-promotional message tone, consistency, and transparency.

Consumer-publics in our study expected companies to convey the six dimensions in the companies' CSR communication process. A direct implication from the findings is that practitioners should analyze whether their CSR communication practice contains the essential six indicators to meet public expectations for CSR communication and to ensure the effectiveness of CSR communication. For the effectiveness of CSR communication, practitioners should make sure to include informativeness, third-party endorsement, and personal relevance aspects in terms of what to communicate for CSR and should consider transparency, consistency, and self-promotional message tone factors for how to communicate CSR aspects.

Consumers in our study highly expected companies to avoid a self-promotional message tone given the highest mean level it revealed among the six dimensions. Consumers expected CSR communication to be based on facts with a low-key tone, and they disliked promotional and self-congratulatory message tones. Publics' expectations toward a low-key/ less promotional CSR message tone can be highly related to their attributions of a company's CSR motives, perceptions of message credibility, and skepticism toward the company's CSR (Pomering and Dolnicar 2009; Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005). In other words, publics may evaluate the company's sincerity of its CSR intentions through discerning its low-key message tone with factual information and as a result, be less skeptical. Given that consumer skepticism has been identified as one of the biggest challenges in CSR communication (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010; Morsing and Schultz 2006; Morsing, Schultz, and Nielsen 2008), it is not surprising that consumers highly expected a less self-promotional message tone from CSR communication. In addition, part of the 'self-promoter's paradox' (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990, 188) issue in CSR communication can be addressed through a careful message tone adjustment.

Moreover, the other factors (i.e. informativeness, third-party endorsement, consistency, and transparency) for effective CSR communication are also addressing issues related to CSR skepticism. It seems that managing consumers' CSR skepticism is a key for successful CSR communication (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010) as the identified factors can be considered prerequisites to reduce CSR skepticism. Given that CSR skepticism stems from disbelief on the accuracy of CSR messages, believability and trustfulness of CSR communication should be secured, and the third-party endorsement, consistency, and transparency factors are a way to provide such believability and trustfulness of the messages. Consumers tend to have a psychological paradox between the natures of a profit company and its CSR: the paradox lies in that a profit company whose main goal is to maximize its profit is doing CSR or philanthropy for creating a better society (Webb and Mohr 1998). This paradox can be resolved or at least reduced by effective CSR communication. Delivering the factors that could secure the believability and trustfulness of CSR communication can be one way to reduce the paradox which consumers perceive about companies' CSR activities.

Previous research has suggested that frequency of CSR communication is an important aspect of CSR communication since they tend to increase suspicion and skepticism of publics and negative public attributions of a company's CSR motives (Dawkins 2004; Morsing and Schultz 2006; Rifon et al. 2004; Stoll 2002). However, measurement items related to frequency were not identified as significant predictors for effective CSR communication in this study. By all means, this does not necessarily mean that frequency of CSR communication is unimportant in CSR communication. Nevertheless, the high covariances of the factor with other constructs found in this study certainly indicate that frequency factor is correlated with other factors such as consistency, message tone, and transparency.

Self-efficacy was also eliminated through the EFA process in this study. Although self-efficacy is crucial for improving message acceptance and changing people's attitudes and behaviors in persuasive communications (Bandura 1995), it was not identified by our consumers as a unique predictor of effective CSR communication. Given that self-efficacy items revealed high covariances with other factors, especially with personal relevance and third-party endorsement, self-efficacy may be a second-order construct for effective CSR communication. This should be investigated further in future research.

In addition, given the highest variance level, the CSR informativeness factor revealed in our analyses, consumers in our study considered CSR informativeness as the most important attribute among what they expected for CSR communication. This may be explained by the lack of public awareness in terms of companies' CSR activities (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009) and strong public demand for CSR information (Dawkins 2004; Pomering and Dolnicar 2009). Our findings might indicate that although consumer publics can be suspicious when a company spends too much money on promoting its CSR, they may think the current CSR communication practice of companies is not sufficient to meet their demand for CSR information. This is consistent with the findings of a previous study that suggested CSR skepticism often results from the lack of consumer awareness in terms of companies' tangible CSR outcomes more than from consumers' doubt of company motives for doing CSR (Singh, Kristensen, and Vilasenor 2009).

Overall, the findings of this study support and are in line with classic persuasion theories in many ways. For instance, the six identified dimensions of effective CSR communication are combinations of what and how to communicate aspects of CSR. What to communicate factors for CSR communication identified in this study such as sharing basic CSR information about CSR beneficiary and the results of previous CSR activities or third-party endorsement (Crane 2001; Schlegelmilch and Pollach 2005) are related to rational facts to increase the credibility of persuasive CSR messages. As such, logics and rationality are one of the basic components of persuasion, representing the rational paradigm (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). By including specific factual information about third-party endorsement or CSR beneficiary, more effective persuasion can occur in the communication process of CSR.

However, inundating consumers with factual information about companies' CSR commitment alone cannot be sufficient for effective CSR communication. The most persuasive communication should also include a narrative or storytelling that convinces consumers of good reasons for attitude or belief changes (Fisher 1984). Fisher (1987) emphasized the narrative paradigm and the importance of narration or storytelling in his persuasion theory. He argued that effective persuasion is based on how consistent and truthful a narrative or a story appears rather than rational facts. This aspect is highly relevant to 'how to communicate' factors in CSR communication found in our study. In order to make CSR communication more believable to consumers, narrative coherence (Fisher 1984, 1987) such as consistency, message tone, and transparency should be secured in CSR messages. Since what makes people accept messages is highly pertinent to all aspects of persuasion such as logics, narratives, emotions, and credibility, 'what and how to communicate' factors should be treated as equally important in CSR communication. As Fisher proposed more integrated perspectives in persuasion, which embraced both rational and narrative paradigms rather than the dualistic approach, this study also identified both aspects of persuasion indicators as part of effective CSR communication predictors.

Theoretical and practical implications

The study provides significant theoretical and practical implications for effective CSR communication. The findings of the study suggest theoretically and methodologically useful dimensions of CSR communication. Although more work is required to validate the six predictors and the measurement items, the findings of this study offer several useful applications to theoretical framework development and testing, facilitating further empirical work in this understudied area. First, CSR communication research that has remained the missing link between CSR activities and consumer responses (Dawkins 2004) will be improved by testing the role of CSR communication in the process of CSR. With the proposed measurements and constructs, the role of CSR communication can be investigated through testing the impact of the six CSR communication predictors on consumer responses such as corporate reputation, organization–public relationships, and supportive behaviors. In addition, scholars should investigate relative effectiveness among the dimensions of CSR communication on consumer responses: Which factor would generate the biggest impact on the success of CSR campaigns? By examining positive relationships between CSR communication factors and CSR outcomes, the role of CSR communication could be demonstrated, filling a missing link in the CSR literature. This will offer clearer theoretical and practical directions for the role of CSR communication in the process.

Another meaningful application area to theory development is the ability to test relationships between the effective CSR communication dimensions and other possible mediating or moderating factors such as knowledge (Smith and Park 1992), engagement (McMillan and Hwang 2002), trust in CSR commitment (Coombs and Holladay 2011), CSR skepticism (Basu and Palazzo 2008; Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2010), and company-consumer identification (Mael and Ashforth 1992). To develop a theoretical process framework of CSR communication, it is important to understand its relationships with other important individual differences: cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of consumers. The proposed CSR dimensions and measurements will facilitate further theory testing in terms of (1) how the level of individuals' CSR skepticism or company-consumer identification is related to CSR communication dimensions, and (2) explicating how consumers' CSR knowledge, trust, and engagement levels are affected by CSR communication.

For practitioners, an understanding of effective CSR communication predictors would benefit practice in terms of what should be communicated in CSR messages and how messages should be communicated with publics. Considering that people make judgments or evaluations about persuasive messages based on their preexisting attitudes toward subjects (Sherif and Hovland 1961), understanding consumers' expectations toward CSR communication will provide clues about how to better communicate companies' CSR activities with target consumers. Practitioners may not have to worry as much about promotion cost or frequency of CSR communication as long as they include CSR informativeness such as sharing specific outcomes of previous and current CSR activities, the company's CSR motives, plus CSR beneficiary, third-party endorsement, and personal relevance in the CSR messages as well as they secure transparency, consistency, and a less promotional message tone in the communication. Lastly, practitioners can adopt the proposed measurement and constructs to design, execute, and evaluate their CSR communication campaigns. The measurement will be a valuable tool to demonstrate the benefits of CSR communication to top management.

Future research and conclusion

Although this study attempts to represent the total population by matching its sample to 2010 US census data for gender, ethnicity, and age ratios, future research should replicate our findings by employing a bigger sample size and with a non-US population. Since public expectations for CSR and CSR communication can vary culturally, the proposed measurement model should be examined in other cultures for better refinements. In addition, a measurement validation process should be performed in future research, using a different set of data and test–retest reliability techniques. Future research should also investigate the relationships between the identified predictors of effective CSR communication and public responses such as attitudes, corporate reputation, and supportive behavior intentions. That is, future research should empirically test what outcomes companies will have if they successfully deliver the identified CSR communication factors found in our study. Through this process, scholars and practitioners will be able to show a clear link between CSR communication and its specific impacts on public responses. Finally, future studies should consider other dimensions not studied here to learn whether there are other communication process variables not identified in this study.

Taken as a whole, this study provides significant guidelines for what should be evaluated for an effective CSR communication practice through identifying significant predictors of effective CSR communication. This study fills an important missing link between CSR activities and their outcomes by examining the relatively understudied areas of CSR communication.

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Notes

1. The Reseachnow panel is composed of more than 6 million members, and the company uses a *by-invitation only* approach for recruiting consumers per each study. All of the consumer panels acknowledge that they will be approached for multiple studies and agree to be the company's consumer panels.
2. The sample used in this study is the same as authors' previous work (Kim and Ferguson 2014) since some part of data were presented under contract to a Page Legacy Scholar Grant from the Arthur W. Page Center at the Penn State College of Communications.

Notes on contributors

Sora Kim is an associate professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She earned her Ph.D. degree from the University of Tennessee in Communications. Her research interests include corporate social responsibility communication, corporate communication and crisis communication management. Her work has been published

at Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, Journal of Public Relations Research, Journal of Advertising, Journal of Business Ethics, Public Relations Review, and other international communication related journals.

Mary Ann Ferguson is a professor in the Department of Public Relations, College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida, Gainesville, Fl. Her PhD is from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Mass Communications. Her research interests are in corporate social responsibility, ethics, and public relationships. She has published in Journal of Public Relations Research, International Journal of Strategic Communication, Public Relations Review, Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, Journal of Direct Marketing, Public Relations Research Annual, and Health Education Quarterly.

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Appendix

Table A1. Initial measurement items for effective CSR communication (Kim and Ferguson 2014).

	Label	Measures
		I WANT TO KNOW …
1	Info1	What a company is doing for communities such as how much donated
2	Info2	A specific social cause that a company supports (e.g. environmental, public education)
3	Info3	A company's expertise to support a specific CSR initiative
4	Info4	What kinds of things a company has achieved from its previous CSR activities
5	Info5	Potential results of a company's current CSR activities
6	Info6	Why society needs a company's CSR initiative
7	Info7	Why a company is doing good for society
8	Info8	A company's motives or intentions for doing CSR activities
9	Info9	What the company wants to achieve by doing CSR activities
10	Info10	Who is benefiting from a company's CSR activities
11	Info11*	If a company has continuously been doing CSR activities
12	Info12*	How long a company has been supporting its CSR initiatives
13	Info13*	The consistency of the company's commitment to its CSR initiatives
		I WANT TO KNOW …
14	SE1*	How I can participate in a company's CSR activities
15	SE2*	How my participation will affect the results of a company's CSR activities
16	SE3*	If I can be confident in supporting the company's CSR
17	Third1	If any other organizations or public figures endorse the company's CSR initiatives
18	Third2	If non-profit organizations are partners of the company's CSR activities
19	Third3	If non-governmental organizations are partners of the company's CSR activities
20	Third4	If the company has received CSR-related certifications such as 'Fair Trade' certification or 'Forestry Stewardship Council' certificate if there's any
21	SE4*	I want to be confident doing my role in helping the company's CSR
22	Third5	It's important to me that the company has strong partnership with third parties such as activist groups (e.g. Greenpeace)
23	Tone1	CSR communication messages from a company should be based on facts
24	Tone2	I don't like CSR messages from a company that are promotional
25	Tone3	I don't like CSR messages from a company that are self-congratulatory
26	Tone4	I like low-key CSR messages from a company
27	Tone5	I like a company's CSR messages to focus on facts
28	Cons1	What the company is communicating about its CSR activities should be consistent
29	Cons2	Consistency in CSR communication of the company is important to me
30	Cons3	A lack of consistency in the company's CSR communication is problematic

(*Continued*)

Table A1. (*Contined*).

	Label	Measures
31	Freq1*	I like CSR messages (communication) from a company appearing often
32	Freq2*	I like to see CSR messages from a company as frequently as possible
33	Freq3*	I want to receive messages about how a company's doing good as often as possible
34	Rel1	I want to know if a company's CSR activities are relevant to me
35	Rel2	I want to know how a company's CSR initiatives are personally relevant (to me)
36	Rel3	I want to know how a company's CSR activities affect my personal life
37	Trans1	I want to know information about the company's CSR failures, not just successes
38	Trans2	I want to be informed if the company's CSR initiative fails
39	Trans3	I want to know both good and bad information about the company's CSR activities
40	Trans4	I want to know the progress of the company's CSR activities

*Ten items were eliminated after EFA.

Note: Info = Informativeness, SE = self-efficacy in participation, Third = third-party endorsement, Tone = self-promotional message tone, Cons = consistency, Freq = frequency, Rel = personal relevance, Trans = transparency.