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Communicating corporate social responsibility (CSR) on social media

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CSR on
social media

How do message source and types of CSR messages influence stakeholders' perceptions?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of message source and types of corporate social responsibility (CSR) message on stakeholder's perception toward CSR and behavioral intention toward the company.

Design/methodology/approach – A 2 (message source: CEO's Facebook account vs organization's Facebook account) \times 3 (types of CSR messages: internal CSR vs external CSR vs control) between-subjects online experiment ($n = 242$) was conducted online.

Findings – Internal CSR message elicited greater perceptions of trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment toward the organization among the stakeholders than the external CSR message and the CEO's personal life message. A significant two-way interaction between the message source and the type of CSR message on behavior intention toward the organization was obtained.

Originality/value – Internal CSR message does matter when it comes to social media posting. The general public do pay attention to what the CEO and the organizations are posting on their social media accounts. Message source does not matter when it comes to social media message posting. However, organizations and CEOs should try to stay consistent when it comes to creating a public CSR message.

Keywords Social media, Corporate social responsibility, Social CEO, Internal CSR, External CSR, Organization-public relationship

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In the field of public relations, organizations and CEOs often use three different platforms to communicate with their stakeholders: company intranet, company website, and social media (Weber Shandwick, 2012). Among these three platforms, social media is probably the most popular one in that about 67 percent of CEOs have a public Facebook page (Weber Shandwick, 2012) and more than 15 million organizations have a public Facebook page (Tune, 2013). Research has shown that both organizations and CEOs often post contents related to program or services, achievements, and awards on their Facebook pages (Haigh *et al.*, 2013; Weber Shandwick, 2012). For for-profit organizations, they prefer to use the corporate ability communication strategy when they generate Facebook posts (Haigh *et al.*, 2013). Corporate ability communication strategy refers to companies promoting the quality of the products or services (Kim and Rader, 2010). Besides the aforementioned contents, another important content on an organization or a CEO's social media account is corporate social responsibility (CSR). It is found that big organizations such as the Red Cross used social media to communicate CSR (i.e. Briones *et al.*, 2011; Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

CSR communication and its impact have been frequently examined in existing literature (Carvalho *et al.*, 2010; Lii and Lee, 2012; Nan and Heo, 2007; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001;



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Tian *et al.*, 2011). Research generally supports that CSR communication can affect how stakeholders perceive an organization and impact their relationships with the organization. Recent research documented an increasing use of CSR on companies' websites (Basil and Erlandson, 2008). Two types of CSR messages have emerged – internal CSR message and external CSR message. Internal CSR messages show an organization's efforts for improving employees' well-being and benefits while external CSR messages highlight the organization's concern about and contribution to the society (Brammer *et al.*, 2007). By emphasizing different aspects of an organization's CSR program, internal and external CSR messages on social media may generate different outcomes.

In addition to the type of CSR messages, the source of CSR communication on social media may also qualify its effectiveness. Two different sources may be involved in an organization's communication with its stakeholders. On one hand, messages may be delivered via the organization's official social media account, such as the company's official Facebook page. Based on the number of likes, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, The Breast Cancer site, and the Harvard University were the three most popular organizations on Facebook (Fan Page List, 2018). On the other hand, communication may happen through the CEO's personal account. CEOs are sometimes considered as the "Chief Engagement Officers" and serve as public faces of the organizations (Tsai and Men, 2017). According to the number of followers, Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook CEO), Reed Hastings (Netflix CEO), and Meg Whitman (Hewitt-Packard CEO) were the three most popular CEOs on Facebook (Nanji, 2016). Among these top followed CEOs, Mark Zuckerberg frequently posted about how Facebook spent efforts in both internal CSR and external CSR, which reflected the Facebook's history of CSR involvement. For example, he posted about the paid maternity leave policy of the company. He also posted about the launch of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative on helping curing children's diseases.

Both the CEO's and the organization's social media accounts represent the voice of the organization and may communicate with the same group of stakeholders. However, stakeholders may choose to communicate with them for distinct reasons and with different preferences and expectations (Saxton and Waters, 2014; Wikangas and Okumura, 1997). Moreover, the CEO's social media content and the organization's social media content typically employ varying communication approaches. The communication on an organization's social media account is usually official and formal while the communication on a CEO's social media account is often more personable and humanized (Tsai and Men, 2017). These distinct communication styles and audience expectations may lead to different communication outcomes, even with the same message content. Thus, it would be interesting to test if the CSR communication effectiveness on social media may be different depending on whether the message source is the organization or the CEO.

While the question of how to effectively communicate CSR on social media has garnered an increasing amount of scholarly and practical attention (Cho *et al.*, 2017), it is imperative to examine the specific ways of CSR message designs and their differential effects on social media. Du *et al.* (2010) proposed a framework that highlighted two message factors that may together influence the effectiveness of CSR communication: message content and message source. Guided by this framework, the current study will focus on two factors in particular. First, the distinction between the internal CSR and the external CSR underscores an important variation in message content. The study will explore the possible influence of these two types of CSR messages. Second, the CEO's social media account and the organization's social media account highlight two different sources through which CSR messages are often delivered on social media. The study will compare the impact of these two sources in CSR communication. Moreover, the study will examine the combinatory

effect of the two factors. As CSR communication through CEO and organizational accounts on social media has become a commonly seen practice, more empirical research is needed to explore the most effective message strategy. The current study will also expand the understanding of both CSR communication and CEO communication under the social media context.

Literature review

The following section will review the existing literature on CSR communication and social CEO and explain why they may influence the organization-public relationship (OPR) and stakeholders' behavioral intention.

CSR

CSR has been defined in many different ways. McWilliams and Siegel (2001) defined CSR as situations where the firm goes beyond compliance and engages in actions that could further social good, beyond the interests of the firm. Basil and Erlandson (2008) posited CSR could be viewed from two perspectives: First, CSR involves benefiting the society, although it may not directly benefit the company's financial position. Second, CSR attends to the needs of a variety of organizational stakeholders. The current study adopted the definition by Basil and Erlandson (2008).

CSR has mainly been studied in terms of its effect on consumer's perceptions and how different types of organizations represented CSR on their websites (Carvalho *et al.*, 2010; Lii and Lee, 2012; Nan and Heo, 2007; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Tian *et al.*, 2011). It is revealed that three CSR initiatives – sponsorship, cause related marketing, and philanthropy – had a significant impact on consumer-company identification and brand attitude (Lii and Lee, 2012). Nan and Heo (2007) found an ad with an embedded CSR message elicited more favorable consumer attitudes toward the company compared with an ad without the CSR message. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) found the positive effect of CSR initiatives on consumer's company evaluations was mediated by their perceptions of self-company congruence and moderated by their support of the CSR domain. Another study showed the extent to which Brazilian consumers perceived a company to be socially responsible was related to both the basic transactional outcome of purchase intentions and the likelihood to switch to a competitor and to complain about the CSR-price increase (Carvalho *et al.*, 2010). Tian *et al.* (2011) found Chinese consumers who showed a high level of awareness and trust of CSR were more likely to transform a good CSR record into positive corporate evaluation, product association, and purchase intention.

Public relations researchers broke CSR into two types: the internal CSR and the external CSR. Internal CSR refers to the policy and practices of an organization that are related to the psychological and physiological well-being of its employees (Brammer *et al.*, 2007; Turker, 2009). For example, Facebook initiated the paid maternity leave policy for its employees in 2015 (Tepper, 2015). Internal CSR has also been defined as employee's emotional attachment toward the organization (Jayabalan *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, external CSR is the environmental and social practice that can help strengthen the firm's legitimacy and reputation among its external stakeholders (Carroll, 1979; Brammer *et al.*, 2007). For example, many companies organize monthly volunteer activities to give back to the society (i.e. food bank donation). In recent years, internal CSR has a more prominent representation than the external CSR. For example, it is found that the CSR activities representation increased from 2003 (27 percent) to 2006 (67 percent) with a strong increase on internal CSR among Canadian companies' websites (Basil and Erlandson, 2008).

Due to the increase of the internal CSR representation, more and more public relations scholars started to compare the effects of internal CSR vs the external CSR on a range of

public relations outcomes. Research has shown that the internal CSR and the external CSR mutually reinforced each other and they were both linked to product quality in the hotel industry. Other external CSR vs internal CSR research have been focusing on examining the impact of internal CSR and external CSR on organizational identification (i.e. Hameed *et al.*, 2016) and organizational commitment (i.e. Al-bdour *et al.*, 2010). Hameed *et al.* (2016) found that perceived external prestige mediated the relationship between external CSR and organizational identification. Perceived internal respect mediated the relationship between internal CSR and organizational identification. Meanwhile, calling orientation (how employees see their work contributions) moderated the relationship between external CSR and external prestige. Calling orientation also moderated the relationship between internal CSR and internal respect. Al-bdour *et al.* (2010) found that all five dimensions of internal CSR, namely, health and safety, human rights, training and education, work life balance, and workplace diversity, were significantly and positively related to affective and normative commitment. Based on prior findings, it is reasonable to expect that when different types of CSR are communicated to the public on social media, they may lead to different stakeholders' perceptions and behavioral intentions.

In addition to different types of CSR messages, Du *et al.* (2010) suggested source or channel of CSR communication may also influence stakeholders' perceptions. The next part will discuss two frequently seen sources for CSR communication on social media (i.e. CEOs and organizational accounts) and their differences.

CEO's communication on social media

CEOs often represent the images of organizations. Thus, their personality and reputation may have significant impacts on the company performance. Previous studies have frequently examined the effects of CEO's personality (Resick *et al.*, 2009; Wales *et al.*, 2013), CEO's credibility (Men, 2012), and CEO's press coverage (Park and Berger, 2004). Resick *et al.* (2009) found that CEO's bright side personalities (i.e. core self-evaluations) were positively related to transformational leadership whereas CEO's dark side personalities (i.e. narcissism) were negatively related to contingent reward leadership. However, Wales *et al.* (2013) found narcissistic CEOs had a propensity to increase entrepreneurial orientation. Entrepreneurial orientation also had a positive impact on firm performance variance. Men (2012) found CEO credibility was positively associated with perceived organizational reputation and employee engagement. Employee perception of organizational reputation mediated the relationship between CEO credibility and employee engagement. Park and Berger (2004) examined CEO's press coverage during the period 1990-2000, and they found there was an increase in salience and positive valence in coverage. There was also a sharp focus on competency and personal dimensions of CEO images.

CEO communication is usually strategic communication. Researchers have studied managing CEO communication and positioning (Conte *et al.*, 2017; Zerfass *et al.*, 2016). Zerfass *et al.* (2016) found most companies position their CEOs but only a few companies guide these activities through a sound management process. European CEOs are usually presented based on their functional and ethical competencies. High power distance countries are more likely to have specific communication strategies for the CEOs compared with the low power distance countries. Another study examined the relationship between CEO communication and tenure longevity (Conte *et al.*, 2017). It is found that CEOs were strongly engaged in institutional communication. Short-tenured CEOs were more engaged in building and consolidating networks with specific stakeholders while long-tenured CEOs were more engaged in institutional and financial communications.

In recent years, more and more scholars have started to investigate the effects of the social CEOs since more and more CEOs have adopted the social media to communicate with their stakeholders (Men and Tsai, 2016; Tsai and Men, 2017). Chen *et al.* examined whether social CEOs could influence the corresponding firms' information environment and attracted more visitors. It is revealed that CEO's personal tweets improved the information environment and widen the retail investor base. The effects were stronger among CEOs who had more followers, posted more tweets, and received more retweets.

Tsai and Men (2017) examined CEO's two different communication styles (assertive communication vs responsive communication) on OPR and public advocacy under the social media context. Assertive communication refers to an independent and dominant communication style while responsive communication refers to an empathetic and sensitive communication style (McCroskey and Richmond, 1995). It is found that CEO's responsive communication style induced the CEO's followers to perceive the CEOs as amicable role models and caring friends, thereby improving their trust of, satisfaction with, and advocacy of the company. The underlying mechanism is para-social interaction.

Men and Tsai (2016) also studied how and why publics engaged with social CEOs and why such engagement mattered. They found publics were motivated by thought leadership and task attraction when they were socially engaged with CEOs. Meanwhile, CEO public engagement had a positive effect on CEO authenticity and approachability, thereby influencing public trust and satisfaction. Public engagement with CEOs also had a direct impact on the quality of OPR.

Organization's communication on social media

In addition to the CEOs, organizations' accounts or official pages on social media are another important source for organization-stakeholder communication on social media. Previous research has examined the effects of organizations' social media posts on stakeholders' perceptions (Haigh and Wigley, 2015; Haigh *et al.*, 2013; Haigh and Brubaker, 2010; Men and Tsai, 2015). It is found that frequent interactions between the stakeholders and the organizations on Facebook pages could bolster stakeholders' perceptions of OPR, CSR, and purchase intent (Haigh *et al.*, 2013). Also, Sisson (2017)'s study showed engagement with a nonprofit organization's social media page increased donors' perceived control mutuality and intention to create social media posts for the organization. Moreover, effective organizational communication on social media during a crisis may help the organization restore its image and improve OPRs (Haigh and Brubaker, 2010).

Organization and CEO as two communication sources on social media have received a lot of scholarly attention, respectively. Social media usage can bring lots of benefits to the organizations and CEOs. For organizations, they can use social media to gain customer insights; increase brand awareness and loyalty; run targeted ads with real time results; generate higher converting leads; provide rich customer experience; increase website traffic and search ranking; find out the competitors' moves; share content faster and easier; geo-target content; and build relationships (Copp, 2016). For CEOs, they may use social media to share news and information; create positive impact on company's reputation; show innovation; give company a human face or personality; communicate with employees; help CEOs build relationships with news media; and give employees a chance to communicate with their CEOs (Weber Shandwick, 2012). Among these many benefits, building relationships with the stakeholders is the common goal for both the CEO and the organization.

Despite the common goal, an organization and its CEO as two different communication sources may be associated with distinct stakeholder expectations. The reasons stakeholders

follow the CEO's social media account may be different from the reasons they follow the organization's social media account. It is found that people follow CEOs on social media because they want to learn the values of the CEOs (Wikangas and Okumura, 1997). Thus, they may expect the CEOs to show more personal lives on social media. For an organization's social media account followers, they prefer dialogic, and certain forms of mobilizational messages (Saxton and Waters, 2014).

Moreover, organizations and CEOs as two sources represent different communication approaches. An organization's social media communication is typically official and more objective while a CEO's social media communication is more personal and approachable. Men and Tsai (2015) found that CEO communication on social media can effectively personify messages and construct an aggregable corporate character for enhancing public engagement and inducing intimate, interpersonal interactions, and community identification. All of these may enhance the organization's relationships with its publics. With distinct stakeholder expectations and communication approaches, organizations and CEOs as two sources may generate different communication effectiveness.

This may also be true in the context of CSR communication. Prior research suggests that reducing skepticism and generate favorable attribution of an organization's motives are the keys to the success of the CSR communication (Du *et al.*, 2010). Elving and Kartal (2012) argued that the consistency between an organization's CSR program and its CEO's personal behaviors may increase the internal attribution of the motives of the CSR program. That is, stakeholders are more likely to believe that the CSR program is for inner motivation and values instead of external reasons, such as profit seeking or other business pursuits. Consequently, internal attribution may enhance the favorability of stakeholders' perceptions. Thus, although the effects of CEO as the source for communicating CSR messages have not been tested before, it may be related to more favorable outcomes than an organization source. This is because it carries two folds of meanings. On one hand, it is an announcement of the organization's CSR initiatives. On the other hand, it implies that the organization's CSR initiatives are aligned with the CEO's personal values. The motives of the CSR initiatives are more internal than external.

Research questions

Previous internal CSR vs external CSR studies have examined the impact of different types of CSR messages on organizational identification (i.e. Hameed *et al.*, 2016) and organizational commitment (i.e. Al-bdour *et al.*, 2010). A previous study has also examined the impact of different CSR communication strategies on stakeholders' perceptions of OPR, CSR, and purchase intent (Haigh *et al.*, 2013). However, the impact of different types of CSR messages (especially internal CSR vs external CSR) on stakeholders' perceptions of OPR and behavioral intention toward the organization is unknown. Thus, the following research question is raised:

- RQ1.* How do types of CSR messages (internal CSR, external CSR, control) influence stakeholders' perceptions of OPR and behavior intention toward the organization?

Past research on social CEOs have mainly focused on the association between CEO narcissism and audience engagement (i.e. Gerstner *et al.*, 2013; Petrenko *et al.*, 2016); however, studies on the relationship between social CEOs and stakeholders' perceptions are limited. One recent social CEO study examined the effects of CEO's communicating styles and para-social interaction on social network sites (Tsai and Men, 2016). Results showed CEOs' responsive and assertive communication styles induced the CEOs' social media followers to perceive the CEO as amicable role models and caring friends. This further leads

to the increased trust of, satisfaction with, and advocacy for the company. However, this study did not examine the impact of message source (an organization's social media account vs a CEO's social media account) on stakeholders' perceptions of OPR and behavioral intention toward the organization. Thus, the following research question is posed:

- RQ2.* How does message source (organizations' Facebook account vs CEO's Facebook account) influence stakeholders' perceptions of OPR and behavioral intention toward the organization?

Method

Study design and participants

This study examined the effects of source and types of CSR message on stakeholders' perceptions. A 2 (source: CEO vs company) \times 3 (type of CSR message: internal CSR vs external CSR vs control) between-subjects experiment was conducted online.

A total of 242 ($n = 242$) US participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). In the final sample ($M_{\text{age}} = 33.49$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.68$), 56.2 percent of the participants were males and 43.8 percent were females. The majority of the participants were Caucasians (80.6 percent), followed by Asian Americans (9.5 percent), African Americans (7.0 percent), Native Americans (1.7 percent), and Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (1.2 percent). In terms of the education level, 41.7 percent indicated they completed a Bachelor's degree, followed by some college (23.6 percent), Associate degree (11.2 percent), Master's (9.9 percent), High School (7.9 percent), and Doctoral degree or a professional degree (5.8 percent).

Stimuli

A fictitious technology start-up company named, "Formular" and a fictitious CEO named "Max Cody" were used in this study. Participants read the cover story first before they were exposed to the experimental condition. The fictitious CEO and company were used to make sure the stakeholders would not have any prior perception toward the company and the CEO.

A total of 12 Facebook posts were created. Six posts came from the CEO's account and the remaining six came from the company's official account. A total of six different CSR messages were created (two for external CSR, two for internal CSR, and two for non-CSR). Each participant read two Facebook posts before they were asked to fill out a post-questionnaire. Two messages were used in each condition to reduce the potential confounding effects of message choice and ensure that the findings of the study were not message-specific. The description of the cover story and the stimuli are available by contacting the lead author.

The two external CSR messages emphasized doing good to the community. One external CSR post was about providing free education to young girls and the other external CSR post talked about Formular employees' volunteering at YMCA to raise money for students. The two internal CSR messages emphasized doing good to the company's employees. One message was about Formular's paid maternity leave policy and the other message was about Formular's "bring pets to work" policy. The two non-CSR messages emphasized CEO's personal life. One message was about introducing the CEO's habit – reading books – and the other one showcased a mothers' day's gift from the CEO's daughter. The non-CSR message was designed based on the trends of companies promoting CEO's personal life in order to cultivate an amicable image of CEO on social media (Men and Tsai, 2016). All stimuli were created based on the Facebook posts from real technology companies. Message length (text description above the image) was generally the same across all conditions.

Procedures

A recruitment message with a brief introduction of the study and the procedure was distributed to potential participants on Amazon MTurk. Once they initiated the study by clicking the link in the recruitment message, they were directed to the online consent form. Upon indicating their agreement to participate in the study, they were provided with some background information about the company and its CEO. Participants were told that they were going to view two Facebook posts about Formular, which was a technology start-up company focusing on developing wearable devices. Max Cody was the CEO of the company. Then they were randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions and presented with the corresponding Facebook posts. After having read the Facebook posts, they were asked to complete the questionnaire assessing their perceived trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, commitment, as well as behavioral intention toward the company. Their demographics were also reported. Then, they were thanked and offered the participation code, with which they could claim the monetary compensation on MTurk. The whole experiment lasted about 15 minutes.

Dependent measures

OPR. The four dimensions of OPR were measured using the scale by Hon and Grunig (1999). Trust toward the company was assessed with six items on a seven-point Likert scale. For example, participants were asked the extent to which they agreed that "Formular treats people like me fairly and justly," "Formular can be relied on to keep its promises," and "Formular has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do" ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.11$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$).

Satisfaction with the company was assessed with four items on a seven-point Likert scale. Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed that "I am happy with Formular," "Both Formular and people like me benefit from the relationship," "Most people like me are happy in their interactions with Formular," and "Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship Formular has established with people like me" ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 1.15$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$).

Control mutuality with the company was assessed with four items on a seven-point Likert scale. Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed that "Formular and people like me are attentive to what each other say," "Formular believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate," "In dealing with people like me, Formular does not have a tendency to throw its weight around," and "Formular really listens to what people like me have to say" ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.15$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$).

Commitment to the company was assessed with four items on a seven-point Likert scale. Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed that "Formular is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me," "Formular wants to maintain a relationship with people like me," "There is a long-lasting bond between Formular and people like me," and "I value my relationship with Formular more than with other companies" ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 1.22$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$).

Behavior intentions toward the company was measured with three items on a seven-point Likert scale from Coyle and Thorson (2001). Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed that "It is very likely that I will return to this organization's service," "I will follow Formular's news and updates in the future," and "I will recommend Formular to my friend" ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.50$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$).

Manipulation check questions

Two questions were used to assess if the experimental manipulations for the source of the Facebook posts and the type of CSR messages were effective. To check the message source

manipulation, participants were asked if the posts they just viewed were from “Max Cody – The CEO of Formular” or “Formular’s official Facebook account.” To check the type of CSR message manipulation, participants were asked to choose the statement that best described the posts they just viewed from the following statements, “The posts are about the company’s involvement in external social projects,” “The posts are about the company’s practices or policies that benefit the employees,” and “The posts are about the CEO’s personal life.”

Results

Manipulation check

Two χ^2 analyses were employed to check the effectiveness of the experimental treatments. Results showed participants who viewed the posts from the CEO were more likely to indicate the posts were from the CEO (87.5 percent) compared to those who viewed the posts from the company’s official account (12.5 percent), $\chi^2(1, n=242)=159.77, p<0.001$, Cramer’s $V=0.81$. The reason that some participants misidentified the CEO’s post is probably because they did not pay attention to the profile picture when they were reading the message.

The manipulation of the type of the CSR messages was also effective, $\chi^2(4, n=242)=377.81, p<0.001$, Cramer’s $V=0.88$. In particular, results revealed participants who viewed the external CSR messages were more likely to indicate the Facebook posts were about the company’s involvement in external social projects (89.4 percent) than those who viewed the internal CSR messages (7.1 percent) (The reason that some participants considered the external CSR messages as internal CSR messages was probably because they thought employees volunteering at YMCA could benefit the employees too) and those who viewed the messages about the CEO’s personal life (3.5 percent). Those who viewed the internal CSR messages were more likely to indicate the Facebook posts were about the company’s practices or policies that benefit the employees (97.5 percent) than their counterparts who viewed the external CSR messages (1.2 percent) and those who viewed the messages about the CEO’s personal life (1.2 percent). Those viewed the control messages were more likely to indicate the posts were about the CEO’s personal life (89.5 percent) than participants who viewed the external CSR messages (5.3 percent) and those who read the internal CSR messages (5.3 percent). Therefore, the manipulations for the type of CSR message and source of message were successful.

Data analysis

To answer *RQ1* and *RQ2*, a series of 2×3 ANOVAs were conducted. Results revealed a significant main effect for the type of CSR message on trust toward the company, $F(2, 236)=7.38, p<0.01$, partial $\eta^2=0.06$. *Post hoc* analyses using Tukey’s HSD showed exposure to the posts featuring external CSR messages ($M=5.16, SE=0.12, p<0.05$) and internal CSR messages ($M=4.99, SE=0.12, p<0.01$) led to a greater perception of trust than did exposure to the posts about the CEO’s personal life ($M=4.51, SE=0.13$). According to the *post hoc* analyses, the difference in trust between the external and internal CSR conditions was not significant.

There was also a significant main effect for the type of CSR message on satisfaction with the company, $F(2, 236)=4.64, p<0.05$, partial $\eta^2=0.04$. *Post hoc* analyses using Tukey’s HSD revealed that exposure to the internal CSR messages elicited a greater level of satisfaction with the company ($M=5.28, SE=0.12$) than did exposure to the messages about the CEO’s personal life ($M=4.74, SE=0.13, p<0.01$). According to the *post hoc* analyses, the difference between the external CSR condition ($M=4.94, SE=0.13$) and the other two conditions was non-significant.

The test suggested there was a significant main effect for the type of CSR message on perceived control mutuality with the company, $F(2, 236) = 6.00, p < 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.05$. *Post hoc* analyses using Tukey's HSD revealed that exposure to the internal CSR messages elicited a greater perception of control mutuality with the company ($M = 5.18, SE = 0.12$) than did exposure to the messages about the CEO's personal life ($M = 4.58, SE = 0.13, p < 0.01$) and the external CSR messages ($M = 4.79, SE = 0.13, p < 0.10$). The difference between the external CSR condition and the condition that viewed the messages about the CEO was, however, non-significant.

Similarly, results revealed a significant main effect for the type of CSR message on perceived commitment, $F(2, 236) = 6.28, p < 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.05$. *Post hoc* analyses using Tukey's HSD revealed that exposure to the internal CSR messages elicited a greater perception of commitment ($M = 5.14, SE = 0.13$) than did exposure to the messages about the CEO's personal life ($M = 4.54, SE = 0.13, p < 0.01$) and the external CSR messages ($M = 4.62, SE = 0.14, p < 0.05$). However, according to the *post hoc* analyses, the difference between the external CSR condition and the condition that viewed the messages about the CEO was non-significant.

The main effect for message source was non-significant on perceived trust, $F(1, 236) = 0.005, p > 0.05$, satisfaction, $F(1, 236) = 0.006, p > 0.05$, control mutuality, $F(1, 236) = 0.25, p > 0.05$, and commitment, $F(1, 236) = 0.93, p > 0.05$. The interaction effect between message source and type of CSR message on perceived trust, $F(2, 236) = 0.31, p > 0.05$, satisfaction, $F(2, 236) = 1.20, p > 0.05$, control mutuality, $F(2, 236) = 0.60, p > 0.05$, and commitment, $F(2, 236) = 1.86, p > 0.05$ were non-significant as well.

Results showed there was a significant main effect for the type of CSR message on behavioral intention toward the company, $F(2, 236) = 4.34, p < 0.05$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.04$. *Post hoc* analyses using Tukey's HSD revealed exposure to the internal CSR messages elicited greater behavioral intentions toward the company ($M = 4.73, SE = 0.15$) than did exposure to the messages about the CEO's personal life ($M = 4.10, SE = 0.17, p < 0.05$) and the external CSR messages ($M = 4.22, SE = 0.16, p < 0.10$). According to the *post hoc* analyses, the difference between the external CSR condition and the condition that viewed the messages about the CEO was, however, non-significant.

The main effect for the type of CSR message should be interpreted in the context of a significant interaction effect between message source and the type of CSR message, $F(2, 236) = 5.62, p < 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.05$. Specifically, when CEO communicated the messages on social media, internal CSR ($M = 4.59, SE = 0.22$) and the messages about the CEO ($M = 4.51, SE = 0.23$) led to greater behavioral intentions than did the external CSR messages ($M = 3.86, SE = 0.23$). *Post hoc* analyses using the Sidak comparison showed, across conditions, only the difference between the external CSR and the internal CSR condition was approaching significance, $p = 0.06$. When the company's official account communicated the messages, internal CSR ($M = 4.86, SE = 0.22, p < 0.01$) and external CSR ($M = 4.58, SE = 0.23, p < 0.05$) led to greater behavioral intentions compared to the non-CSR messages ($M = 3.69, SE = 0.25$). Patterns of the interaction effect were presented in Figure 1 and (Table I). The main effect for message source was non-significant on behavioral intentions, $F(1, 236) = 0.09, p > 0.05$.

Discussion

This study examined the effects of message source (CEO's social media account vs organization's social media account) and types of the CSR messages (internal CSR vs external CSR vs non-CSR) on stakeholders' perceptions of OPR and behavioral intention toward the organization. Previous study has examined how internal CSR and external CSR influence organizational identification (i.e. Hameed *et al.*, 2016) and organizational

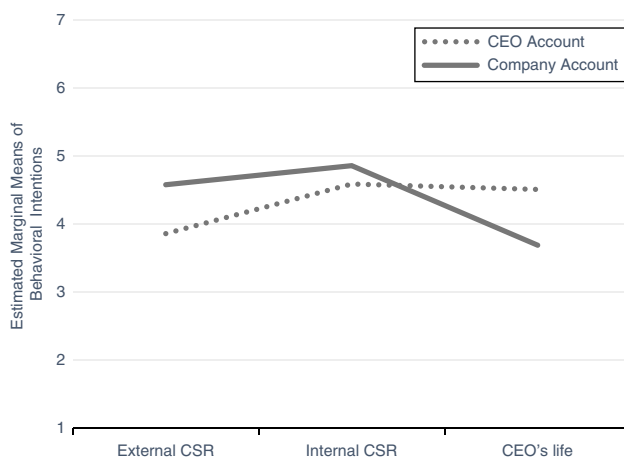


Figure 1.
The interaction effect
between message
source and types of
CSR message on
behavioral intentions
toward the company

	CEO's Facebook account			Organization's Facebook account		
	External CSR <i>n</i> = 41	Internal CSR <i>n</i> = 45	Control <i>n</i> = 39	External CSR <i>n</i> = 40	Internal CSR <i>n</i> = 44	Control <i>n</i> = 33
OPR – trust	4.94 (1.24)	5.14 (1.13)	4.59 (0.90)	5.04 (0.97)	5.17 (1.06)	4.42 (1.22)
OPR – satisfaction	4.88 (1.28)	5.16 (1.13)	4.90 (1.04)	4.99 (1.03)	5.40 (1.04)	4.59 (1.29)
OPR – control mutuality	4.73 (1.21)	5.12 (1.09)	4.80 (1.01)	4.85 (1.11)	5.24 (1.05)	4.35 (1.42)
OPR – commitment	4.36 (1.25)	5.08 (1.16)	4.65 (1.06)	4.89 (1.17)	5.21 (1.16)	4.43 (1.37)
Behavior intention toward the organization	3.86 (1.62)	4.59 (1.51)	4.51 (1.27)	4.58 (1.21)	4.86 (1.51)	3.69 (1.57)

Notes: The numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. OPR was measured using Hon and Grunig's (1999) scale. It includes four dimensions: trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality. Behavioral intention toward the organization was measured using three items adapted from Coyle and Thorson (2001). All measures were placed on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

Table I.
Cell means of the
outcome variables
by conditions

commitment (i.e. Al-bdour *et al.*, 2010). The current study is innovative in that it is one of the few studies examining how organizations and CEOs utilize different CSR messages to influence stakeholders' perceptions of OPR and behavioral intention toward the organization. The study contributes to current research on CSR communication and CEO communication on social media.

Theoretical implications

The study findings generally support prior CSR communication research by showing that promoting an organization's CSR activities can bolster stakeholders' perceptions of the organization. More importantly, findings lend empirical support to the theoretical framework of CSR communication by demonstrating that both the message content and the message source can influence the CSR communication effectiveness (Du *et al.*, 2010). Moving beyond literature, the study examined different CSR message strategies on social media and explored how their effects were moderated depending on whether the source is the organization or its CEO.

In terms of message content, the current study showed emphasizing internal and external CSR initiatives to publics on social media would have different effects on the OPR. Specifically, internal CSR messages led to greater trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality among stakeholders compared to the external CSR messages. The findings suggested that the internal CSR message was more effective than the external CSR message (and the non-CSR control message) when it comes to bolstering OPR. Although internal CSR is defined as the emphasis on employees' well-being and benefits in CSR activities and may appeal more to the internal stakeholders (Brammer *et al.*, 2007), findings showed communicating internal CSR on social media indeed elicited more favorable perceptions than external CSR messages even among external stakeholders. Stakeholders may perceive the organization as more caring when the organization treats its employees well. This finding is likely related to the skepticism of the motives of CSR activities, which is considered as the key challenge in CSR communication (Du *et al.*, 2010). External stakeholders tend to be less skeptical toward internal CSR activities as they are more directly related the operation of an organization.

Out of our expectation, message source did not show a significant main effect on the CSR communication effectiveness. Although previous research implied a CEO's personal behaviors would affect how stakeholders attributed the motives of the organization's CSR program (Elving and Kartal, 2012), the current study demonstrated communicating CSR messages through CEO on social media did not lend to different OPR and behavioral intention than when CSR messages were delivered through the organization's account.

Although the study did not support the main effect of message source, a combinatory effect of CSR message and message source on behavioral intention occurred. When the CSR message appeared on the CEO's social media account, both the internal CSR message and the non-CSR control message led to higher behavioral intention toward the company compared to the external CSR message. This is probably because both the internal CSR message and the control message are more tailored to the external stakeholders' expectation of CEO communication. The control message fit the need of social media followers for viewing the CEO's personal lives (Wikangas and Okumura, 1997). The internal CSR message showcased the CEO's willingness of and efforts in taking care of employees, which is an important indicator of the CEO's leadership (Tsai & Men, 2017). The external CSR message might be less expected on a CEO's social media page and likely be perceived as a pure promotion attempt, thus raising stakeholders' skepticism.

Moreover, when the CSR message appeared on the organization's social media account, both the internal and the external CSR messages led to greater behavioral intention toward the organization compared to the non-CSR control message. This finding could be interpreted as CEO's personal lives rarely appeared organizations' social media accounts. Just like most social media users post their personal lives on their personal social media accounts, it is more appropriate to post non-CSR messages (CEO's personal life) on the CEO's personal social media accounts. Thus, the external stakeholders may consider the non-CSR message on an organization's social media account as inappropriate so that their behavioral intention toward the organization was lower compared to when they saw the organization's social media account posted CSR-related messages.

Practical implications

Since there is an increase of CSR communication on social media in recent years, it is imperative for practitioners to understand how to best communicate an organization's CSR efforts and initiatives. An effective CSR communication can not only bolster the OPR but also can help the organization realize the CSR program value, which may motivate the future involvement in CSR activities. Findings of the current study have

several implications for effective CSR communication and stakeholder management on social media.

First, as CSR communication faces several challenges such as stakeholders' skepticism of the motives of the CSR activities, the study suggests that emphasizing the organization's willingness of and efforts for treating employees well may be more effective in fostering stakeholders' organizational perceptions than emphasizing the organization's contribution to the society in general.

Second, when it comes to motivating stakeholders' behavioral intention toward the organization on social media, the CEO's and the organization's social media accounts should use different message strategies. For the CEO's social media account, the internal CSR message and the CEO's personal life stories may be more effective. For the organization's social media account, both types of CSR messages are more effective than non-CSR messages in eliciting stakeholders' behavioral intentions. Posts about CEOs' personal lives should be limited on organizations' social media accounts.

Limitations and future directions

This study bears several limitations. First, Facebook was used as a social media platform in the current study. Research showed more and more CEOs are migrating from Facebook to other social media platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn to communicate with the stakeholders. LinkedIn is now the top social media among social CEOs (McCue, 2015). Thus, future study could choose LinkedIn as an alternative platform to examine the effects of CSR message on stakeholders' perceptions. Another limitation of the study is the stimuli manipulation. Some participants did not correctly identify the source of the message (i.e. about 12.5 percent of the participants thought it was the company not the CEO who posted the message). Others were confused about the difference between the internal CSR message and the external CSR message (i.e. about 7.1 percent of the participants thought the external CSR message was about internal CSR). Future study could close this gap by making sure the Facebook profile picture cue is prominent enough so that participants would pay attention. A better external CSR message could be designed to avoid the message confusion. Third, a male CEO was selected as an example in the current study. Past research showed female CEOs were associated with lower firm risk level (Khan and Veito, 2013). Thus, gender of the CEO may influence stakeholders' perceptions toward OPR and their behavior intention toward the organization. Future study could close this gap by employing CEOs from both genders. Lastly, this study recruited general stakeholders from MTurk as participants for the current study. Future study could distinguish participants between company employees and non-employees. The reason is that company employees may pay more attention toward CSR and behavior intention toward the company compared with non-employees.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study examined how message source and different types of CSR message on social media influence stakeholders' perceptions. Results showed the internal CSR message elicited greater perceptions of trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment toward the organization among the stakeholders than the external CSR message and the message about the CEO's personal life. On the organization's Facebook account, communicating the external CSR message and the internal CSR message triggered greater behavioral intention toward the organization than communicating the non-CSR message. On the CEO's Facebook account, communicating internal CSR messages or messages about the CEO's life elicited greater behavioral intention toward the organization than communicating the external CSR messages.

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