

**Call for Papers: Special Issue of
*Management Communication Quarterly***

**CSR Communication in an Age of
Digitalization and Polarization**

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Thematic focus

“We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic,” the UN’s secretary general Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus remarked in 2020 in response to the then emerging COVID-19 pandemic. The statement suggests that the communicative landscape in which contemporary organizations operate has changed significantly over the past decade, creating challenging conditions under which organizations and their constituents engage in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication. On the one hand, the rise of digital media and especially social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter have considerably expanded the range of ways organizations can engage in interactions and dialogue with their stakeholders (e.g., Glozer et al., 2019; Maltseva et al., 2019). On the other hand, digital media have also created problems of increasing loads of disinformation (Bennett & Livingston, 2020) and “fake news” (Tsoukas & Knight, 2019) that are shared on their platforms and that make it difficult for actors to differentiate between trustworthy, “fact”-based news sources and dubious, deceptive ones. Some observers even suggest we have entered the age of a “post-truth society” where traditional values of a fact-based information provision are eroding and doubt, even regarding scientific knowledge, is spreading (Meyer & Quattrone, 2021).

Furthermore, there is a trend towards an increasing polarization of public discourse. This development is particularly threatening for Western democracies because polarization renders the achievement of compromises and consensus increasingly difficult (McCoy et al., 2018). Here, digital media platforms also serve as a catalyst, since their algorithmic filters tend to favor polarizing forms of communication and lead users to consume content primarily from their “filter bubbles” (Kitchens et al., 2020).

Overall, while CSR research and practice is traditionally concerned with how actors in and around organizations negotiate meanings about CSR, both in interactions with external stakeholders (e.g., NGOs, the media) and/or with internal stakeholders (e.g., employees) (Schoeneborn, Morsing & Crane, 2020; Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013), the age of digitalization and disinformation creates substantially new challenges for CSR communication (Glozer, Caruana & Hibbert, 2019; Verk, Golob & Podnar, 2021). This Special Issue of *Management Communication Quarterly* addresses new challenges that CSR communication and its theorizing is facing in the age of digitalization, disinformation, and polarization. Thus, the focus of this special issue is to bring together research on how organizations address sustainability/responsibility issues strategically via CSR communication in today's globally accessible and dynamic communication environments, especially in increasingly polarized societal discourses via digital media.

We welcome submissions that address a broad range of questions and topic areas within the theme of the Special Issue. Questions that submissions might address include:

- How, why, and with what consequences do certain organizations decide to enter into polarized societal discourses?
- How is CSR communication that draws strongly on fact-based information (as recommended by earlier works, such as Morsing et al., 2008) theorized and evaluated, if we live in a society where some actors do not care much about facts or easily dilute these with “alternative facts” of dubious origin?
- How can fact-based CSR communication be used, if at all, to attain legitimation in an age of polarized communication and disinformation?
- What are the implications of the increased usage of digital and social media for firms engaging in practices of CSR/sustainability reporting?
- How can and should organizations and actors engage stakeholder dialogue through digital media amidst increasingly unreconcilable, polarized discourses?
- How and why do some organizations engage the complexity of polarized discourses in CSR communication, whereas others tend to employ “greenhushing” (Font et al., 2017) or “strategic silence” (Carlos & Lewis, 2018), that is, abstain from CSR communication whatsoever?
- What implications do polarized discourses have for consumer, marketing, and branding aspects of CSR?
- How is CSR communication performed in digital contexts (e.g., social media, gamification), and with what consequences?
- How do organizational micropolitics, internal activism, social movements, and entrepreneurship enact or perhaps even foster polarized discourses and disinformation?
- How are oftentimes hidden issues of gender and diversity operating in CSR communication in digitalized contexts?
- What norms and values should guide CSR communication in an age of digitalization, disinformation, and polarization?
- How, if at all, is the meaning of CSR itself shifting amidst these conditions?
- How do the current shifts in the context of CSR advantage and disadvantage different individuals, groups, organizations, regions, and nations?

The Special Issue has close thematic links to the [6th International CSR Communication Conference](#) that will take place Sept. 14-16, 2022 at Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany. However, participation in the conference is not required to submit to the MCQ Special Issue. We welcome submissions addressing CSR as a communication process from various disciplines, including Organizational Communication, Corporate Communication, Public Relations, Marketing, or Management and Organizational Studies. MCQ and this special issue are committed to publishing and amplifying content from diverse, global perspectives.

Submission process and deadlines

The deadline for submission of full papers will be **December 15th, 2022**. Manuscripts should adhere to Management Communication Quarterly's standard submission guidelines for full-length articles. Submissions should be no more than 10,000 words, including abstract and references. All papers should be formatted in the latest edition of APA style. Manuscripts must be submitted through the journal's online submission system (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/mcq>) and should select the special issue as their submission type. For further information or questions, please contact Special Issue Editor Dennis Schoeneborn (ds.msc@cbs.dk).

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About the guest editors

Dennis Schoeneborn is Professor of Organization, Communication, and CSR at Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, and Visiting Professor of Organization and Management at Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany. His main research areas are organization theory, organizational communication, CSR communication, digital communication, and new forms of organizing. His work has been published in the *Academy of Management Review*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Management Communication Quarterly*, and *Organization Studies*, among others. He serves as Associate Editor at the journal *Business & Society* and he is an editorial board member at *Management Communication Quarterly*, and *Organization Studies*. From 2015 to 2020, he served as head coordinator of the Standing Working Group "Organization as Communication" at the European Group of Organizational Studies (EGOS), jointly with Nicolas Bencherki, Timothy R. Kuhn, François Cooren, and Consuelo Vásquez.

Urša Golob is Professor of Marketing Communication at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her main research interests are in various areas of CSR, CSR communication and sustainable consumption. Urša is one of the founding members of the International CSR Communication Conference. Her work has been published in *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Public Relations Review*, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* and *Journal of Brand Management*, among others. She serves as the Co-Editor-in-Chief for *Journal of Brand Management*, where she is currently also editing a Special

Issue on *Brands & Activism*. She has been involved in editing three Special Issues related to CSR communication for *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*.

Hannah Trittin-Ulbrich is Assistant Professor for Business Ethics at Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany. She researches corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate digital responsibility (CDR), CSR communication, as well as the organizational and societal impact of digital technologies. Her research has been published in journals like *Journal for Management Studies*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, or *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. She is also member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Business Ethics*, and is currently editing a *Business & Society* special issue on “Stakeholder Engagement: Opening up Participation, Inclusion, and Democracy” as well as a special issue in *Business Ethics, the Environment and Responsibility* on “Corporate Change Agents for Sustainability”.

Matthias Wenzel is Professor of Organization Studies at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany. His research focuses on discourse and communication in strategizing and organizing, as well as their societal implications. His work has been published in journals such as the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *Long Range Planning*, *Organization Studies*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, *Strategic Management Journal*, and *Strategic Organization*, among others. In addition, Matthias serves as Associate Editor for the SMS Collections at the *Strategic Management Journal*, Co-editor for Media Innovations of the *Strategic Management Journal*, *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, and *Global Strategy Journal*, and as member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Business Research*, among others. Furthermore, he is currently editing a *Business & Society* special issue on “Stakeholder Engagement: Opening up Participation, Inclusion, and Democracy”.

Amy O’Connor is Associate Professor of strategic communication at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, USA. Her research exposes how corporations’ CSR talk plays out in the lived experiences of different stakeholder groups. Her research has appeared in both academic and non-academic venues. It has been featured by the Conference Board of Directors, Harvard Business Review, and PRWeek and published in journals such as *Business & Society*, *Corporate Communications*, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, and *Management Communication Quarterly*. In addition, O’Connor is the editor of the upcoming Routledge’s *Handbook of Corporate Social Responsibility Communication*, in which she brings together an international group of business, organizational communication, and public relations scholars to interrogate and advance the field of CSR. She serves as associate editor for *Management Communication Quarterly* where she specializes in the advancement of CSR scholarship.