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FRAMING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON THE WEBSITES OF *FORTUNE 10 GREEN GIANTS*

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Kriti Ashok

December 2010

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

FRAMING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON THE WEBSITES OF *FORTUNE 10 GREEN GIANTS*

by

Kriti Ashok

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ABSTRACT

FRAMING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON THE WEBSITES OF *FORTUNE 10 GREEN GIANTS*

by Kriti Ashok

This thesis reports a framing study of corporate social responsibility on the Internet. The study explores how *Fortune 10 Green Giants* frame corporate social responsibility on their websites. The Green Giants are Honda, Continental, Suncor, Tesco, Alcan, PG&E, S.C. Johnson, Goldman Sachs, Swiss Re, and Hewlett-Packard. According to *Fortune* magazine, these 10 companies have gone beyond what the law requires to operate in an environmentally responsible way. The study is focused on the textual content of these 10 corporation websites. The study involves identification of frames, determination of the most used and the least used frames, and identification of patterns in the way corporate social responsibility is framed by these 10 corporations.

Using framing as the method, this study demonstrates how corporations frame the phenomenon of corporate social responsibility to manage their reputation and guide the public discourse on the issue. The relevant tabs of textual content on the websites were analyzed for the presence of frames and keywords that denote acts of and commitment to corporate social responsibility exhibited by the organizations. The most used frame was *Awareness,* and the least used frame was *Transparency*. A pattern was also detected in the way the proposed frames appeared on the 10 websites. To maintain the objectivity of the study, intercoder reliability was determined. The intercoder reliability ranged from 0.8 to 0.93.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility communication is an outgrowth and advancement of the corporate social reports and environmental communication programs of the 1970s and 1980s. These reports were popularized with environmental scandals and corporate malfeasances. Corporate social responsibility reporting is fraught with challenges in a climate that is marked by informed publics and critical media. Corporations are facing clearly articulated expectations from consumers regarding their contributions to sustainable development. In such a scenario, the Internet offers one of the most strategic benefits to corporate social responsibility communication. It allows an ongoing and interactive process rather than a static annual product and, most importantly, provides a transparent and legitimate account.

The presentation of an organization in a medium includes the practices of inclusion, exclusion, and emphasis. These actions form the building blocks in the course of shaping a corporate image. These concepts are also synonymous with the process of framing. Thus, a framing study of corporate social responsibility becomes relevant and important. Various studies demonstrate a positive relationship between social performance and financial performance; therefore, exhibition of social actions by organizations on their websites is a motivated action. It is a deliberate attempt to structure public discourse in a way that privileges their goals and means of attaining them. This motive of the organizations is fulfilled by employing framing as they develop content for public consumption.

Framing is a practice in media content production, yet it is attracting research from the perspectives of both production and consumption, with an emphasis on the latter. The process of framing and corporate social responsibility has been overlooked by media scholars to date. A few studies that have combined the two do exist but are focused on framing effects rather than framing itself. Hence, research on the framing of corporate reputation may foster the understanding of the two areas together.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study identified the frames employed to portray corporate social responsibility in the textual content of *Fortune 10 Green Giants'* websites. It also determined the most used and the least used frames, and detected presence of patterns in the appearance of frames.

This study enriches the field of framing and corporate social responsibility in mass communication research. It comes as a supplement to the existing framing effects' studies on corporate social responsibility.

Organization of the Thesis

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section is Literature Review. The literature reviewed for this study is divided into three subsections. The first subsection provides a brief background on corporate social responsibility, defines corporate social responsibility, its need, and importance. This subsection also explains the importance of the Internet in communicating corporate social responsibility. The second subsection reviews framing literature, delineates the importance of framing in content production of corporate websites, and examines the role and intent of information

promoters. The third subsection of the Literature Review includes the literature overview and discusses the conceptual framework of the study. This subsection ends with research questions.

The second section of the paper is Method. It explains the tools employed to answer the research questions. It has details about the sample, coding, descriptions of the frames used, list of keywords denoting each frame, and statistical tools.

The third section of the paper is Results and it enumerates the findings from the study. The fourth and last section of the paper is Discussion and it further ruminates over the findings and suggests directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This section includes a background on corporate social responsibility, studies on the importance and need of corporate social responsibility, relevant research on framing, and the research questions. It also discusses the conceptual framework utilized in the study.

A Brief History of Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility as a concept was originally developed by author Howard Bowen in 1953 in his book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* (Bowen, 1953). However, the term got popularized in the wake of environmental scandals such as the chemical catastrophes in Bhopal and Seveso and corporate malfeasances like Enron (Tian, 2004). The Union Carbide chemical disaster claimed numerous lives and maims generations to come. These incidents sensitized the general public. Signitzer and Anja (2009) noted that consequently ecology became a hot issue in the media pushed by investigative journalists and critical nongovernmental organizations alike. Under pressure, the organizations reacted with environmental communication programs. These efforts were mainly crisis communication and one-way reporting about successes of environmental practices. Many companies published so-called social reports to demonstrate socially responsible behavior. However, most of the reports just greenwashed as they lacked honesty and transparency and were misused as advertising instruments (Signitzer & Anja, 2009).

Corporate social responsibility communication is an outgrowth and advancement

of such corporate social reports and environmental communication programs (Wood, 1991). Wood (1991) wrote that in the 1970s, a plethora of studies on various business-related social problems were conducted based on the idea that a business was an actor in the environment and should respond to social pressures and demands. By the early 1980s, the focus shifted to responsiveness. Researchers sought to find how companies respond to business-related social issues as well as what was considered ethical behavior (Clark, 2000). Wood (1991) noted that it was then that models of corporate social responsibility began to emerge, with most claiming that business and society are intricately woven and that businesses had a responsibility to respond to societal needs and pressures. The founding of the International Association of Business and Society in 1990 reiterated the notion that all businesses around the globe face similar business and societal issues.

Another perspective regarding the history of corporate social responsibility was provided by Marchand (1998). Marchand (1998) explained that in the early twentieth century when the first phase of corporate merger was completed, business houses found themselves in a desperate need for legitimacy among those whose lives were affected by such a merger. Thus, the persona of the corporate house needed a soul to fill the vacuum it had created by displacing or co-opting traditional small town business establishments which had fostered emotional and familial attachments among the people inhabiting those towns. The need for a realignment of the public relations between the people and business houses marks the starting point of corporate social responsibility. Clark (2000) also explained the development of corporate social responsibility in terms of the

organizational need to create a corporate soul.

Defining Corporate Social Responsibility

There is no single authoritative definition of the term corporate social responsibility (Chaudhri, 2007; Fiesler, Hoffman, & Meckel, 2008; Ihlen, 2008). However, all of them emphasize the interrelationship between economic, environmental, and social aspects and impacts of an organization's activities. Most definitions revolve around the idea that corporate social responsibility is about minimizing the negative and maximizing the positive effects of organizational activity in relation to people, society and the environment (Ihlen, 2008).

Davis (1973) defined corporate social responsibility as "the firm's consideration of, and response to, issues beyond the narrow economic, technical, and legal requirements of the firm... to accomplish social benefits along with the traditional economic gains which the firm seeks" (Davis, 1973, pp. 312-13). Corporate social responsibility practice in the U.S. has been guided by Carroll's (1991) four step model of responsibilities which combines all four distinct responsibilities of a company. The responsibilities include economic responsibility to be profitable, the legal responsibility to abide by the laws of the respective society, the ethical responsibility to do what is right, just and fair, and the philanthropic responsibility to contribute to various kinds of social, educational, recreational or cultural purposes.

Another school of thought defined corporate social responsibility with regard to the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Clark, 2000; Waddock & Smith, 2000). Freeman (1984) defined stakeholder as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the

achievement of the organization's objectives. Clark (2000) traced the evolution and processes of corporate social responsibility and discussed commonalities between them and public relations. She noted that both disciplines acknowledged the need for relationship management and relationship building between an organization and its key stakeholders. Waddock and Smith (2000) defined corporate social responsibility as the relationships that a company develops with its stakeholders.

Besser (1998) also explained corporate social responsibility in terms of stakeholder relationships broadly constituting responsibility to consumers, employees, and other shareholders; responsibility to the environment; and responsibility to community development.

Hirschland (2006) provided a classic definition of corporate social responsibility which is considered for the purpose of this paper. He defined corporate social responsibility as “the expectations of businesses by non-state stakeholder groups, and the strategic management of these demands by businesses that help to assure profits and enterprise sustainability” (Hirschland, 2006, p. 6).

The Need and Importance of Corporate Social Responsibility Communication

Tian (2004) noted that the importance of corporate social responsibility increased because of the six key issues that gripped the world: the increase in rich-poor divide; the State’s disengagement; the advance of sustainability; the anti-corporate backlash; the trend to transparency; and hopes of new millennium. Therefore, the need for transparent and proactive communication of corporate social responsibility is a great concern. Owen (2003) defined corporate social reporting as the process of communicating the social and

environmental effects of organizations' economic actions to particular interest groups within society and to society at large. It involves extending the accountability of organizations beyond the traditional role of providing a financial account to the owners of capital, in particular shareholders. Chaudhri and Wang (2007) analyzed corporate social reporting in line with the legitimacy theories and extended the argument to include ongoing stakeholder dialogue and the larger process of building corporate reputation.

Corporate social responsibility communication goes beyond financial reporting and is fraught with challenges. In a climate marked by informed publics and a critical media, companies are facing clearly articulated expectations from customers and consumers regarding their contributions to sustainable development. This puts pressure on organizations to maintain transparency and be proactive in communicating with their publics. Historically, companies have used different media to get their word out. The Internet represents a new medium for companies to use in communicating with their publics, both internal and external.

Chaudhri and Wang (2007) noted that the role of the Internet increased as one of the most preferred channels of corporate communication because of the compelling needs of transparency. Tian (2004) noted that corporate websites had become an icon for a company in a manner similar to that of a corporate logo. From the mid-1990s, large corporations began to use their websites to announce their presence on the Web, to promote the company image, to enhance public relations, to attract users to browse their products and services, and to collect user responses and other related data. Ihlen (2008) also noted that companies use their websites as a channel to communicate with their

various publics and to present their positive images. Ihlen (2008) did a rhetorical study of how corporations try to come across as good environmental citizens. Ihlen (2008) noted that companies use four overarching strategies: they claim to improve the world; they say they clean up their own act; they point to approval from others; and they argue that they care about consumers.

Antal, Dierkies, MacMillan, and Marz (2002) also noted the importance of corporate social responsibility communication via websites. The Internet facilitated the rapid spread of much more comprehensive information, and made it possible for companies to solicit more feedback from a range of stakeholders. They explained that the Web offered the organizations the opportunity to design messages that do not have to follow dictates of gatekeepers as in print and electronic journalism. They also emphasized that one of the most strategic benefits of the Internet for Corporate Social Responsibility communication is that it allows an ongoing and interactive process. Other conventional means of communication can only present a rather static annual product.

Several studies have illustrated the importance of mission statements on corporate websites for the portrayal of corporate social responsibility. Chun and Davies (2001) analyzed the mission statements from leading American corporate websites to investigate e-reputation. They discovered that competence was the most emphasized dimension of brand personalities. Amato and Amato (2002) also investigated the mission statements of *Forbes* and *Fortune* companies to determine their commitment to the quality of life goals. Maynard and Tian (2004) analyzed Chinese websites of the 100 top global brands. They concluded that top global brands that have a Chinese website are designed to build

and maintain the image of being socially responsible in China. Tian (2004) conducted a computer-assisted text analysis of the mission statements of the *Fortune* 100 companies' websites. The study revealed that fair business practice was the most prominently presented category of corporate social responsibility in the mission statements analyzed.

Signitzer and Anja (2009) noted three advantages of corporate sustainability communication. They explained that firstly, it can enhance trust and credibility among customers by positioning the company as a sustainable organization with sustainable products. Such communication on the topic of sustainability may become a catalyst for environmental learning and change processes within the company also and, as a consequence, a catalyst for innovation and competitive advantage. Secondly, it can complement other communication instruments like market communication, advertisement, and sales promotion to build relations with customers to enhance sales of sustainable products. Finally, by empowering the general public, it could initiate processes of change within society which, in fact, could result in more sustainable behavior of various publics.

Several studies have proved the benefits of communication of corporate social responsibility to organizations. Hemingway and Maclagan (2004) noted that although companies' strategies in social responsibility may or may not be directly aimed at commercial benefits, good performance in corporate social responsibility increases the legitimacy of a company in social and political activities. Margolis and Walsh (2001) noted that the majority of empirical studies about the relationship between corporate social performance and financial performance found a positive relationship between these

two variables. Therefore, adopting corporate social responsibility into corporate strategies is not only beneficial for the public and society, but also for the companies themselves.

The importance of corporate social responsibility and the increased importance of communicating it via the Internet makes an interesting case for the study of corporate websites to examine the ways various organizations are disseminating their social actions. A textual frame analysis of corporate websites can provide deep insights into the strategy of constructing corporate social responsibility discourse among people.

Reviewing Framing

The concept of framing was originally developed in social sciences to refer to the principles of organization that arrange social events in order. Baran and Davis (2006) wrote that frame analysis was Goffman's idea about how people use expectations to make sense of everyday life. People learn social cues from daily interaction and media content. They explained that a frame is a specific set of expectations used to make sense of a social situation at a given point in time.

Most definitions of framing either have an interpretive approach or see framing as the main idea. Gitlin (1980) stated that frames are “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (p. 6). Thus, Gitlin (1980) said that framing of an issue is influenced by which pieces of information are included or excluded. Gamson (1989) also noted that as the issue is suggested, certain facts are divulged about the issue while others are omitted. Thus, selection of frames which derive their meanings from patterns of interpretation set

the tone for how content is viewed. Similarly, Entman (1993) elaborated that framing is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make it more salient in the communication context. In other words, framing in mass media is a process for interpreting information, during which media practitioners sort out stories from a pool of scattered messages, build links among them, highlight certain ones, and present the composed picture to the public.

Johnson-Cartee (2005) also presented an interpretive approach as she noted that framing deals with the organization of idea elements into a meaningful pattern. She explained that idea elements are symbolic devices in a culture that are grouped into interpretive packages. Each interpretive package has a symbolic signature which is a cluster of condensation symbols used to suggest its frame as well as its reasoning and justification. She further explained that condensation symbols were shorthand means by which large numbers of beliefs, feelings, values, and world view were shared. She also delineated various condensation symbols like metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images. Shi (2007) emphasized the intentional selection process and noted that framing was essentially a structure with inclusion, exclusion, and emphasis. Shi (2007) also noted that inclusion and exclusion are the two aspects of the process of selection, through which certain contents are chosen while others are intentionally filtered out.

Other media scholars view framing as the main idea. Reese (2001) noted that frames had the power to bring amorphous reality to a meaningful structure and considered the process to be much more than simple inclusion-exclusion of information.

Thus frames are active information generating as well as screening devices. He defined frames as the "*organizing principles* that are socially *shared* and *persistent* over time, that work *symbolically* to meaningfully *structure* the social world" (Reese, 2001, p. 11). Similarly, Hertog and McLeod (2001) noted that frames were more than just organizing principles and had their own content. Frames had a central idea accompanied by tremendous symbolic power, excess meanings, and widespread recognition.

Framing is also viewed from psychological as well as sociological perspectives. Johnson-Cartee (2005) noted different academic terms denoting the same intellectual construct. She noted that psychologists and psychiatrists utilize a construct called *schema* for frames and sociologists and political behaviorists coined the term *script* for their use. The psychological perspective emphasizes the structure of individual cognitive representations or schemata which serve as an individual's cognitive resource and influence her judgment (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Hertog and McLeod (2001) emphasized on the sociological perspective and considered frames to be cultural rather than cognitive phenomena. They noted that frames possess some central ideas like myths, narratives and metaphors and some peripheral ideas-and some relations of varying strength that link them. Hertog and McLeod (2001) added that frames are persistent over time and structure our understanding of social world. Underlining the sociological approach they wrote that frames were dynamic and were altered and replaced over time with change in social situations or politics or economy.

Frames in Media Content and Information Senders

Media content is replete with frames. Frames can be called Johnson-Cartee's (2005) condensation symbols like metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images. These symbols when repeated or reinforced convey the intent of the sender. She added that certain condensation symbols called *appeals to principle* evoke moral values, sometimes religious values, and general societal and cultural self-images to generate enthusiasm for particular policy choices (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 171). Gamson (1989) also noted that a particular frame could favor the interest of a particular individual, group, or source.

Hertog and McLeod (2001) wrote that frames reflect the deliberate attempts of individuals or groups to structure public discourse in a way that privileges their goals and means of attaining them. They explained that when a topic is framed, its context is determined, its major tenets prescribed, individuals, groups, organizations are assigned the roles of protagonists, antagonist or spectators and legitimacy of varied strategies for action is defined. Reese (2001) also noted that the way a social problem is framed affects the way people respond to it. The way information is structured affects cognitive processing, and audience schemata interact with texts to determine the ultimate meaning derived from them.

Similarly, Hertog and McLeod (2001) stressed that one of the goals of framing is to identify the array of strategies and tactics groups employed to influence social framing of a topic. Johnson-Cartee (2005) wrote, referring to news promoters, that they construct information that promotes their preferred version of reality. Also, the news promoters

seeking to influence the public construct frames to influence perceptions of themselves, their organizations, or the policies, programs, or causes with which they are involved (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 199).

Hallahan (1999) provided one of the most comprehensive theoretical structures for framing. This paradigm described seven framing models as well as their adjustments in public relations. The seven models were framing of situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibilities, and news. Of these seven models, some models are of special relevance to corporate social responsibility. For example, attribute framing is operated through using pictures, redefining problems, and promoting certain experiences, so as to call attention to certain attributes of the subject under discussion while obscuring others. As a result, the process influences audiences' judgment by altering their evaluation criteria. This is what was precisely done while framing social actions of an organization in corporate social performance reports in the 1970s. Also, Baran and Davis (2005) noted that Goffman defined ads or promotional materials as hyperritualized representations of social action where hyperritualized representation is the media content constructed to highlight only the most meaningful actions. Both the theoretical concepts show that the intentions of the information sender govern the process of framing.

Framing Analysis

Pan and Kosicki (1993) noted that framing analysis is an empirical analysis of media content. This approach views media content as a set of organized and symbolic devices. By identifying symbolic elements in the content frames, media scholars can learn how media practitioners use them to process information and construct reality.

However, Koenig (2006) noted that even though frame analyses are fashionable, the corresponding methodological literature is scant because of the methodological obscurity of Goffman's initial formulation. He added that even though frame analyses span a number of disparate approaches some of them are not even compatible with each other.

Maher (2001) noted that most of the framing studies offer no measurement model at all. Thus, a growing body of scholarship insists that frames should correspond to identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics. Several studies in this tradition use multi-scale items to code data and others employ keywords to identify frames. However, reliance on creativity might translate into analytical arbitrariness (Maher, 2001, p. 84).

Literature Overview and Conceptual Framework

The literature review demonstrated that framing is applied to the presentation of an organization in a medium, with the practices of inclusion, exclusion, and emphasis. These practices compose the building blocks of a corporate image. These concepts are also synonymous with Entman's definition of framing. Also, studies by Chaudhri and Wang (2007) and Tian (2004) demonstrated the importance of websites to dissipate corporate social responsibility messages of organizations. Thus, framing study of corporate social responsibility on organizational websites becomes relevant and important.

To use Goffmanian terms, the corporate social responsibility oriented content on the websites is the *hyperritualized representation* of the organizations' social action.

Studies by Hemingway and Maclagan (2004) and Margolis and Walsh (2001) demonstrated a positive relationship between social performance and financial performance. Therefore, exhibition of social actions by organizations on their websites can be explained as a motivated action. It is a deliberate attempt by the organizations to structure public discourse in a way that favors their goals and means of attaining them. This motive of the organizations is fulfilled by employing framing as they develop content for public consumption. Hallahan (1999) explained under attribution framing how the framing process achieves this motivated behavior of influencing audiences' judgment by altering their evaluation criteria.

Hertog and McLeod (2001) explained the power vested with frames as they structure the understanding of social world in various ways. When a topic is framed, its context is determined, its major tenets prescribed, individuals, groups, organizations are assigned the roles of protagonists, antagonist or spectators and legitimacy of varied strategies for action is defined. Similarly, strategic framing of corporate social responsibility on websites by organizations helps them secure long term profit by building reputation, forestalling regulation, securing a more stable societal context for business, and reducing operating costs by avoiding conflict (Carroll, 1999; Davis, 1973). This reputation building by portraying a positive self-image by organizations is achieved by four overarching strategies as explained by Ihlen (2008). They claim to improve the world, they say they clean up their own act, they point to approval from others, and they argue that they care about people.

The condensation symbols provided by Johnson-Cartee (2005) will help identify

the frames in the study. Studies by Chaudhri and Wang (2007) and Tian (2004) will help in the process of coding. Tian's (2004) emphasis on mission statements will help in the search of relevant tabs in the website for keywords. Ihlen's (2008) four overarching strategies can help in the detection of frames that denote positive image of the corporations.

Research Questions

Based on the literature, the research questions for this study on how *Fortune 10 Green Giants* framed the phenomenon of corporate social responsibility are as follows:

1. What frames were used by the *Fortune 10 Green Giants* to portray their commitment to corporate social responsibility?
2. What were the most used frames and the least used frames?
3. Was there a presence of pattern or patterns in the way these 10 companies framed CSR on their websites?

Chapter 3

Method

This study explored how the *Fortune 10 Green Giants* framed corporate social responsibility on their websites. The study examined the textual content of the corporate websites of these companies and determined what frames were used to portray their commitment to corporate social responsibility. Theoretical foundations of framing were applied to analyze websites' textual content.

This study utilized the method proposed by Entman (1993) for a framing study. This study employed keywords to identify frames in the textual content of the corporate websites. The sample chosen for the purpose of the study consisted of the corporate websites of *Fortune 10 Green Giants*. The Green Giants are Honda, Continental, Suncor, Tesco, Alcan, PG&E, S.C. Johnson, Goldman Sachs, Swiss Re, and Hewlett-Packard. Honda and Continental are transportation companies. Suncor and PG&E are energy companies. Goldman Sachs and Swiss Re are financial services providers. Tesco is a global grocery and general merchandising retailer. Hewlett-Packard is a computer systems company. S.C. Johnson manufactures household chemicals and cleaning supplies and Alcan is an aluminum manufacturer. These 10 companies went beyond what the law requires in their respective countries to operate in an environmentally responsible way in terms of environmentally healthy practices as well as environmental information disclosure.

To select the companies on the *Green Giants* list, *Fortune* began by soliciting nominations from environmentalists and consultants who had worked in the trenches of corporate America. They nominated nearly 100 companies. *Fortune* decided to concentrate on bigger firms because their environmental footprint was more important. Thus, the websites of these organizations were reflective of corporate social responsibility in a prominent way. As the study progressed it became evident that these websites were rife with relevant frames.

Framing is a new approach to study corporate social responsibility communication. There has been little research in the past that used framing to study corporate social responsibility communication; however, most of these researches have been focused on the effects of framing rather than observing the phenomenon of framing *per se*. This study has not only identified the prevalent frames using keywords and catch-phrases but has also discovered the most popular and least frequent frames. It has also detected patterns in which these frames occur.

The textual content of the corporate websites of the *Fortune 10 Green Giants* formed the sample of this study. A total of 275 Web pages were analyzed for the purpose of the study. The corporate websites of these 10 corporations were chosen as a sample for the purpose of this study because they are global organizations with huge ecological footprints. *Fortune 10 Green Giants* also happen to have a huge consumer base across the globe that forces them to make their corporate social responsibility related content more conspicuous.

The thesis analyzed the *mission statements*, *environment*, *green index*, *responsible development*, *sustainable development* sections of the *Fortune 10 Green Giants'* websites. The websites were analyzed to search for keywords and catchphrases denoting the proposed frames. The frequency of each keyword on each website was mapped in tables.

The importance of mission statements in organizational websites for the placement of corporate social responsibility frames was demonstrated by Tian (2004). Also, Chaudhri and Wang's (2007) work helped identify the relevant sections of websites for the detection of frames.

To use Johnson-Cartee's (2005) terminology, for the purpose of identification of *condensation symbols* rigorous brainstorming sessions were employed by the researcher with a peer group. Also, to avoid researcher's fiat, several journals, articles, and websites were perused to generate frames.

For the purpose of generation of keywords, studies by Chun and Davies (2001), Amato and Amato (2002), Maynard and Tian (2004), and Ihlen (2008) were considered apart from other literature. For the purpose of the study, a record of all the tabs and sections of the websites reviewed was kept. Also, the links to all the Web pages studied were saved and recorded.

Ihlen (2008) did a rhetorical study of how corporations try to come across as good environmental citizens. Ihlen (2008) noted that companies use their websites as a

channel to communicate with their various publics and to present their positive images. Ihlen's study shows that companies use four overarching strategies: they claim to improve the world; they say they clean up their own act; they point to approval from others; and they argue that they care about consumers.

Based on Ihlen's (2008) study and a careful perusal of the textual content of the *Fortune 10 Green Giants*' corporate websites, the following frames were proposed.

Awareness Frame

This frame is employed by organizations to portray their awareness of the issue in questions. This frame is indicated by the rampant usage of buzzwords like *environment*, *global warming*, *climate change*, *solar*, *biofuels*, etc. The organizations intend to demonstrate to the more informed consumers their knowledge of the problem. Using words like *carbon footprint* and *recycle* helps them show their familiarity with the current environmental concerns as well as preventive measures.

Responsibility Frame

This frame is categorized by the attempt of the organizations to show their efforts to be a responsible global citizen. This frame shows the duty-bound and answerable face of these organizations which includes taking responsibility of the repercussions of their acts be it to the environment or the society. The frame included use of words and phrases like *triple bottom line*, *protect*, *improve*, *commitment*, *responsible*, *Good Samaritan*, etc.

Standardization Frame

This frame denotes the corporations' adherence to national, international, and global standards of social responsibility. Standardization provides immediate legitimacy to the organization's efforts and helps them display their rankings. Some examples of standard codes of conduct are U.N. Global Compact, Dow Jones Sustainability Index, Global Reporting Initiative, etc.

Transparency Frame

This frame shows the corporations' efforts to be transparent with their acts and the willingness to share them with all their stakeholders. This frame primarily underlines the fairness with which these corporations conduct their business. This frame is represented by environmental social governance reports, annual reports, sustainability reports, etc.

Care and Concern Frame

This frame is used by organizations to portray the non-financial concerns of the corporations. These concerns can be expressed in terms of the corporations' specific initiatives or objectives achieved or slated for near future. *Care and Concern* frame often reflects the humane side of corporations. This frame can be characterized by the use of words and phrases like *values*, *life*, *human capital*, *respect*, *harmony*, *balance*, etc.

Our Product-Our Way Frame

This frame shows how corporations legitimize their products, technology, and business in general with respect to corporate social responsibility. Added emphasis on the disclosure of ingredients, details about the technology employed, the source of energy consumed, nitty-gritty about packaging and transportation reflect this frame. This frame also underlines the ecological projects and partnerships undertaken by organizations.

Approval Frame

Approval frame is the seal of legitimacy for the corporations. Organizations use this frame to display their achievements as leaders in corporate citizenship. Approval from metrics at global scale demonstrating high quality index of the corporations authenticates their claims and helps them win the loyalty and support all their stakeholders. This frame included awards, recognitions, high rankings in accredited social and environmental listings, and leadership certificates.

To determine the most popular and least frequent frames the presence and frequency of all the keywords and catchphrases, and resultantly the presence and frequency of all the frames was counted and tabulated for each of the 10 websites. The data are represented graphically as well using pie-charts.

For the purpose of determining the presence of pattern or patterns in the way *Green Giants* framed corporate social responsibility, their websites were analyzed to detect any order in which the all the proposed frames and the following information occur: norms, press coverage, alignment with general standards such as corporate codes

of conduct, and alignment with government sponsored codes such as U.N. Global Compact, Dow Jones Sustainability Index, and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development guidelines.

The intercoder reliability of the study ranged from .80 to .93. For *Awareness* frame, the reliability was calculated to be .93. *Responsibility* frame had an intercoder reliability of .86. *Care and Concern* frame's intercoder reliability was calculated to be .84. *Standardization* frame had an intercoder reliability of .85. *Approval* frame and *Transparency* frame had an intercoder reliability of .80 and *Our Product-Our Way* frame had an intercoder reliability of .82.

Chapter 4

Results

The textual content of the corporate websites of *Fortune 10 Green Giants* was analyzed to answer the three research questions. A total of seven frames were proposed: *Awareness* frame; *Care and Concern* frame; *Responsibility* frame; *Standardization* frame; *Transparency* frame; *Approval* frame; and *Our Product-Our Way* frame. *Environment*, *Greener Living*, *Responsibility*, *About Us*, *Corporate Responsibility*, and *Global Citizenship* sections of the *Fortune 10 Green Giants'* websites were analyzed to determine what keywords and catchphrases were used to denote each frame. The frequency of each keyword on each website was tallied in the coding sheet.

The first research question was to identify the keywords. A total of 126 keywords and catchphrases were identified. Table 1 shows the average value of each frame in percentage on the *Fortune 10 Green Giants'* websites. Table 2 shows the total frequency and percentage of each frame on each website. For the list of keywords see Appendix A.

The second research question was to identify the most used and the least used frames on the *Fortune 10 Green Giants'* websites. The most used frame was *Awareness* frame with highest average of 41.20%. The most used key words were *environment*, *energy*, *emission*, and *reduce*. This frame was visible in high frequencies on nine websites. On Honda's corporate website, 50.91% of the frames were *Awareness* frames. Continental had 39.21% *Awareness* frames, Suncor had 55.98%, Tesco had 62.09%, PG&E had 41.59%, and HP had 38.71% *Awareness* frames. Only one website had *Care and Concern* frame as the most frequent frame and it was Alcan (38.20%). However,

Care and Concern frame came quite close to being the most frequent one in the case of Goldman Sachs' website also. The presence of *Awareness* frame on Goldman Sachs' website was 33.82% and of *Care and Concern* frame was 30.64%. Thus, the primary focus of these corporations was awareness. It is important for corporations to establish their awareness about the issues of concern as they have highly informed publics and a critical media to which to cater.

Responsibility and *Care and Concern* frames fall second in popularity. In fact, they come quite close as their averages are 20.98 and 21.28 respectively. The *Responsibility* frame is an action frame with keywords like *protect* and *improve* as it emphasizes the responsible aspect of the corporation's persona. *Care and Concern* frame is marked by the use of emotionally charged language which has proved effective in most means of communication. Keywords such as *home*, *family*, *trust*, and *care* provide a human face to the persona of the corporations. The most popular *Responsibility* frame keywords were *safe*, *responsible*, *commit*, and *develop*. The most popular *Care and Concern* frame keywords were *community*, *ethic*, *human*, and *help*.

Awareness, *Care and Concern*, and *Responsibility* frames came up as the top three frames of the study. One of the least used frames was *Our Product-Our Way* frame. This frame had an average of 4.31%. Two corporations did not exhibit this frame at all. Alcan and Swiss Re ignored this frame on their corporate websites primarily due to the nature of their businesses and products.

Table 1

Average Value in Percentage of Each Frame on the Websites of Fortune 10 Green Giants

Frame	Average in Percentage
Awareness	41.2
Responsibility	20.9
Care	21.3
Standardization	3.7
Transparency	2.2
Our Product-Our Way	4.3
Approval	6.4

Table 2

Total Frequency/Percentage of Each Frame on Each Website

	Corporations									
	Honda	Continental	Suncor	Tesco	Alcan	PG&E	S.C. Johnson	Goldman Sachs	Swiss Re	HP
Frames	*f /%*	*f /%*	*f /%*	*f /%*	*f /%*	*f /%*	*f /%*	*f /%*	*f /%*	*f /%*
Awareness	419/50.9	278/39.2	702/55.9	452/62.1	85/22.6	257/41.6	238/35.6	138/33.8	91/31.5	751/38.7
Responsibility	133/16.2	155/21.9	224/17.9	69/9.5	108/28.7	166/26.9	147/22	100/24.5	75/25.3	332/17.1
Care	43/5.2	121/17.1	117/9.3	159/21.8	144/38.2	100/16.2	151/22.6	125/30.6	78/27	480/27.7
Standardization	32/3.9	39/5.5	66/5.3	7/.9	16/4.2	23/3.7	50/7.5	3/.7	12/4.1	24/1.2
Transparency	25/3	0/0	24/1.9	10/1.4	9/2.4	15/2.4	22/3.3	13/3.2	6/2.9	27/1.4
Approval	13/1.6	95/13.4	8/.6	1/.1	15/3.9	42/6.8	43/6.4	22/5.4	29/10	305/15.7
Our Product	158/19.2	21/2.9	113/9	30/4.1	0/0	15/2.4	17/2.5	7/1.7	0/0	21/1.1

Other frames that showed up on the lower side of the scale were *Standardization, Transparency,* and *Approval*. All the corporations have tried to align their social responsibility efforts to national and global committees and standards. Adherence to standards helps the corporations claim legitimacy for their actions. Some of the *Standardization* frame labels are Dow Jones Sustainability Index, United States Environmental Protection Agency, Global Reporting Initiative, and United States Green Building Council. The *Standardization* frame had an average of 3.72%.

The least frequent frame turned out to be *Transparency* with an average of 2.20%. Nine out of 10 websites exhibited presence of *Transparency* frame by sharing their annual sustainability reports with the consumers and the media. These corporations have made their gross consumption of energy, pollutant-discharge details, recycle efforts, and other repercussions of their business activities available to the publics. This frame establishes the fact that the organizations in question take responsibility of their actions.

All the websites have references to some award or recognition that has been given to the corporation. These awards, or the *Approval* frames, legitimize the corporations' claims to being responsible. This frame had an average of 6.41%.

Figure 1 compares the average value in percentage of all the seven frames on *Fortune 10 Green Giants'* websites.

The third research question was to detect the presence of a pattern in the way all the seven frames were employed on the corporate websites of the *Fortune 10 Green Giants*. The study revealed that all the websites have their content organized in a

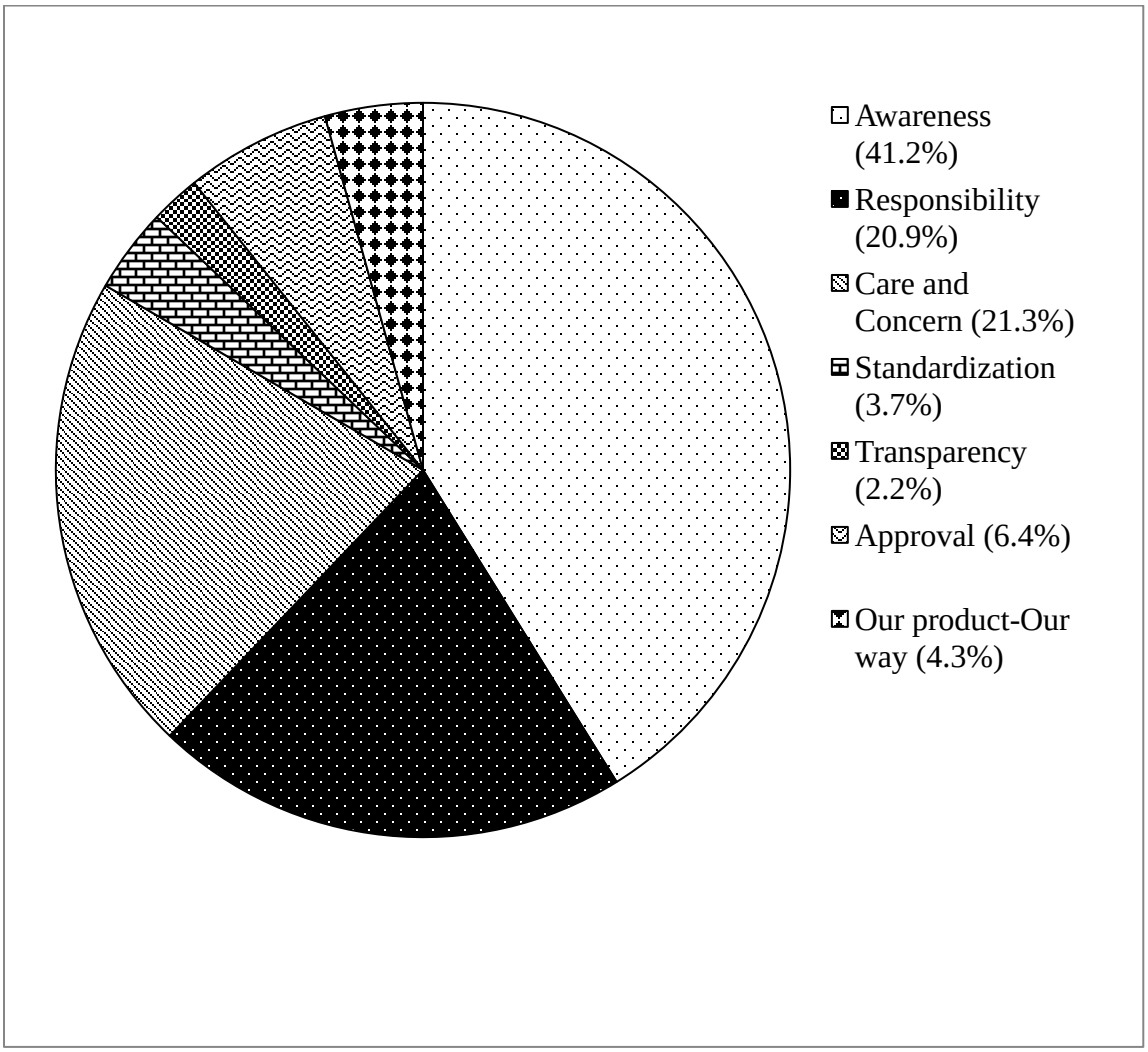

Figure 1. Average Value in Percentage of All the Seven Frames on Fortune 10 Green Giants' Websites.

hierarchy. To view the websites using a set of lenses derived from the frames proposed, there was a visible hierarchy in which each of the frames appeared on the websites. All 10 websites emphasized demonstrating their awareness about the issue (*Awareness* frame). Exhibiting awareness about the social and environmental issues was at the top of the corporations' priority list. Second came in the need to communicate that they feel responsible to the society at large (*Responsibility* frame). The corporations used keywords like *leadership*, *protect*, and *develop* to communicate that their awareness about the issues has propelled them into actions and initiatives and that they are action-oriented organizations and are not sitting idly. Closely following *Responsibility* frame on the priority list comes the *Care and Concern* frame. The corporations communicate that they care and are concerned about all their stakeholders be it their consumers, the environment and the society they operate in, or their shareholders.

The top three frames were an easier thing to do and subsequently communicate for the corporations on their respective websites. However, validating and legitimizing all that they claim on their websites was the more difficult task. Hence, frames like *Transparency*, *Standardization*, and *Approval* appeared on the lower rungs of the priority list for the *Fortune 10 Green Giants*. *Approval* by display of awards and *Standardization* by adhering to globally set standards took over *Transparency* in the hierarchy of frames visible on these 10 websites.

The corporate website of Hewlett-Packard exhibited a careful usage of all the seven frames. It came across as a perfect example of a well-balanced website with

enough claims substantiated by awards. Hewlett-Packard's corporate website was the one to exhibit highest number of frames as well.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Media scholars have noted the importance of corporate social responsibility communication via websites. The Internet not only facilitates rapid spread of massive information to a global audience, but it also offers the organizations the opportunity to design messages that do not have to follow dictates of gatekeepers as in print and electronic journalism. The most strategic benefit of the Internet for Corporate Social Responsibility communication is that it allows an ongoing and interactive process rather than a static annual product.

Corporate Social Responsibility communication via websites has enhanced trust and credibility of corporations among customers. It also complements other communication instruments like market communication, advertisement, and sales promotion to build relations with customers to enhance sales of sustainable products. Although company strategies in social responsibility may or may not be directly aimed at commercial benefits, good performances in corporate social responsibility often result in good year-end results, provided the organization's acts of social, political, or environmental relevance were well communicated with all the stakeholders.

The proposed corporate social responsibility frames appeared on each of the 10 Green Giants' websites. *Awareness*, *Responsibility*, and *Care and Concern* were the top three frames employed by the Green Giants. The least frequent frame was *Transparency* frame with the lowest average of 2.20%.

Demonstrating acquaintance with an issue is the first step organizations take

before they claim their preparedness to handle the same. Therefore, *Awareness* frame was the most used frame in the study as it appeared on each of the 10 websites at the highest frequency. The *Awareness* frame provides a learned face to the corporations. Use of *Awareness* frame demonstrates that the organizations are mindful of the social and physical environment in which they operate and put forth their perceptiveness about the issue in front of the consumers. The most used key words were *environment, energy, emission,* and *reduce*. *Responsibility* frame was second on the list. This frame is an action-oriented frame. This frame conveyed that the corporations are prepared to take the responsibility for their actions. They will act, prevent, and protect. The most frequent *Responsibility* frame keywords were *safe*, *responsible*, *commit,* and *develop*.

Care and concern frame uses emotionally charged language. This frame is used by organizations to portray their non-financial concerns. *Care and concern* frame was the third most frequently used frame. It provides a soul to the personality of the corporations. It is definitely a powerful frame as two corporations (Alcan and Swiss Re) used it at higher frequency than *Awareness* and *Responsibility* frames. The most popular *Care and Concern* frame keywords were *community*, *ethic*, *human*, and *help*.

The *Standardization* frame helps the corporations bolster all their claims by providing standards to which to adhere and quote. It sets the criteria for companies to meet. All 10 corporations used this frame to validate their claims. The *Transparency* frame emphasizes that corporations have nothing to hide as they share details about the repercussions of their business on the society and environment at large. However, this frame was a tough test to pass for many, thus the *Transparency* frame was the least used

frame with the lowest average of 2.20%. Continental was one corporation that did not share any reports or details about its business on the website and had zero frequency on the *Transparency* frame.

The *Approval* frame provides the final seal of legitimacy to the corporations. All 10 *Green Giants* mentioned all the awards they had won. The Continental website had no *Transparency* frames at all but used a high number of *Approval* frames. It used the *Approval* frame to validate all the claims and to make up for no transparency on website. The reason for frames appearing in this fashion could be Continental's business nature. As an airline company is a fuel-guzzling corporation thus, Continental side-stepped any annual sustainability report and tried to balance it by mentioning a high number of awards.

It was also observed that different organizations had different emphases in terms of the frames they chose owing to the nature of their businesses. For example, Alcan chose not to use any *Our Product-Our Way* frame at all as its product involves mining of aluminum resources— inappropriate for discussion on a website. Nonetheless, as noted in the Results section, a definite pattern does exist in the way Fortune 10 Green Giants have framed the phenomenon of corporate social responsibility.

It was also noted that a relatively low frequency of one frame often led to a high frequency of another and *vice versa*. For example, Continental Airlines exhibited no *Transparency* frames on its website. It shared no annual reports or details about the impact of its business but exhibited a high number of *Approval* frames. It paid less

attention to the *Transparency* frame as it had enough *Approval* frames to balance it. Thus, this study presents an interesting finding that the content of the website is a function of the intention of the corporation as the corporation manages its reputation among the stakeholders masking some information and highlighting others.

Similarly, use of a high number of *Standardization* frames by some websites was often followed up by a high frequency of *Approval* frames as these two frames reinforce each other. However, the case was not true for all the corporations.

The corporate website of Hewlett-Packard exhibited a careful usage of all the seven frames. It came across as a perfect example of a well-balanced website with enough claims substantiated by awards. Hewlett-Packard's corporate website exhibited the highest number of frames as well.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the existing corporate social responsibility and framing literature. It is one of the first studies to study corporate social responsibility by framing practices. Corporate social responsibility has not been studied using framing yet. Most studies are focused on the effects of framing rather than framing itself. This thesis reported a conceptual study that dealt with corporate social responsibility frames in detail rather than a treatise on the effects of framing. This study also demonstrated an interesting finding that frames often show the interest of the corporations; that is, the interest of the information sender governs the process of framing.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study could be enhanced by adding the dimension of time to the method. For example, observing corporate website content for corporate social responsibility frames before and after the economic recession of 2008 can lead to new comparisons. Due to a shifting focus of organizations from social responsibility to financial responsibility, their website content should have a visible effect.

This study could be further expanded by comparing the website content of larger and smaller corporations doing similar businesses. The degree of importance granted to corporate social responsibility communication compared to the size of corporation can lend interesting insights in corporate communication studies. This study could also be a precursor to greenwashing studies of large corporations.

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Appendix

Frames and Their Indicators

Awareness Frame

1. Biofuel
2. Biodegradable
3. Climate change
4. Carbon footprint
5. Clean
6. Environment
7. Energy
8. Earth
9. Ecology
10. Ecosystem
11. Ecofriendly
12. Ecoproducts
13. Emission
14. Fuel
15. Green
16. Greenhouse Gases
17. GHG
18. Global warming

19. Impact
20. Nature
21. Petroleum
22. Reduce
23. Reuse
24. Recycle
25. Reforestation
26. Renewable
27. Sustainable
28. Solar
29. Vegetation
30. Wildlife

Responsibility Frame

1. Accountable
2. Benefit
3. Commit
4. Certainty
5. Conserve
6. Develop
7. Dependable
8. Empowered

9. Global Citizen
10. Improve
11. Leader
12. Proactive
13. Protect
14. Preserve
15. Prevent
16. Responsible
17. Reliable
18. Resource
19. Safe
20. Solve
21. Triple Bottom Line
22. Vision

Care and Concern Frame

1. Care
2. Concern
3. Clarity
4. Community
5. Culture
6. Dream

7. Dedication
8. Dignity
9. Ethic
10. Future
11. Fair
12. Family
13. Harmony
14. Home
15. Health
16. Honesty
17. Human
18. Help
19. Integrity
20. Life
21. Nurture
22. Promise
23. Quality
24. Relation
25. Respect
26. Society
27. Save
28. Stakeholder

29. Support
30. Trust
31. Value

Standardization Frame

1. American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE)
2. Climate Disclosure Leadership Index
3. China Energy Conservation Program (CECP)
4. China State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA)
5. Climate Savers Computing Initiative's (CSCI)
6. Dow Jones Sustainability Index
7. Energy Star
8. Ethical Trading Initiative
9. LEED
10. ISO
11. Germany's Association for the Efficient and Environmentally Friendly Use of Energy (ASUE)
12. Global Reporting Initiative
13. Japan Environment Committee
14. Low carbon fuel standards (LCFS)
15. Natural Gas Industry Innovation

16. Specific Gas Emitters Regulations (SGER)
17. Sustainable Travel International
18. United Nations Global Compact
19. United Nations Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals
20. US Clean Air Act
21. US EPA
22. USGBC
23. World Environmental Committee
24. 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Accord

Transparency Frame

1. Transparent
2. Annual Sustainability Report
3. Corporate Responsibility Report
4. Annual Environmental Report

Approval Frame

1. Award
2. Recognize
3. Recognition

4. Rank
5. Success