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15 Years of Research on the Use of Storytelling in the Dissemination of CSR

Viola Gjylbegaj* and Estrella Barrio-Fraile

Facultat Ciències de la Comunicació, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Carrer de la Vinya, s/n, 08193 Bellaterra, Barcelona, Spain

ABSTRACT

This study conducts a systematic review of research published from January 2009 to December 2023 on the use of storytelling in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication. The aim is to analyze the relationship between CSR and storytelling from an academic perspective, demonstrating how storytelling serves as a potent tool for shaping perceptions, engaging stakeholders, and enhancing organizational image within the realm of CSR. Articles from the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases were reviewed, with data extracted as of December 31, 2023. Results highlight storytelling's pivotal role in humanizing complex CSR endeavors, fostering emotional connections with stakeholders, and authentically conveying organizational values. These findings emphasize the strategic importance of integrating CSR into core business operations as a fundamental aspect of organizational identity and responsibility.

Keywords: Communication, CSR, organizational behavior, stakeholder engagement, storytelling, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays a vital role in shaping organizational behavior and stakeholder relationships. CSR fosters trust, loyalty, and engagement when integrated with effective communication strategies. Storytelling has become a key tool in humanizing CSR efforts, enhancing reputation, and creating emotional connections. Scholars highlight the significance of storytelling in shaping perceptions and engaging stakeholders. This study seeks to explore the relationship between CSR and storytelling by addressing the following research question: *What are the primary implications raised by these investigations concerning the relationship between CSR and storytelling?*

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E-mail addresses:
Viola.Gjylbegaj@autonoma.cat (Viola Gjylbegaj)
Estrella.Barrio@uab.cat (Estrella Barrio-Fraile)
* Corresponding author

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METHODOLOGY

This study systematically reviews CSR and storytelling literature from 2009 to 2023 using the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases. A total of 28 articles were analyzed to assess how CSR storytelling influences organizational practices and stakeholder perceptions. This systematic literature review follows the methodology of other studies (Aguaded et al., 2023; Rodríguez et al., 2023; Nieto-Ferrando J., Gómez-Morales B., & Castro-Mariño D. 2023), and focuses on two major databases: Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus. The search, conducted in September 2023, included terms like "storytelling" and "corporate social responsibility" or "CSR," and was limited to journal articles. Book chapters and conference proceedings were excluded. The earliest relevant study was from 2009. The review process involved three steps. First, literature was gathered using predefined filters from both databases. Second, 14 duplicate entries were removed, reducing the initial set from 52 to 38. Third, 10 more papers were excluded for not addressing the core relationship between CSR and storytelling, leaving 28 papers for final analysis.

Below is a diagram summarizing the process for selecting and including the final set of articles (Figure 1).

Phase 1. Initial search	**Phase 2. Elimination of Duplicates**
Databases: Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus **Search terms**: "storytelling" and "corporate social responsibility", "storytelling" and "CSR". **Time period**: From the inception of each database to September 2023 (The earliest article found on the subject dates to 2009) **Document type**: Article **Sample size (N)=52**	Duplicate articles found in both databases were removed. **N= 38**

Phase 3. Initial Researcher Analysis	**Phase 4. Analysis Table Application and Categorization**
The documents were reviewed, and 10 works were excluded from the sample, as the relationship between CSR and storytelling was not a core part of their analysis. **N = 28**	An analysis table was applied with variables and categorization. **N = 28**

Figure 1. Diagram of the process of selection and inclusion of the articles by phase
Source. Authors

RESULTS

This section outlines key insights into the relationship between CSR and storytelling, divided into three thematic blocks. The first block, *Discourse Analysis*, explores how CSR narratives are crafted through storytelling techniques and language. Studies like Hall et al. (2021) and Pérez et al. (2020) demonstrate how CSR stories humanize corporate activities and foster emotional connections, while critical approaches stress the need for ethical consistency between stated values and practices. Research on counter-narratives highlights the risks of perceived hypocrisy in CSR storytelling. The second block, *Communication Tools*, examines the channels used to share CSR narratives, such as corporate websites, social media, and reports. Studies emphasize the importance of selecting the right communication tools to engage diverse stakeholders. Research by Steenkamp and Rensburg (2019) and Coombs (2019) shows how multichannel strategies enhance CSR communication effectiveness. The third block, *Stakeholder Impact*, focuses on how CSR storytelling shapes stakeholder trust, loyalty, and engagement. Hall et al. (2021) show that compelling stories influence stakeholder support, while research explores how storytelling impacts organizational culture and leadership. Additionally, industry-specific studies highlight how CSR narratives vary by sector, offering tailored communication strategies.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Investigations into the relationship between CSR and storytelling reveal key insights. Storytelling significantly enhances communication effectiveness between companies and stakeholders. Engaging narratives with well-defined characters and clear plots fosters deeper connections, improving stakeholder engagement and increased transparency. Such stories humanize corporate actions and strengthen brand reputation by showcasing commitment to social and environmental responsibilities. Techniques like metaphor and foreshadowing emphasize long-term vision, reinforcing stakeholder trust and loyalty. Additionally, discourse analysis offers insights into CSR activities' cultural and leadership impacts, highlighting the need to integrate storytelling into CSR strategies for more meaningful consumer engagement.

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