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# From CSR to CSI: analysing consumers' hostile responses to branding initiatives in social media-scape

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# **From CSR to CSI: analysing consumers' hostile responses to branding initiatives in social media-scape**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose** - The paper analyses consumers' hostile responses and 'creative' re-interpretation of a proactive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) brand communication campaign on social media by a leading Italian company in the energy industry that came to be perceived as a reactive Corporate Social Irresponsibility (CSI) performance.

**Design/methodology/approach** - Taking Palazzo and Basu's framework of scapes (2007) as a starting point, the paper explores the intersection between branding and CSR studies. After consideration of the lack of empirical studies on this subject, a content analysis of tweets generated from the campaign 'Guerrieri' of Enel is performed.

**Findings** - Findings show the dialogic bottom-up approach results are ineffective due to the hijacking of original intent of the company in implementing its CSR communication initiatives. That is to say that corporate brand (CB) strategies can be easily re-interpreted in social media-scape in an opposing perspective, raising the risk of digital hijacking and boycotting initiatives.

**Practical implications** - From a practical standpoint, the study informs managers so that they can evaluate complex problems implicated in the creation of CSR activities aimed at engaging consumers and virtual communities. Besides, the paper would like to aid managers when they face discontent or activism, suggesting they should turn the attention of their stakeholders through a re-evaluation of relevant CSR activities, potentially leveraging on a loyal public which has completely interiorised CB values and can act as brand ambassadors.

**Originality/value** – The paper is one of the first attempts to study the nexus between CSR and CB in digitally-empowering contexts, clarifying the crucial role of social media-scape.

**Keywords:** Corporate social responsibility, corporate social irresponsibility, corporate brand, social media-scape, ethics, identity, value, consumption, content analysis, Enel.

**Paper type:** Research paper

## **1. Introduction**

While the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has always received huge consideration from different fields of study (e.g., Rupp and Mallory, 2015; Glavas, 2016; Jamali and Karam, 2018), researchers and scholars have been submerged by numerous outrages and other negligent corporate performances, such as environmental contaminations or manipulations of human resources' rights (e.g. Volkswagen's diesel emissions fraud, Apple's violation of human rights in China, etc.) that often push consumers to respond to branding initiatives with hostility (Hotten, 2015; Siano et al., 2017). These despicable actions, reported as Corporate Social Irresponsible (CSI) practices, are implemented by companies that prefer "being reactive as opposed to proactive in addressing corporate issues" to society (Jones et al., 2009: 304). CSI, in fact, is described as: "a decision to accept an alternative that is thought by the decision maker to be inferior to another alternative when the effects upon all parties are considered. Generally this involves a gain by one party at the expense of the total system" (Armstrong, 1977, p. 185).

It has been demonstrated that CSR and CSI are intrinsically linked (Lange and Washburn, 2012; Murphy and Schlegelmilch, 2013; Price and Sun, 2017) and are both affected by new media and development of digital technologies. Thanks to these technologies companies can succeed in implementing and promoting an impeccable conduct, but conversely, the stakeholders might perceive them as unethical and request corrective measures (Dowling, 2014). Hence, in order to avoid stakeholders' negative response against organisations and their brands, CSI and CSR need to be communicated differently. From a managerial point of view, communication about CSR needs to be flaunted, while irresponsible behaviours should just be quietly recognised (Kotchen and Moon, 2011; Lin et al., 2016). However, this is not always the case. Several companies, in fact, performing valid CSR strategies fail to communicate this effectively, while other companies acting irresponsibly to society can be in need of a crisis communication plan to deal with difficult circumstances that can involve consumers' unfriendly reactions to branding strategies (Grappi et al.,

2013a; Antonetti and Maklan, 2016). These are the two opposite extremes of a broad spectrum; in between, it is possible to find a grey area where companies trying to communicate their CSR could, on the contrary, be perceived as involved in CSI (Lin-Hi and Müller, 2013). Having said that, it is undisputed that both concepts CSR and CSI, through communication strategies, can influence corporate performances, company's cost structures or the direction of market outcomes (Kang et al., 2016), but the impact is on corporate brand management and ethics too (Balmer et al., 2011; Grohmann and Bodur, 2015). The existing relation between these factors is a multifaceted and controversial issue that can be addressed via different perspectives, namely identity (collective and individual identity), consumption (public brand representations, consumer empowerment, etc.) values (citizenship) (Golob and Podnar, 2011; Christensen et al., 2013), and has become even more complicated with the advent of digital technologies and the rise of the anti-global movement.

Thus, this paper aims to link all these different perspectives in a systematic way, focusing on consumers' hostile responses and 'creative' re-interpretation of the 'Guerrieri' CSR campaign on social media by a leading Italian company in the energy industry that came to be perceived as a reactive CSI initiative. This includes the analysis of a dialogic bottom-up approach that was ineffective due to the hijacking of the original intent of the organisation in its CSR communication initiatives aimed at strengthening the corporate brand (CB).

Starting from Palazzo and Basu's framework of scapes (2007), the paper investigates the intersection between corporate branding and CSR studies, showing the existence of a marked paucity of exploration on both theoretical and empirical sides. In fact, the literature review suggests that the usual focus on the traditional way to develop ethical brands can be counterproductive, as it does not clarify mechanisms that rule alternative brand representations of consumers, especially with regard to social media. Therefore, a new scape is added to the 'original' framework in order to fulfil this theoretical gap: the social media-scape. This revised framework shows that CSR and branding initiatives can be analysed with different framings and they have strong influences on different modes which illustrates that CB are ethically (or unethically) evaluated.

The crux of the paper is divided into several parts in addition to this introduction; a brief presentation of the past studies developed in the area is offered, a content analysis of tweets generated from the campaign ‘Guerrieri’ of Enel is performed, then related findings, discussions and conclusion are presented. The content analysis allowed us to investigate the role played by social media and to identify how relations between CSR, brand and ethics work and influence each other. Finally, the study contributions and limitations are summarised along with suggestions for future research.

## **2. Conceptual background: extending the field linking CSR, ethics and CB**

In the last decades, CB emerged in response to various challenges to traditional brand strategy (Hatch and Schultz 2010; Otubanjo et al., 2010; Pillai 2012). Savvy consumers, mature markets, declining brand loyalty have all progressively undermined traditional brand building strategies in favour of a more problematic approach to branding (Fetscherin and Usunier, 2012). Current debate is, in fact, characterised by a large adoption of social theories to the field of consumer research (i.e. postmodern theory, constructivism, consumer culture theory) as well as a shift of interest from product to CB (Balmer, 2010). Corporate brand has been defined as “the visual, verbal and behavioural expressions of an organisation’s unique business model” (Knox and Bickerton 2003: 1023). It is based on communication efforts and, thanks to them, CB succeeds in supporting a variety of product brands, which benefit from their belonging to a sole corporate marketing system (Berens et al., 2005; He and Balmer, 2007). Moreover, CB can be described as a specific super-structure which tries to protect the consistency of an organisation, strengthening the combination of its features and creating synergies between them (Einwiller and Will, 2002; Dacin and Brown, 2006). In addition, CB involves other different marketing issues such as brand personality, brand identity, brand image, brand associations, and brand communication (Uggla, 2006; Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). The integration of communication strengths and typical aesthetic features of CB

allows this issue to play an essential role in the frame of crisis management and in rebranding situations, as it aims at increasing corporate image, invigorating brand promise to customers, and reaching marketplace success (Jarventie-Thesleff et al., 2011; Fetscherin and Usunier, 2012; Bolhuis et al., 2018).

Therefore, it is clear that CB can potentially be perceived as a source of individual identity's tensions for consumers, as it 'summarises' the whole life of an organisation with all its values and characteristics and can be embraced as a sort of lifestyle to follow (Kornberger, 2010; Chernev et al., 2011; Cătălin and Andreea, 2014). At the same time, in a postmodern world, there are other individuals who tend to create their own symbolic world (differently from that given by institutions and/or organisations) and pursue single identity projects, overcoming traditional distinctions present in lifestyles or other fixed segmentation criteria (He and Balmer, 2007; Escalas and Bettman, 2005).

Nevertheless, CB addresses consumers' desire of feeling unique, creating and proposing a set of values, a basis for narratives built around a normative framework (Palazzo and Basu, 2007). Many of these narratives are boosted thanks to typical CSR contents and activities, which are able to create distinctive brand associations in the minds of stakeholders (Blombäck and Scandeliu, 2013)

On the other hand, it must be said that the rise of anti-globalisation movements as well as the explosion of digital technologies put more pressure on successful CB from an ethical perspective, as evidenced by boycotting initiatives and by multiplication of alternative representations of brands in digital media (Hutton and Fosdick, 2011; Swaminathan, 2016). The web became the space where consumers' hostile responses to CB initiatives seem to grow exponentially and where feelings of righteous fury or moral outrage can be easily spread in powerful online communities (Kähr et al., 2016). The perception that an organisation or its brands are behaving unfairly triggers angry reactions, as the feeling of rage – the “furious, overwhelming, extreme anger” (Surachartkumtonkun et al. 2013: 73) - pushes consumers to put in action every kind of tactics that can stop unethical corporate behaviours and CSI activities, including consumer brand sabotage, customer retaliation

and negative word of mouth (Grappi et al., 2013b). Only in this way, customers may feel relieved from the injustice suffered, and attenuate their perceived greed (Lindenmeier et al., 2012).

These circumstances involve an ethical backlash - the more successful is a brand, the more consumers demand high ethical standards – that poses a serious risk to companies, generating not only ineffective brand communications or CSI results but also potential reputation damage (Mark-Herbert and Von Schantz, 2007; Öberseder et al., 2013).

The moralisation of branding has been discussed by Palazzo and Basu (2007) who investigate three ‘landscapes’ (consumption, value and identity) that could be considered as issues which put together individual and social perspectives with CB. The approach is founded on Appadurai’s work (1990) that defines scapes as “blocks of imagined worlds” which are created by different imaginations of persons/groups (Appadurai, 1990: 329). Scapes are indeed real for people that live in such imaginary worlds, and are able to undermine the other imagined worlds created by institutions and companies (Appadurai, 2011). These constructs use the suffix ‘scape’ to express both mutability and multidimensionality and are strongly linked to each other. According to Giddens (2013), values and identity are strictly connected as the first can be considered the basis for the creation of the second one, but, meantime, both are affected by external/social transformations and can influence consumption preferences and decisions of buying (Arnould and Price, 2000; Beverland and Farrelly, 2009). The three interrelated building blocks can be useful when it comes to analysing the existing link between CSR and branding.

In particular, the identity-scape refers to the postmodern trend of replacing the established construction of identity with an individual process of deconstruction/reconstruction in an adaptive procedure of determining the self (Gabriel and Lang, 1995). Besides, in the deconstructing/reconstructing continuum of identity, traditional consumption rules play an essential role, introducing fragmentation and fluidity in the self (Firat and Dholakia, 2006; Firat et al., 1995). Nevertheless, the recent laws of consumption and the declining preference for brands – basis for the rise of identity’s fragmentation - fight with other innate processes in the self: individuals’ needs for

coherence and stability (Beck et al., 1995). This behavioural war results in a continuous process of rebuilding self-consciousness, self-realisation, and self-determination (Beck et al., 2003; Beck and Lau, 2005) via the normative framework offered by CB.

On the other hand, the consumption-scape focuses on the strong impact that consumption has on identity. This is not considered a negative aspect in terms of identity formation (Klein, 2000) but it just reflects the existence of a cognitive and moral independence of the ‘consuming’ individual (Fournier, 1998; Kozinets, 2002) due to the fact that consumption is an important activity in the lives of post-modern people. In particular, nowadays, what really affects identity is not the consumption *per se* but the possibility to achieve the specific brand that results in creating a status symbol and a ‘concrete’ meaning in line with the self and its values (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998; Schau, 2000; Escalas and Bettman, 2005).

Finally, values-scape indicates an “internal moral compass” that allows one to understand external issues and link them to the self (Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004, p. 362). As said before, values are the basis on which people shape their identity (Jüttner and Wehrli, 1994; Novak and Truskinovsky, 2017). Consequently, in terms of consumption, when individuals buy products that respect their self-worth, they should feel reassured and able to defend their values (Czellar and Palazzo, 2004; Schrempf and Palazzo, 2011). In terms of branding, this circumstance is even more accurate, in fact, values and value systems are clearly involved in building brand associations and brand structures/hierarchies (Keller, 2016; Angle and Forehand, 2016).

After analysing the link between the three scapes, it is clear that such a process “would be sensitive to the nature of the change (i.e., individualisation and globalisation) as well as the changing dynamics of branding as perceived by consumers, with exchanges among the scapes, in turn, shedding light on the twin phenomena of brand success and anti-brand activism” (Palazzo and Basu, 2007, p. 336). However, nowadays, it is not only individualisation and globalisation that have a great impact on the evolving process bonding values-identity and consumption, but digital media and, especially, social media are going to play an even more influencing role in this social field

(Hudson et al., 2016). Social media create symbiotic ‘cyber-identification’ between brands and consumers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This process depicts attitudes, individual information and communication that incite consumers to view CB as demonstrative of their personal identity (Talamo and Ligorio, 2001). Having said that, it is clear that social media-scape needs to be added to the existing framework of scapes (see Figure 1). Even if it shows several similarities with concepts of mediascape and techno-scapes (Appadurai, 1990), the social media-scape presents a number of distinctive factors – among others, immediacy, democracy and rapidity - that make it a powerful element in shaping the nexus between identity formation, consumption choices and development of a value system (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social media-scape refers both to distribution of electronic capabilities to create and spread information, and to images of the world that are structured thanks to these digital media (Gensler et al., 2013). Besides, it tends to be image-centred, narrative-based and able to reflect different views of the real world (Talamo and Ligorio, 2001) as media-scapes do. Moreover, social media-scape – resembling techno-scapes - concerns a global and fast-changing configuration of technology, influenced by the whole amount of complex relationships that involve money, politics, skilled practitioners, etc. (Appadurai, 1990).

It is important to recognise that social media-scape (as identity, consumption and value scapes) can entail, at the same time, brand support and brand opposition. The resolution of conflicts among consumers and companies may be reached by guaranteeing that consumption values and life values suggested by organisations, and spread through social media, are considered positively by stakeholders as providing consistency for their identity’s construction (Gensler et al., 2013).

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INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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Actively investigating the links among identity, consumption, values, CSR and social media involves analysing new key exchanges within elements that are part of the framework and their influence on perception of corporate branding - summarised in the following propositions:

P1 - social media-scape amplifies the vulnerability of CB strategies and brand communication campaigns, creating the condition for anti-brand narrations to influence the whole perception of CB. In this environment, the connection between identity-scape and value-scape goes beyond consumption and involves broader social dimensions that can affect CSR strategies and ethical branding activities resulting in causing CSI effects.

P2 - the organisations' ability to develop CSI, without being caught out, declines over time in response to stakeholder empowerment. Moreover, the organisations' capacity to manage brand successfully is going to decrease over time, if branding strategy is based only on product brand instead of communicating corporate values as the basis of a proper CB;

P3 - brand representations mainly built in an organised discursive space sustained by social media can easily be perceived as CSI practices;

P4 - alternative brand representations can be used to understand brand-related sociality - embedding superior brand performance - and ethical brand construction on social media-scape.

These propositions will be explored through a content analysis performed on Twitter of a corporate brand campaign.

Furthermore, the new flow of exchanges within the concepts' part of the revised framework will be investigated by giving particular attention to the under-explored link existing between CSR, ethics and CBs.

### **3. Methodology**

Content analysis has been chosen due to the fact that is extensively used in marketing communications' literature, in order to provide systematic insights and make replicable inferences about the communication content (Nacar and Burnaz, 2011; Neuendorf, 2016). Moreover, content analysis techniques are considered particularly appropriate for analyzing values, behaviours and others intangible elements such as personal judgements (Kassarjian, 1977). The method is also

helpful for examining trends and patterns in online and offline documents (Weare and Lin, 2000). Additionally, it provides an empirical basis for observing shifts in public opinion, a topic that is clearly strictly linked with social media conversations where people are completely free to express themselves and their beliefs (Waters and Jamal, 2011).

Therefore, a qualitative/quantitative content analysis was performed on Twitter tweets related to the 2013 campaign of ENEL (the leading firm in Italy's energy market), denominated 'Guerrieri' (Warriors). The concept of this campaign was to make visible the 'battles' that every individual (as a modern 'warrior') has to face on a daily basis (e.g., job difficulties, health problems, personal troubles). Challenges, obstacles and victories of these warriors are supported figuratively by Enel, as provider of 'energy' and 'light'. This rhetorical construction (i.e., Enel as a responsible citizen that helps others) is substantiated in an invitation to consumers to share their stories through a storytelling platform in a three-month period, created specifically for this purpose.

The rationale for the choice of this communication campaign is that it was planned and implemented giving high prominence to social media. Accordingly, it helped to explore the role played by social media-scape and to define how relations between CSR, brand and ethics work and influence each other. Content classification for Twitter, in fact, can be considered as a conjunction of observed use of Twitter expressed by users, and the informal supervision and direction implemented by Twitter's branding insights (Dann, 2015). Thus, the paper analyses messages in relation to a specific Twitter hashtag (*#Guerrieri*). Hashtags are a mechanism to link messages to a specific topic, thus making tweets more easily discoverable. Each user can search Twitter for particular hashtags and track the stream of messages containing specific hashtags in a specific period of time. Hashtags have progressively become a useful mechanism to coordinate conversations around precise events or communication campaigns. In some cases, hashtags can also be user-generated, emerging in response to breaking news or unforeseen events (Bruns and Stieglitz, 2012). In our case, the hashtag was initiated by the company (with the use of sponsored tweets) but re-interpreted 'creatively' by Twitter users.

### *Unit of analysis and sampling*

The unit of analysis is represented by all tweets posted with this specific hashtag (#guerrieri). The dataset was manually created by recording all tweets with #guerrieri hashtag from the beginning of the campaign (19<sup>th</sup> July 2013) and for the following three months (19<sup>th</sup> October 2013). A total number of 1661 tweets have been recorded. The choice to limit the analysis to a three-month period is due to the need to explore consumers' responses to the campaign while the Enel storytelling platform was active. In the following months, the number of tweets was drastically reduced. Our dataset is constituted exclusively from original tweets, namely tweets that are neither replies nor retweets<sup>1</sup>.

### *Coding scheme for content analysis*

Rather than the word and/or aggregation of words, we considered the tweet as the unit of analysis. We coded each tweet message in a number of categories identified after pilot coding. A two-axial coding scheme was used in order to reflect the tweet's content in the following terms: 1) if the meaning was in line with that intended by the firm (hijacking or not) ('conventional tweets' are tweets that use the Guerrieri hashtag in line with objectives and intentions of the company and 'hijacking tweets' are tweets that subvert the use of Guerrieri hashtag with respect to the original intentions, where users refute the proposed meaning and express their opinions, thoughts and personal feelings); 2) the type of content.

Following Chew and Eysenbach (2010), a pilot coding was performed to provide the initial categories and codebook, and to ensure the mutual understanding of the coding scheme by the two coders involved. In particular, 200 tweet samples were randomly selected from our original dataset. Upon review and discussion, less frequently used categories were collapsed into higher-order

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<sup>1</sup> We are not interested in replies and retweets as our research objective was focused on how CSR messages and brand meaning have been used through social media-scape, and not specifically in WOM mechanisms on Twitter. According to Sook Kwon et al. (2014), retweets do not add any other information to the original tweet.

dimensions. The last iteration was determined when Cohen's kappa value was above the accepted threshold (>.70). Then, tweets were imported into NVivo (version 10), a qualitative software program, to help us inform the codebook and identify patterns in the data.

#### 4. Findings

According to the coding scheme, the analysis shows a prevalence of tweetjacking, namely hijacking tweets that constitute about 65% of total tweets in the sample (see Table 1). Only just over one third of total tweets used the hashtag Guerrieri in a conventional way, namely following intentions of the corporate brand campaign.

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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The second dimension of analysis concerns different types of content of each tweet, whether hijacking, or not, the intended meaning of #guerrieri. Numerous content attributes were identified in the codebook for use in this study. Following Spence et al. (2015), the resulting content analysis categories produced five groupings: *argumentative*, *insult/frustration*, *expression of affect*, *humour* or *sarcasm*, and *promotional*.

In line with Gaspar et al. (2014), an additional category ('other') was included to code spam tweets using this hashtag or tweets in which there was uncertainty about the intention expressed. In Table 2, descriptions, examples and frequency of content categories have been reported.

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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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Figure 2 shows the distribution of different categories from the launch of the campaign (19 July – 1<sup>st</sup> week) to the end (19 October – 12<sup>th</sup> week). In the first week most tweets (both from official Enel accounts and from other users) tended to promote the campaign. Then, from mid-September (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> weeks) onward, there is a progressive prevalence of hostile tweets that reinterpret the company’s hashtag.

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INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

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Both argumentative and insult/frustration categories reached their peak in the 9<sup>th</sup> week, thus marking the definitive affirmation of representation of Enel’s corporate brand very far from that intended by the company. The hashtag #guerrieri, instead of being used to link to stories shared on the storytelling platform, has been used to launch an unprecedented attack on the company with various CSI’s accusations. The social media-scape has enabled users to express a diversity of views on heterogeneous issues, which not only generated a boomerang effect on the campaign, but also has revealed and spread negative brand associations and representations.

In addition, if we considered exclusively the two categories of ‘hijacking tweets’, and ‘argumentative’, these represent nearly 50% of tweetjacking. A further analysis of these tweets reveals the particular attention of users to CSR issues: over 20% of tweets in this category (113 out of 499) present explicit reference to CSI behaviours, offering a very negative representation of the company (Figure 3).

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INSERT FIGURE 3 AND TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

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This is also confirmed by word frequency analysis on these tweets (Table 3) which shows that all top ten most recurrent words have been used with a negative connotation in terms of ‘devastating’ impacts on environment (i.e. carbon, nuclear) and human health (i.e. killer, victims, cancer), thus raising accusations of conducting CSI practices with this corporate branding campaign.

## **5. Discussion**

The analysis of the Guerrieri campaign on Twitter helped researchers to test the four set propositions. Results show that Enel failed to capitalise on the innate two-way communication nature of social media-scape: most tweets using #guerrieri were hostile and related to sustainability issues. Besides, tweetjacking of #guerrieri aimed to subvert the objectives expected from the CB campaign, thus allowing the dissemination of information in relation to issues of social responsibility and resulting in spreading a reactive CSI feeling among consumers and other stakeholders. The particular attention paid to CSR issues, through explicit references about the negative effects caused by Enel to society and ecosystems, not only deepens the information available on hijacking of the campaign mode but strengthens the case for the role of social media-scape in CSR and brand communication. This scape – added in Palazzo and Basu (2007) framework - shows that CSR and branding initiatives can be analysed with different framings and they have a strong influence on the different modes of CB that are ethically evaluated. In the first framing, the organisation creates ethical branding activities and CSR strategies with the aim of involving consumers and strengthening their relationships. In the second framing, alternative and ‘creative’ consumers’ CSR re-interpretations generate complex problems for the organisation, new – not always positive – brand associations, and cause the failure of the CSR campaign, raising accusations of CSI. Both framings have in common the fact that they are influenced by social media-scape’s features (Figure 4).

## INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

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On the other hand, this study demonstrates that CB and CSR are still concrete assets for organisations. Both are significant to customers and offer different perspectives and symbolic representations of a company (Grohmann and Bodur, 2015). For this reason, CB and CSR are frequently employed to attract and sustain consumers' attention (Balmer, 2012). In other words, the findings of this study provide support for the discussion about the relationship between CSR and CB from the customers' perspective.

In general, it is found that the main factors which influence the analysed campaign was the incorrect use of typical features of social media-scape, and consequences of this misuse were the complete failure of the CSR communication. Consequently, our first proposition is confirmed (**P1**). In this particular circumstance, the social media-scape - in contrast with Lyon and Montgomery's (2013) first insight – intensified the whole set of accusations of conducting CSI practices that Enel was already facing before the campaign, due to its unethical behaviours (i.e. coal plant pollution) that compromised the relationship of trust between Enel, public opinion and Greenpeace Italy. This negative halo effect highlights, once more, the fact that: the creation of a trustable ethical brand is an arduous task for companies as it is not based on the first impression a consumer has of an organisation, it can come to encompass the entire corporate image/reputation and it is one potential path for managing the perception of a company among its consumers (Balmer et al., 2011; Fournier and Alvarez, 2013). For this reason, organisations need to spend extensive time, research and money on developing a favourable ethical brand that reflects corporate values, thanks to a proper use of the value-scape and to a fair CSR approach.

Furthermore, results illustrate that not only the relevance of the role played by social media-scape, but also recognisability and familiarity towards Enel's past CSI performances (i.e. problem with carbon footprint, pollution, incorrect energy bills, etc.), as well as consumers' attitudes towards

interactive advertisements, had an impact on the analysed campaign. It can be argued that our findings provide an indication for the following premise: an organisation's ability to develop CSI, without being caught out, declines over time in response to stakeholder empowerment. This involves the fact that CSR efforts need to be put into place, considering what is (and was) going on in the consumption-scape, otherwise the whole CB will not yield any benefit from a corporate brand campaign and other ethical strategies (see Figure 4). Therefore, as stated in our second proposition (**P2**), what really influences consumers is not just consumption or communication but the chance to attain the 'right' CB that results in generating a sense of fulfilment/satisfaction and in reaching a status symbol for customers, avoiding challenging people's ideals and morals (Romani et al., 2015). If these circumstances are set, consumers and other stakeholders may feel so engaged with the CB and its values as to be disposed to initiate the process of creation of negotiated brands (Gregory, 2007). The negotiated approach suggests companies should develop the CB by identifying its core values as a combination of management insights and relevant stakeholder views (De Chernatony et al., 2004; Vollero et al., 2016). These basic principles, shared between the organisation and the stakeholders, need to be articulated and exposed through corporate communication, and, as in our case, through CSR communication too. This means that negotiated brands will constantly develop by incorporating internal and external perspectives, but, at the same time, they show the strong benefit of appearing "distinctive and enduring because they are based on a set of values that will remain consistent (although evolving) over time" (Gregory, 2007, p. 64).

Moreover, the findings of the study sustain our third and fourth propositions (**P3** and **P4**) and are consistent with the theory about brand public (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016), which recommends that when individuals succeed or fail in dynamic interactions with other consumers about their favourite brand, it affects the inferences – mental representations – they have about the brand itself. This study's findings, in particular, demonstrate that when individuals perceive the negative side of a CB, and they find a way to exchange their opinions on social media-scape, there is an immediate mental model that they hold of the received corporate communication messages which creates an

even greater sense of dissatisfaction towards the organisation itself. Besides, this mental model is likely to impact on behaviours too (Gensler et al., 2013). Hence, the social media-scape is the perfect interactive ‘space’ – based on the existing strengths of shared identity and value scapes - where accusations of implementing CSI practices can be sustained, but also where successful mediated brand representations can be born and prosper. This involves the suggestion that alternative brand representations and brand publics can be used by brand managers to understand brand-related sociality on social media-scape (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016).

## **6. Theoretical and practical implications**

The study has several theoretical contributions and managerial implications. From a theoretical point of view, the researchers propose a conceptual model based on the achieved findings (see Figure 5). In this new framework, the original conceptual model of Palazzo and Basu (2007) is not only enriched with the new scape referring to social media, but the inner dynamics of scapes and their interrelationships also involve other relevant concepts such as corporate branding, ethical brand, brand public and negotiated brands discussed in the previous paragraph. All these ‘players’ introduced in the model, after analysing the Enel campaign, might help to shed light on how consumers consider corporate brand nowadays, why online activism might take the form of hostile responses to branding initiatives, and what is the potential role of CSR in bridging the conflicting trends.

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INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

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Besides, this research offers managerial inferences for decision-makers and brand managers who wish to understand how to put into practice proactive CSR actions and brand communication

campaigns on social media, while avoiding the risk to be perceived unexpectedly as implementing reactive CSI performances. The study suggests that managers should understand that the interactive CSR is a complex phenomenon since it is determined by multiple factors including cyber-identification and CB, and it can cause discontented activism expressed, as in this case, through digital hijacking. This reaction can happen when customers connected to a specific brand find consumption values to be compatible with their identity and/or cyber-identity, while the company puts into practice negative life values, leading to problems in merging the two statuses (Figure 4). This may have been the scenario with regard to the opposition to Enel's campaign. In this respect, it is interesting for decision makers to highlight that while loyal consumers were satisfied with CSR efforts and the aspect of consumption identity congruence, overlooking other life values (conveyed by company's previous unethical activities), other types of publics, such as critical consumers/NGOs/journalists showed their discontent about the incongruence with preferred life values and perceived the campaign from a CSI perspective. This means that managers need to understand that brand support and anti-brand activism could be two different faces of a same coin, although expressed by different stakeholders. Thus, the paper would like to aid managers in facing discontent or activism, suggesting they should turn the attention of their stakeholders through a re-evaluation of relevant CSR activities, potentially leveraging on loyal publics which have completely interiorised CB values (Palazzo and Richter, 2005)

The presented case also significantly points out to decision makers that reputation risk lies ahead for those who simply pretend to sustain ethical related causes, greenwashing their CB, in order to circumvent CSR inquiry: as was demonstrated, especially in social media-scape, it is likely that they will be confronted with symbolic actions such as digital hijacking and boycotting initiatives.

## **7. Conclusions and further research**

This study analyses the associations between CSR, ethics and CB in a specific context: the social media-scape. Our main contribution is to grasp a broader view of explored topics by investigating whether the incorporation of the interactive ethical brand influences CSR and CB initiatives from the consumers' perspective. So far, this seems to be one of few studies to empirically validate the assumptions made by researchers, introducing the effect of social media-scape.

In order to explore consumers' experiences, feelings, beliefs and understanding about the concept of the study, the paper collected data from Twitter, which is one of the novelties of this research. The lack of similar investigations necessitated us to conduct a qualitative study aiming to develop conceptual relationships with a view of theory formulation involving interesting new social changes.

Although the achieved results cannot be generalised for other markets or circumstances, this study would facilitate other researchers to design an inclusive instrument suited to develop empirical investigations in different contexts. Future studies may look into different views of theory generation by measuring the attitudes of consumers collected through other social media, for example. Equally interesting would be the exploration of consumers' responses to brand communication from a longitudinal perspective by evaluating the cumulative effects of brand communication on consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards ethical features of corporate brands.

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Figure 1: A revisited framework of scapes (adapted from Palazzo and Basu, 2007)

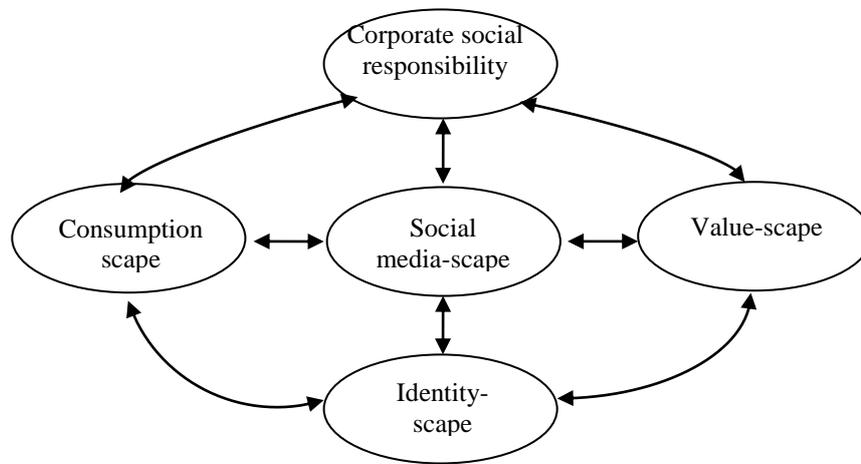


Table 1 – Type of tweets, frequency and tweet example

Type of tweets	Frequency (%)	Example Tweets
<b>Conventional tweets</b> All tweets that use the Guerrieri hashtag in line with objectives and intentions of company	n=575 (34.6%)	 <p>No matter what your battle is, you have the energy to win it. Also ours. #guerrieri Tell your story</p>
<b>Hijacking tweets</b> All tweets that subvert the use of Guerrieri hashtag with respect to the original intentions, where users refute the proposed meaning and express their opinions, thoughts and personal feelings	n=1086 (65.4%)	 <p>Every day #guerrieri from Salento fight the Enel killer carbon footprint.</p>

Table 2 – Descriptions, examples and frequency of content categories

Qualifier	Description	Example Tweets	Frequency (%)
<b>Argumentative</b>	Tweets that contain an argument to the criticism against the company (on sustainability, on the pricing policy, etc.) and/or the communication campaign	- @enelsharing us# guerrieri are trying to fight against the coal at Spezia #cannotbearanymore #enel #endcoal - 366 dead people in Italy every year. They are victims of #enel #guerrieri. ('studio Somo' for Greenpeace - April 2012)	499 (30.04%)
<b>Insult/frustration</b>	Tweets that express anger and frequently present swear words with the aim of attacking impetuous initiatives	- Enel advertisement, #guerrieri, is a shit. We can't say nothing else - #Enel #guerrieri communication campaign is disgusting, they try to change social discontent into money for bills	208 (12.52%)
<b>Display affect</b>	Tweets that express and focus on feelings, moods, emotions of users in relation to the campaign	- I feel sorry for #guerrieri, the Enel hashtag - I don't like the fact that Enel uses #guerrieri. It's something that belongs to us, the people who wake up early in the morning, who bring kids to the school, etc.	25 (1.51%)
<b>Humour or sarcasm</b>	Tweets are comedic or sarcastic.	- Enel doesn't know what to do anymore. Its light bulb must be switched off. - The real #guerrieri are people that succeed at paying Enel's bills	316 (19.02%)
<b>Promotional</b>	Tweets that aim to promote or explicitly praise the campaign	- The #guerrieri have a light inside, it's shining, beautiful. It's the light that everyone has inside. - Genius! Advertisement that leaves without words and with lots of trust in yourself! #guerrieri#Enel	554 (33.35%)
<b>Other</b>	Spam or tweets with uncertain meaning (e.g. due to broken link)	- Culture as a 'weapon', these too are #guerrieri: [Link] an interesting project for others and for us too!	59 (3.55%)

Figure 2 – Distribution of categories of tweets in 12 weeks of campaign

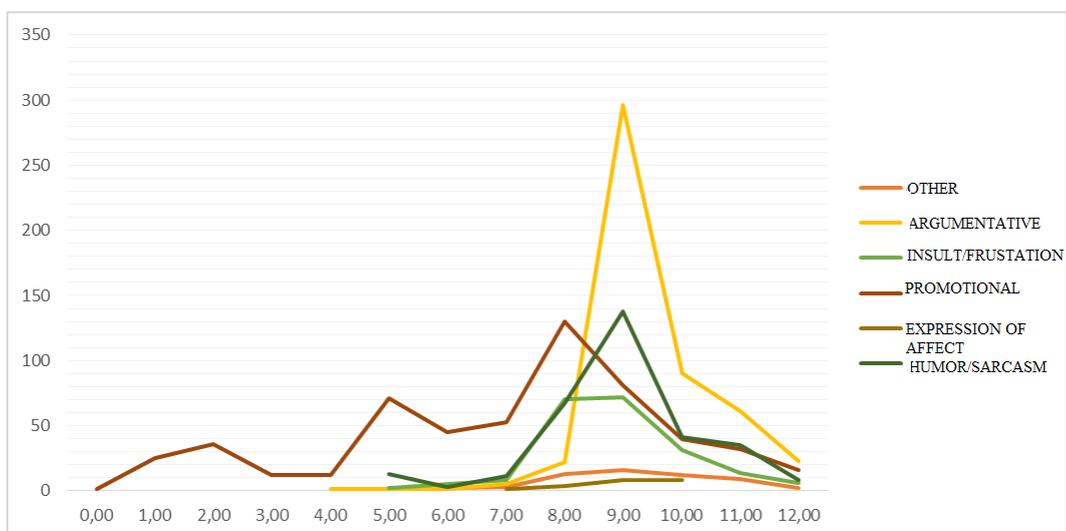


Figure 3 – Examples of hijacking tweets related to CSR/CSI issues



Table 3 – Top ten most recurrent words in tweets related to CSR/CSI issues

Keyword	Frequency
Carbon	47
Power plant/s	38
Greenpeace	32
Battle	27
Greenwashing	15
Devastating	13
Killer	7
Nuclear	8
Victims	5
Cancer	4

Figure 4: Brand values (consumption) and life value (identity) scenarios mediated by social media-scape (adapted from Palazzo and Basu, 2007)

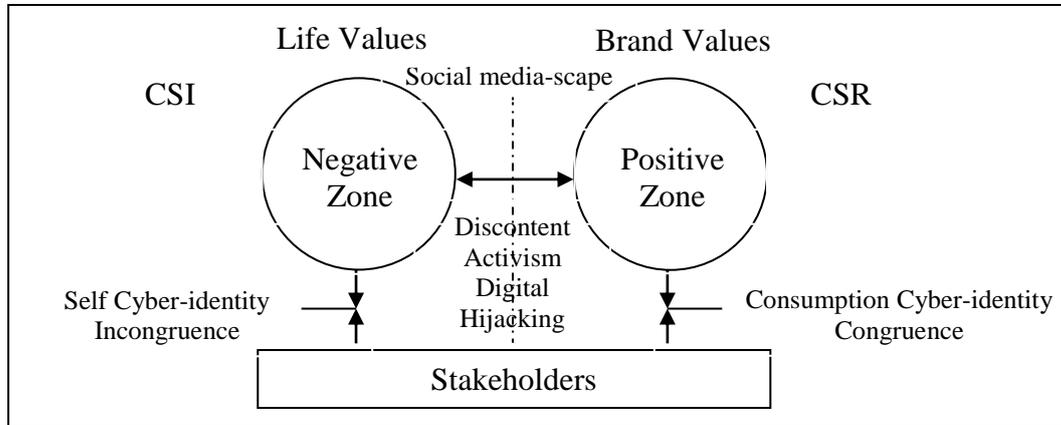


Figure 5: A revisited framework of scapes: linking CSR, brand and ethics. (Adapted from Palazzo and Basu, 2007)

