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Using LinkedIn to Promote Effective Corporate Social Responsibility Communication Through The B2B Supply Chain

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USING LINKEDIN TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE CORPORATE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE B2B SUPPLY CHAIN

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1

ABSTRACT

Utilizing LinkedIn as a communication tool for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communications is a relatively unknown area of CSR research. However, existing scholarship and current business trends suggest that LinkedIn may be beneficial for business to business (B2B) companies to communicate to their corporate partners. Findings from this study advance communication scholarship in this relatively new area of research and provide new understanding in how LinkedIn can be used by companies to strengthen business operations pertaining to corporate social responsibility. This thesis examines how Equinix, a B2B company, communicates its socially responsible initiatives on LinkedIn and to what extent its publicization efforts reflect the overlapping CSR values of its publicly named top corporate partners. A two-year content analysis ranging from 2021 to 2023 was conducted on Equinix's LinkedIn posts and corporate sustainability reports. Results of this qualitative case study suggests that Equinix's online users are interested in seeing more content related to its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts and community investments, as well as current events related to sustainability operations. These results are compiled into a strategic plan that highlights the shared values of the case subject's corporate partners, what shortcomings and best practices exist in the case subject's attempts of publicizing its CSR values on LinkedIn, and recommendations for how the case subject should move forward in effectively communicating its CSR efforts on LinkedIn.

DEDICATION

This accomplishment of this thesis is dedicated to my parents, Art and Marilyn, and my sweet dog, Teddy. My dad worked tirelessly to provide for our family and put in long hours to ensure that not only did I have the opportunity to be the first person in our family to attend college, but also to attend graduate school. His sacrifice and dedication are what allowed me to be here, which I am forever indebted. My mom has always encouraged me and reminded me of my potential to make a positive impact in the world. Without her unwavering belief in me, I may not have had the confidence to pursue this academic endeavor. Lastly, I cannot forget to acknowledge the love and companionship of Teddy, who has been a constant source of comfort and joy throughout my academic journey. To Art, Marilyn, and Teddy, thank you for your love and support. This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents (Continued) Page

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Corporate interest in launching socially responsible initiatives continues to mount as the competition of the market grows (Fatima & Elbanna, 2022; Podnar & Golob, 2007). Additionally, the increasing dependence of social media within society has created pressure for companies to determine how to effectively communicate its corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts to online audiences. The act of promoting these socially responsible initiatives can be used as a marketing strategy by companies to increase its status amongst its corporate partners (Moorman, 2020). Corporate social responsibility highlights a company's usage of power and financial means in addressing a political or social issue to build higher purchase desirability amongst its buyers (Vredenburgh et al., 2020).

With the rise in social media usage, more companies are looking to use digital platforms to publicize their socially responsible efforts. This allows corporations to use social responsibility as a marketing tool to attract online users who hold similar values to buy from the companies and build consumer loyalty (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). With the growing success from this strategy in a business to consumer (B2C) context, business to business (B2B) companies are now looking to implement modify this strategy for itself (Honarmandi et al., 2019). B2C companies involve business transactions between a business entity and individual consumers, whereas B2B refers to commerce between two businesses, such as a wholesaler, vendor, or manufacturer (Kumar & Raheja, 2012). While B2C companies use CSR as a strategy to attract consumers who are

personally interested in contributing to a social issue through their purchases, B2B companies uses CSR as a means of attracting other corporate partners who are interested in saying they support certain issues through their company's supply chain.

B2C companies are primarily concerned with whether its consumers believe that corporate social responsibility are genuine and authentic (Moehl & Friedman, 2021). Without this belief, B2C companies' CSR efforts may be ineffective in increasing larger profit margins and detrimental in driving customers away from the companies' brand (Alhouti et al., 2016). One strategy B2C companies use to display authenticity in its CSR values is by promoting that its business partners in its supply chain operations are also enacting similar CSR values. General Mills exemplified this in 2015 when it announced that it would achieve 100 percent sustainability in 2025 by harvesting its ten priority ingredients through ethically sustainable suppliers (The Associated Press, 2015).

Consequentially, with the increased market demand for B2C companies to enact CSR initiatives, it is becoming important for the B2B companies that act as suppliers in the business operations chain to launch the companies' own CSR initiatives and effectively promote the campaigns. The consequences of not taking this action include a company's inevitable loss of market competitiveness and the missed opportunity to increase loyalty amongst its current buyers. A 2022 Barclays Bank PLC report found that one fifth of British retailers dropped its suppliers over sustainability concerns within a twelve-month period (Barclays Bank PLC., 2022). This market trend is only expected to continue due to the upcoming generation's dedication to supporting CSR initiatives through their purchases (Nielsen, 2015).

With these things considered, it is important for B2B companies to effectively communicate CSR efforts. One of the most influential modern marketing mediums that a B2B company can use to accomplish this is social media (Alalwan et al., 2017). To date, the most used B2B social media platform is LinkedIn. The Content Marketing Institute's 2021 report found that LinkedIn is used by 96% of B2B content marketers and 66% of organizations on LinkedIn stated that advertising on the platform had yielded the best overall return on investment (ROI) (Handley & Murton Beets, 2021).

Current research points to the benefits of B2B companies communicating to corporate partners on LinkedIn (Sundström et al., 2020) and the importance of B2B companies promoting CSR initiatives (Blenkhorn & MacKenzie, 2017; Han & Lee 2021). However, the intersection of how a B2B company can effectively communicate its CSR initiatives on LinkedIn is a relatively unknown area of CSR research (Guesalaga, 2016; Kim & Moon, 2021). The current study consists of a project thesis of a B2B company engaging in corporate social responsibility to better understand how LinkedIn can be used as a CSR marketing tool and which methods of promoting its CSR efforts are the most effective on its platform. The final product is composed of a strategic plan that highlights the shared values of the case subject's corporate partners, what shortcomings and best practices exist in the case subject's attempts of publicizing its CSR values on LinkedIn, and recommendations for how the case subject should move forward in effectively communicating its CSR efforts on LinkedIn.

Specifically, the focus of this project thesis examines how the company Equinix communicates its socially responsible initiatives on LinkedIn and to what extent its

publicization efforts reflect the overlapping CSR values of its publicly named top corporate partners. Equinix is an international technology solutions company whose social impact programs are centered around promoting environmental sustainability, social progress, and governance (Equinix, 2021a). This organization is an ideal site due to the multidimensional nature of its corporate social responsibility and the growing industry demand for interconnected technology services (Lamberti & Lettieri, 2009; Ziser, 2022). The complexity of its social impact programs and the range of its corporate partners will provide novel contributions for understanding how to effectively communicate corporate social responsibility efforts in a B2B context on LinkedIn.

 A two-year content analysis ranging from 2021 to 2023 was conducted on Equinix's LinkedIn posts and corporate sustainability reports. This study's results are comprised in a strategic plan that details how Equinix—and other technology companies—should plan to promote its CSR efforts. Together, the results of this study contribute to furthering communication scholarship in this relatively new area of research and provide new understanding in how LinkedIn can be used by companies to strengthen business operations pertaining to corporate social responsibility.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility in Academic Scholarship

Corporate social responsibility is a unique phenomenon within academic scholarship due to the various ways in which it is examined across differing fields of study. Scholars recognize CSR as the actions that a company takes to address social issues and its social impact within its business operations (Crane & Glozer, 2016; Ji, et al., 2020; Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Park & Dodd, 2016); however, enough nuances exist within the broad CSR literature that it is necessary to review the treatment of CSR, as the concept is the focal concept in this study. This literature review will explore how CSR has been defined, examined, and treated across the varying disciplines of communication, public relations, management, marketing, sustainability, and social media.

CSR in Communication Literature

Due to the varying degrees of focus within communication literature, CSR has not been singularly defined. Broadly, CSR is conceptualized as the action of an organization taking a participative role in addressing stakeholders' societal issues (Crane et al., 2004; Matten & Moon, 2005; Sorsa, 2008). Communication literature has researched CSR from the perspectives of public relations and corporate communication, marketing communication, organization communication, and organizational studies (Golob et al., 2013; Ihlen et al., 2011; May et al., 2011;). The way that CSR is defined in communication literature is dependent on whether a scholar is using a functionalistic or constructivist approach (Golob et al., 2013). Within a functionalistic approach, CSR acts

as a mechanism that influences stakeholders' perception about an organization (Putnam & Boys, 2006). Contrastingly, a constructivist approach views CSR as a shared communication challenge between an organization and its stakeholders that involves co-creation and negotiation (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). Thus, communication literature has examined CSR as a means of influence and as a stakeholder communication mode.

Golob et al.'s (2013) systemic review revealed three reoccurring themes in CSR communication literature, including disclosure/accountability, process, and outcomes/consequences (p. 181). Marketing communication and public relations communication research have examined CSR outcomes by measuring stakeholders' perception of an organization's CSR efforts (Du et al., 2010; Pomering & Johnson, 2009). Research in corporate communication literature has focused on foundational communication practices at various development stages within the scope of CSR (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2007; Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010), while organizational communication and organizational studies have looked at the functional and theoretical aspects of an organization engaging in CSR (Ellemers & Chopova, 2021; Sharp & Zaidman, 2010). From these varying types of communication research, CSR is multidimensional in nature.

This intricate nature of CSR within communication literature subsequently impacts its treatment within research. When CSR is defined as an instrument by organizations to impact stakeholders' perceptions, it is treated as a resource for reputation enhancement (Golob et al., 2013). Studies that focus on the functionality of CSR analyze it as the means to achieving a desirable outcome for the organization (Du et al., 2010;

14

Lock & Schulz-Knappe, 2018). However, this self-serving organizational outcome shifts

when CSR is treated as a communication mode for stakeholder engagement (Mumby &

Stohl, 1996). This change in viewing what CSR's purpose is results in CSR being treated

as an organizational outreach effort for stakeholders (Kim, 2019; Scandelius & Cohen,

2016). An emerging stream of communication research has used this to position CSR as a

platform for examining collaboration and mutual understanding within a corporate

communication context (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018). Ultimately, the specificity of the

discipline within communication affects the way in which CSR is treated.

CSR in Public Relations Literature

Public relations scholarship has traditionally defined CSR as a way for

organizations to build relationships within society (Clark, 2000). This definition

developed following Whetten et al.'s (2001) suggestion that the definition of CSR should

include the idea that CSR is a "societal expectation of corporate behavior" amongst

stakeholders (p. 374). The conceptualization of CSR as a societal expectation perpetuates

the idea that an organization should be responsive to society's desires of it and form

stakeholder relationships to better understand and meet those expectations (De Bakker et

al., 2005). Consequently, defining CSR as an organizational-public relations (OPR)

function provides a basis for public relations scholars to explore the relational aspect of

CSR communication from an organization (Clark, 2000; Cutlip et al., 2006; Morsing &

Schultz, 2006).

The emphasis of OPR in public relations research on CSR has resulted in

scholarship that examines the relationship opportunity that CSR has with the public

(Boynton, 2002). This approach differs from other disciplines due to the emphasis placed on examining the relationship outcomes from enacting and promoting CSR (Ho Lee, 2016). Specifically, the most common areas examined in public relations literature related to CSR are the themes of reputation building, trust generation, and relationship management (Ho Lee, 2016). Ho Lee's (2016) analysis of public relations literature from 1980 to 2015 found that the most researched CSR topics focused on "descriptions of CSR practices, CSR communication, and the effects of CSR" (p. 216). In terms of methodologies, current public relations research is relatively balanced between qualitative and quantitative approaches (Ho Lee, 2016). This is symbolic due to other disciplines in business literature primarily focusing on quantitative research (Lockett et al. 2006; Moratis & van Egmond, 2018; Velt & Stawinoga, 2020).

The relationship focus of CSR by public relations scholars has caused CSR to be treated as a tool for managing an organization and its stakeholders' interests (Bonyton, 2002). For example, Gaither et al. (2018) examined Coca-Cola's "5by20" CSR campaign and found that Coca-Cola launched the initiative after the company's internal research data identified women as primary stakeholders. Specifically, this CSR campaign gave Coca-Cola's stakeholders the opportunity to economically empower five million women by 2020 with business training and financial assets that would be donated from Coca-Cola's product profit (Gaither et al., 2018). The "5by20" campaign was hypothesized to be successful because of its stakeholder-centered nature of Coca-Cola giving its women stakeholders the opportunity to invest in an initiative that was personal to them (Gaither et al., 2018).

Enacting CSR allows for an organization to provide its stakeholders a means to be a part of societal good, which consequently can improve corporate image and facilitate positive OPR (L'Etang & Pieczka, 2006; Stark & Kruckeberg, 2003). Building from this, public relations literature argues the importance of using existing stakeholder relationships and an organization's public relations goals to be considered and examined when an organization is looking to implement and promote CSR in its business operations (Benn et al., 2010; Stroh, 2007).

CSR in Management Literature

Within management literature, CSR is broadly conceptualized as a business cost for operations (Sprinkle & Maines, 2010). This cost is viewed to be impacted by the various network levels of institution, organization, and individual (Aguinis, 2011). Nidumolu et al. (2009) contends that CSR's function within management is to drive corporate innovation. Traditional management research has defined CSR as a means for economic gain (Griffin & Mahon, 1997; Margolis & Walsh, 2003); however, contemporary management research is moving towards considering its social impact (Rhou & Singal, 2020; Seles et al., 2018).

Regardless of whether social impact is considered, management scholarship primarily examines CSR and its relation to corporate financial performance (Velte, 2021). For instance, Nyame-Asiamah and Ghulam (2019) observed that sales revenue significantly increased for Marks & Spencer and Tesco when the organizations launched CSR initiatives. This monetary focus has motivated management researchers to examine the specific CSR areas of consumer behavior, its relationship to corporate innovation, and

the impact of corporate governance determinates (Endrikat et al., 2020; Fatma & Rahman, 2015; Ratajczak & Szutowski, 2016). Fatma and Rahman (2015) argue that these factors impact how management research examines whether or not a company should engage in CSR and if there will be a positive financial outcome. Fundamentally, management scholars value the effects that CSR will have on corporations (Aguinis, 2011). Yet, it is important to note that much of current management research is limited by focusing on CSR within developed nations (Fatma & Rahman, 2015) and using empirical methodology (Velte, 2021).

While management literature uniformly values corporate financial performance, management scholars differ in their treatment of what relationship CSR should have with a corporation's profits. Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) reason that corporations should enact CSR as a response to consumer demand while Sprinkle and Maines (2010) argue that CSR should be considered as a way to reduce production costs. Fattemi and Fooladi (2013) further the argument for CSR proactivity by asserting that companies who do not enact CSR will reduce market value and operational longevity. CSR has also been treated as a strategy for boosting brand reputation, customer loyalty, and increasing organizational identification amongst employees (Aguinis, 2011; Carmeli et al., 2007; Fatma & Rahman, 2015). Ultimately, while management literature remains centrally rooted in treating CSR as a financial benefit for corporations, scholars continue to differ in what causations necessitate enacting it.

CSR in Marketing Literature

CSR's definition differs across marketing literature. Chakraborty and Jha (2019) note that the elements of differing motivations, constraints, and incentives play the most substantial impact in how a marketing study defines CSR. Marketing scholars continue to disagree on whether corporations are obligated to enact CSR. Crook (2005) and Foley et al. (2000) argue that a corporation's main concern should be increase profit. Yet, other scholars contend that corporations have a responsibility to respond to stakeholders' societal needs and concerns (Marrewijk, 2003; Mohr & Sarin, 2009; Peloza & Shang, 2011; Smith, 2009; Uslay et al., 2009). The latter definition has become more prevalent as globalization continues to expand corporations' global impact (Mohiuddin, 2017).

While the definition of what CSR is differs across marketing literature, marketing scholars typically examine the role that CSR has in impacting stakeholder engagement through quantitative studies (Chakraborty & Jha, 2019; Mishra & Modi, 2016; White et al., 2017). Traditional marketing scholarship focuses on using CSR as a *step* in engaging consumers, while current literature is evolving to view CSR as the *means* of communication for various stakeholder groups (Chakraborty & Jha, 2019). Another notable shift in the status of marketing literature has been research's examination of CSR within McCarthy's (1964) marketing mix model of the four P's: product, price, place, and promotion. While marketing literature up until around 2010 largely focused on CSR within the context of promotion and product (Vaaland et al., 2008), research after 2010 has become more inclusive in considering all four P's (Limbu & Humann, 2022; Lymperopoulos et al., 2012; Vrontis et al., 2020).

The academic treatment of CSR within the discipline of marketing is directly influenced by the archetypal examination of corporate partners. This is exemplified in Bhattacharya and Korschun's (2008) evaluation of corporate partners' value, which treats corporate partners as instrumental in a company's success. From this, Burmann et al. (2009) and White and Willness (2009) claim that CSR should be used to achieve positive company evaluation amongst corporate partners. Building from this idea, marketing researchers have treated CSR as a mechanism for reinforcing trust amongst corporate partners (Homburg et al., 2013), reducing consumption guilt within consumerism (Zemack-Rugar et al., 2016), and combatting investment risk (Mishra & Modi, 2016). However, it should be reaffirmed that the altruistic motivations behind these objectives differ depending on how a marketing researcher is defining CSR (Chakraborty & Jha, 2019).

CSR in Sustainability Literature

The wide variety of disciplines that encompass sustainability literature have broadened how CSR is enacted. Tourism and hospitality research has approached CSR as a way for a company to have purpose in society (Sánchez-Teba et al., 2021). Dyllick and Hockerts (2002) argue that a company has an obligation to address its publics' economic, environmental, and social needs in tandem with achieving true operational sustainability. In line with this ideology, sustainability is defined as the ultimate objective for industrial operations and CSR is viewed as the preliminary stage for achieving it (Sánchez-Teba et al., 2021). Within the scope of higher education research, CSR is similarly viewed as a necessary operations component for universities (Ismail & Shujaat, 2019; Velte &

Stawinoga, 2017). Adhikariparajuli et al. (2021) argues that, without CSR, universities will limit their students' ability to become good citizens and risk operational longevity. This subsequently will impact societal sustainability in ideology and sustainability in competitiveness for higher education institutions. Conversely, business literature on sustainability defines CSR as an optional commitment for a company to improve communities through its business practices (Kotler & Lee, 2002: Madanaguli et al., 2021). Through this commitment, Aguinis (2011) contends that corporations can achieve an optimal trade-off in the network of people, the planet, and profits.

In addition, CSR has been examined in sustainability literature through the research areas of business, finance, ethics, environmental studies, management, technology, and engineering (Sánchez-Teba et al., 2021). The expansive nature of disciplines has impacted methodological approaches, however longitudinal studies and environmental analyses are common (Adhikariparajuli et al., 2021). Current sustainability research is motivated by modern trends of consumers becoming sensitive to corporate ecological and social behaviors (Ibarnia et al. 2020; Lii, et al., 2013). In wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ibarnia et al. (2020) argues that future tourism and hospitality research will be dependent on examining CSR as a tool to maintain and boost the industry's competitiveness and development. Similarly, business scholars are examining CSR as a means of influencing brand reputation, brand equity, and business performance (Sánchez-Teba et al., 2021).

More recently, 'greenwashing' through CSR campaigns is emerging as another theme of sustainability literature (Lee, et al., 2018; Mahoney, et al., 2013; Wu, et al.,

2020). Greenwashing refers to a company stating that it is an environmentally responsible company through its CSR actions, when in actuality its operations cause the planet more harm than good (Cherry & Sneirson, 2010). For example, Keurig Canada was forced to pay a $3 million penalty after falsely claiming that its single K-cup pods were recyclable when they are not (The Canadian Press, 2022).

From these disciplinary examinations, CSR is generally treated as an outcome of public attitude towards societal good (Adhikariparajuli et al., 2021). Because public opinion is a key motivation factor in sustainability literature, enacting CSR is seen as an innovative way for corporations to react to stakeholders' goodwill values (Camisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012; Mei et al., 2012). In addition, Singh et al., (2021) asserts that CSR can be treated as a consequence of market competitiveness. While sustainability research differs in whether CSR can be treated altruistic, its mainstream treatment in academia typically revolves around responding to stakeholders' perception and reaction of CSR (Sardana et al., 2020; Stubbs & Schapper, 2011; Van Marrewijk, 2003).

Corporate Social Responsibility on LinkedIn

Single studies that focus on the relationship between corporate social responsibility and a specific social media platform outside of Facebook and Twitter are limited (Muntinga et al., 2011; Okazaki et al., 2014; Van Noort et al., 2014); however, there are a number of studies that examine CSR across multiple social media platforms (Cho et al., 2017; Martínez et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2012). For example, Smith et al.'s (2012) research found that Twitter is one of the most effective marketing mediums for corporate social responsibility due to the willingness Twitter users have to engage with

brands' content through discussions. On the other hand, Facebook has been shown to be a better social media platform for sharing CSR posts (Martínez et al., 2022). These types of findings are valuable academic contributions that can increase the effectiveness of communication. Yet, it is critical to expand the research focus of social media platforms to platforms like LinkedIn.

In 2022, Sprout Social recognized LinkedIn as the top social media platform for lead generation users, which demonstrates the benefits of academic research focusing on studying LinkedIn as a communication medium for CSR marketing strategies (Barnhart, 2022). Lead generation users are part of a company's stakeholders and are defined as prospective customers for a business due to their organizational interests (Banerjee & Bhardwaj, 2019). Academic scholarship will benefit from researching effective corporate communication strategies on platforms like LinkedIn that have the ability to reach large groups of lead generation users.

Current CSR research that focuses on LinkedIn is limited; however, existing studies imply room for potential value in this area. Yang et al. (2018) found that companies use LinkedIn to communicate employee-focused socially responsible efforts, such as diversity and sustainability, more than other platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, and Twitter. This is due to LinkedIn's primary function, which is to act as an online professional network. LinkedIn is the only social media platform that is solely characterized as a business social network; the other platforms studied were all found to primarily have the ability to "entertain" online users (Yang et al., 2018). Furthermore,

LinkedIn's platform is built to inform users of timely and relevant information (Voorveld et al., 2018, p. 45).

In relation to CSR, LinkedIn has been used by companies to communicate sustainability goals. For example, in their analysis of sustainability-related CSR social media communications from Canada's three largest grocery retailers, Harper's (2020) noted that the grocery store Loblaw chose to only promote its sustainability commitments on LinkedIn, despite having a presence on other social media platforms. On LinkedIn, Loblaw named its sustainability goal and provided a link to the company's CSR report on its website. Yet outside of this study, current research is limited in understanding what posting strategies are effective when communicating CSR on LinkedIn.

Corporate Importance of Implementing CSR

CSR can be an important tool for a company to use in increasing profits and boosting its reputation amongst key stakeholders (Sánchez-Torné et al., 2020). Research demonstrates that consumers frequently associate a company's values with the quality of its products (Edvardsson et al., 2005; Kelley et al., 1990; Vollero et al., 2017). These benefits cause the publicization of CSR efforts to be an increasing area of relevance for public relations practitioners.

CSR presents a way for consumers to support social issues that they care about through their everyday purchases; this subsequently is effective in increasing a company's revenues. Due to the rise in digital interconnectivity, the transfer of knowledge about previously marginalized, oppressed, and suppressed individuals has increased the interest in activism to an all-time high. As a result, there is a growing

number of consumers that want to see the urgency of addressing social and environmental issues echoed in the business operations of the companies that they purchase from (Öberseder et al., 2013). The impact of CSR influences a business's ROI to the extent that research on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions have shown that the presence of a company's CSR efforts can impact whether consumers will purchase from the company or its competitor (Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009).

For example, the ice cream brand Ben & Jerry's has been recognized as the top selling American ice cream brand for more than half a decade and reported 936 million U.S. dollars in sales at the end of 2021. This accounted for over 13% of national ice cream sales (Wunsch, 2022). Consumers' steady loyalty in purchasing this brand is largely attributed to the consistent promotion of Ben & Jerry's CSR efforts (Benmelech, 2021; Carr et al., 2004; Kaur, 2016; Polk, 2014). Through supporting companies who promote CSR activities, consumers feel as if they have a role in supporting the social cause through their spending choices (Gupta & Hodges, 2012).

In addition to the benefits of consumer purchase intentions, Helm (2011) found that employees at a company who placed a strong importance on its CSR initiatives increased employee satisfaction, which positively affected their commitment to the organization and overall job performance. By doing this, employees had greater work productivity (Almeida & Coelho, 2019; Turban & Cable 2003). CSR has also been linked to increasing the number of applicants for a company (Mullerat, 2010). Hedbolm et al. (2019) launched a field experiment in which they created their own firm to study work behavior. Their study found that their application pool increased by 25% when the firm

promoted CSR efforts. As such, these impacts combined increase the value of products that a company is producing, which furthers its profit increase (Gill, 2009).

Furthermore, corporate social responsibility is beneficial in strengthening perceptions amongst key publics. Effective CSR communication can improve consumers' trust in a brand (Kim & Ferguson, 2016). A public's trust in an organization is the "willingness of the public as an external stakeholder to become vulnerable to the actions of business as a general institution" (Pirson et al., 2016, p. 8). This trust is important because it has a mutual effect with the aforementioned purchase intention factor (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Explicitly, customers can be motivated by the desire to not only help a cause through their purchases, but also to buy from companies that they highly favor. In conjunction, if a consumer has a higher opinion of a company and desire to purchase from it, their motivation to defend the company during a crisis subsequently increases (Aziz, 2020). Zeno Group's (2020) research found that people are six times more likely to try to protect a brand during a crisis if they already have a trusting relationship with the company. Together, these implications demonstrate the operational importance for an organization to engage in corporate social responsibility.

Corporate Importance of Using Corporate Social Responsibility in B2B Industry

Despite the value that corporate social responsibility has displayed in literature, much communication literature is limited to studying how digital CSR communication functions within a B2C context. Little is known about the effects of CSR on social media within a B2B industry context. Yet, there is empirical evidence that suggests B2B companies can benefit from embracing corporate social responsibility (Blenkhorn &

MacKenzie, 2017; Han & Childs, 2016; Han & Lee, 2021; Saurage-Altenloh & Randall, 2020).

B2B companies publicizing CSR initiatives can strengthen marketability amongst loyal customers. While organizational buyers are traditionally motivated by "price, on-time delivery, and technical quality," consumers are motivated by emotion and cognition (Han & Lee, 2021). A B2B company can capitalize on these different motivation factors by appealing not only to its organizational buyers' needs, but also to its organizational buyers' consumers (Homburg et al., 2013). Simply, a B2B company offering social responsibility within its services allows for its B2C companies to also claim the goodwill and incorporate it into the B2C companies' own marketing tactics to consumers. This can be observed in a B2C company like Anthropologie.

Anthropologie claims on its website that a reason the company can be considered sustainable is due to its commitment to "work with vendors and supplies who share our commitment to making decisions with social and environmental factors in mind" (Anthropologie, 2022). A further look into their website shows that Anthropologie will not sign a contract with a vendor unless it can prove that it upholds Anthropologie's social responsibility standards (URBN, 2020). This example shows how B2C companies can sell stories about their products' supply chain to consumers that will directly affect their emotional and cognitive consumption motives. Moreover, a B2B company that uses corporate social responsibility as a marketing strategy sells its buyers its product *and* a marketing strategy that its buyers can use for their own consumers.

In addition, B2B companies promoting environmentally sustainable responsibility can stand out amongst competitors and increase market scalability (Casidy & Yan, 2022; Mariadoss et al., 2011; Sheth & Sinha, 2015; Voola et al., 2022). There is an increasing call across industries for supply chains to be more sustainable (Skaar & Fet, 2012). Salesforce.com Inc, one of the largest companies in the world (Companies Ranked by Market Cap - CompaniesMarketCap.com, n.d.), announced in 2021 that its suppliers would be required to adjust business operations to reducing carbon emissions. Failure to make these environmental changes would result in termination of its business contract (Nellis, 2021). There is an expected increase in these types of standards from B2C supply chains due to the growing millennial workforce (Booker, 2019). Millennials are defined as individuals born between 1980 and 1995 (Ng et al., 2010). The business decision-makers from this generation show a higher interest in incorporating sustainability into operations, which is only expected to increase as their age demographic replaces the older generations in the workforce (Reavis et al., 2021). As such, B2B companies that embrace environmentally sustainable practices in business operations will have an advantage of attracting new buyers, beat out competitors who do not have sustainable production practices, and ensure that the organization's operations standards meet the values of future business partners. Yet, while current literature notes the growing importance of B2B companies to engage in corporate social responsibility, much remains to be learned about how this is enacted on social media, and platforms that market to business professionals.

To address these gaps in literature, this study aims to understand the extent to which corporate partners' shared values and social media user engagement impacts how a B2B company promotes its corporate social responsibility initiatives on LinkedIn. This will contribute to communication literature by building a better understanding about how B2B companies can use LinkedIn to effectively publicize CSR efforts, as well as strengthen and expand relationships with its publics. Subsequently, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What are the shared CSR values between Equinix and its publicly identified corporate partners?

RQ2: (a) To what extent does Equinix use LinkedIn to communicate its CSR initiatives; (b) how frequently does Equinix promote its shared CSR values on LinkedIn?

RQ3: Which of Equinix's CSR initiatives receive more social media engagement via likes, comments, and shares on LinkedIn?

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

A qualitative content analysis of one organization's Corporate Sustainability annual reports and LinkedIn posts was utilized to answer the research questions. Straussian grounded theory was utilized for this content analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Straussian grounded theory is a research method that emphasizes the discovery of new theoretical insights through the constant comparative analysis of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This constant comparative analysis of data leads to a theoretical explanation of the phenomena under investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). When compared to Glaser's approach to grounded theory, the Straussian grounded theory approach allows for greater flexibility in analyzing data and more specified exploration of CSR as a phenomenon (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Results from this project thesis address the gap in research regarding how LinkedIn can be used by companies to strengthen business operations pertaining to corporate social responsibility.

Examining an organization's CSR efforts via qualitative methods has been used in previous research to examine CSR in supply chains (Andersen & Skyjoett-Larsen, 2009; Chan et al., 2020; Ciliberti et al., 2008), CSR in multi-national corporations (Maon et al., 2009; Obrad & Gherhes, 2018), CSR in industries that significantly impact the environment (Du & Vieira, 2012; Jenkins, 2004; Jenkins & Yakovleva, 2006), and external stakeholders' views of CSR (Doh & Guay, 2006; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009). For example, Cegliński and Wiśniewska (2016) examined the pharmaceutical company Polpharma's competitive advantage of using CSR. This was achieved by analyzing

Polpharma's website, CSR reports, and the Responsible Business Forum reports (Cegliński & Wiśniewska, 2016). Examining how a single organization implements CSR initiatives is useful because it enables researchers to examine research topics that are situated within a specific context (Lis, 2020).

Within this study, a thematic content analysis was utilized to reveal collective themes of Equinix's corporate partners' CSR initiatives and patterns in the CSR themes Equinix promotes on its LinkedIn page. To gain insight into the overlap between Equinix's own CSR initiatives and those of its corporate partners, a comparative analysis was employed. Additionally, social media engagement data (e.g., post likes, comments, and shares) was utilized to answer RQ3 because it aids in determining which CSR themes and initiatives are recognized and prioritized by stakeholders and other online corporate partners. Specifically, this study determines the overlap between Equinix's CSR values and its corporate partners' CSR values, analyzes how Equinix's CSR values are communicated on LinkedIn, and provides strategic recommendations for implementing and maintaining effective CSR communication on LinkedIn.

A qualitative approach is the most suitable means for addressing the research questions. Thematic content analyses are useful for identifying patterns that may be recurrent in communication (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Additionally, it allows researchers to identify key topics and relationships within the data (Neuendorf, 2018). Comparative analyses are beneficial for validating findings, identifying gaps in data and identifying overarching themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

Site Description

In its evolution to become the world's largest global interconnection and data center providers, Equinix's success is largely contributed to its early-stage sustainability efforts (NextMedia, 2021). In 2011, the company launched its ongoing commitment to reduce energy consumptions in its data centers by investing in sustainable technical and physical infrastructure (Equinix, 2021b). However, Greenpeace, the largest environmental organization in the world, released a report in 2014 citing Equinix's sustainable shortcomings (Jones, 2014). In "Clicking Clean: How Companies are Creating the Green Internet," Greenpeace gave Equinix a "C" rating for its absence in energy efficiency targets and a "D" rating for its lack in increasing renewable energy commitments and its low renewable energy deployment and advocacy (Cook et al., 2014). Equinix also received a "B" rating for reporting energy transparency (Cook et al., 2014). Greenpeace acknowledged that while Equinix had made great strides towards sustainable operations, much of its current sustainability efforts were considered pilots and needed to be brought "to scale" and expanded across differing global markets (Cook et al., 2014, p. 50).

Following this scrutiny, Equinix launched its official Corporate Sustainability program in 2014 with the original four focus pillars of environment, people, governance, and community. This program was publicized in a forty-page digitized report on Equinix's website in 2015 and relied on the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework for its sustainability reporting (Equinix, 2015, p. 26). In an opening letter, CEO and President Steve Smith states that Equinix's Corporate Sustainability program would be

guided by "the principle of shared value" (Equinix, 2015, p. 5). Smith elaborates that this means Equinix's CSR focuses will always be a reflection of the values of Equinix's corporate partners (Equinix, 2015, p. 5). Since its creation, the Corporate Sustainability program's pillars have been condensed to the areas of environment, social, and governance (Equinix, 2021a). Additionally, Equinix created a Sustainability Program Office (SPO) to manage the Corporate Sustainability program, which is overseen by its Sustainability Executive Steering Committee. This steering committee is made up Equinix executives and reports directly to the Board of Directors Governance Committee (Equinix, 2022).

Equinix publicizes updates about its Corporate Sustainability program primarily on its website. The Corporate Sustainability program has its own webpage on Equinix's main website under 'About,' as well as its own website. On both websites, Equinix continues to publish digitized reports for each fiscal year's CSR progress. Since 2016, Equinix has also participated in the annual Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) Climate Change Survey, which measures operations' environmental impact. The findings from the CDP Climate Change Survey are simultaneously published with the organizational digitized CSR reports. To support these materials throughout the year, Equinix routinely uses its blogs and press releases to highlight CSR updates. Equinix's social media platforms of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn are used as a supplemental tool for various company CSR reporting.

Equinix launched its LinkedIn account in 2018 and at the time of writing, it currently has 329, 869 followers. This following surpasses its other social media

platforms of YouTube, which has 8.87K followers, Facebook, which has 39,548

followers, and Twitter, which has 26.2K followers.

Sample Procedures

This study relies on purposive sampling, which is optimal for providing flexibility

in discovery (Suri, 2011). The purposive sampling strategy is necessary because the

nonrandom nature allows for determined data to be collected from identified data sources

(Etikan et al., 2016).

The criteria for inclusion for the study's selected sample was based on the chosen

contents' ability to adequately address the study's purpose. Materials studied include

Equinix's Corporate Sustainability annual report for 2021 and LinkedIn content from

2021-2023. At the time of writing, the 2021 Corporate Sustainability annual report was

the most recently published report. The timeframe of 2021-2023 was selected so that the

sample would reflect the most up-to-date information available and illustrate an accurate

picture of Equinix's current CSR communication practices on LinkedIn. This sample

serves as the basis for understanding Equinix's CSR values and how these values are

communicated on its LinkedIn page. The sample also includes Equinix's corporate

partners' websites that were named in Equinix's FR2021 Annual Report (Equinix, 2021a,

p. 25). Specifically, this sample includes websites that name the corporate partners' CSR

values. By using these organizations' CSR websites, better understanding about what

similarities between Equinix and its corporate partners' CSR initiatives is uncovered.

Data Collection Procedures

This study gathered data from publicly available webpages of Equinix's corporate partners, Equinix's annual Corporate Sustainability report for 2021, and Equinix's LinkedIn posts. First, I reviewed Equinix's Corporate Sustainability report for 2021 and extracted the main CSR categories that the document outlined. Then I assessed the webpages of Equinix's corporate partners that were named in Equinix's FY2021 Annual Report (Equinix, 2021a, p. 25). From this, I identified the CSR values of Equinix's corporate partners from their respective websites and entered them into an Excel spreadsheet. Lastly, I collected all of Equinix's LinkedIn posts from 2021 to 2023 using the data extraction software Octoparse and saved them in an Excel spreadsheet. Octoparse is a data extraction software that enables users to scrape information from various types of websites. This includes the post content and the number of likes, comments, and shares each post received.

Data Analysis Procedures

To answer the research questions and create a strategic social media marketing plan, Straussian grounded theory was utilized to analyze the data and uncover emerging themes (Azungah, 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To do this, I coded similar keywords using Vaismoradi et al's., (2016) process for forming conceptual codes and relationship codes and a conducted thematic content analysis. Specifically, this was accomplished by identifying key themes that emerge from the coded data and how they relate to one another (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

To answer RQ1, I first evaluated Equinix's 2021 Corporate Sustainability annual report and identified its CSR values and descriptions of programming through a

qualitative content analysis. After identifying these values and documenting them in my notes, I then reviewed the CSR values from Equinix's corporate partners' webpages. To analyze the data for both Equinix's annual report and the corporate partners' webpages, I coded preliminary patterns and identified emerging categories. Next, to follow Vaismoradi et al's (2016) steps for conducting a thematic content analysis, I first compared the identified CSR values in terms of similarities and differences and then grouped the values into clusters. Similar clusters received a label to reflect the CSR values' content and were then translated into themes. Next, I followed Glaser's (1965) steps for conducting a comparative analysis between the two sets of data. The information about Equinix's CSR values was then compared to the emerging themes from its corporate partners' CSR values. The overlapping content was then condensed into integrated categories, which holistically reflect the shared CSR values that Equinix and its corporate partners have.

Next, to answer RQ2(a), I analyzed 1,900 LinkedIn posts in an Excel spreadsheet. A total of 245 posts were identified as related to CSR values and communication, and then reorganized into a new Excel spreadsheet page. To identify the specific CSR content that Equinix was posting on its LinkedIn, I followed the steps outlined by Vaismoradi et al. (2016) for conducting a qualitative content analysis. First, I reviewed the data of the CSR posts. Then, I developed conceptual codes by determining key concepts within the data. These key concepts were then translated into categories that collectively reflected the types of CSR content that Equinix is promoting on its LinkedIn. For RQ2(b), the number of LinkedIn posts identified in RQ2(a) to be CSR-related was divided by the total

number of the sample of LinkedIn posts. The frequency of similar elements revealed what areas of shared values Equinix publishes most frequently.

Lastly, to answer RQ3, results from the qualitative content analysis on Equinix's LinkedIn posts used in RQ2(a) were compared with social media engagement data from users' likes, comments, and shares to determine what areas of Equinix's CSR communication LinkedIn users interact with more frequently. Within this study, engagement is measured by asynchronous interactivity between online users and social media content (Saffer et al., 2013) and not as dialogic communication (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Table 1
The research questions posed with the samples and data analysis methods used to answer them.

Research Questions	Sample	Data Analysis Method
RQ1: What are the shared socially responsible values between Equinix and its publicly identified corporate partners?	Equinix's Corporate Partners' CSR Websites and Equinix's Annual Corporate Sustainability report for 2021	Thematic Content Analysis (cf. Vaismoradi et al., 2016) and Comparative Analysis (cf. Glaser, 1965)
RQ2: (a) To what extent does Equinix use LinkedIn to communicate its CSR initiatives? (b) How frequently does Equinix promote its shared CSR values on LinkedIn?	Equinix's LinkedIn Posts and Results from RQ1 Thematic Content Analysis	Qualitative Content Analysis (cf. Vaismoradi et al., 2016) and frequency count
RQ3: Which of Equinix's CSR initiatives receive more social media engagement via likes, comments, and shares on LinkedIn?	Equinix's LinkedIn Posts	Frequency Count of Social Media Engagement Data (e.g., user likes, comments, and shares)

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

RQ1 sought to identify the shared socially responsible values between Equinix
and its publicly identified corporate partners. As depicted in Table 3, Equinix's annual
Corporate Sustainability report for 2021 identified 31 corporate partners. Three
companies from this sample did not feature any CSR initiatives on their websites. Results
of the thematic content analysis of Equinix's corporate partners' CSR values in Table 4
reveal themes of Sustainability, Diversity and Safety, People and Communities,
Corporate Giving, and Volunteering. After comparing the corporate partners CSR values
with Equinix's CSR values, results reveal the themes of Sustainability, Diversity, Equity,
and Inclusion (DEI), and Communities are shared. DEI and Communities were originally
combined in the analysis of Equinix's CSR initiatives; however, the categories were
separated due to 50% of its corporate partners having them in separate CSR categories.
Following the qualitative content analysis of Equinix's LinkedIn posts, these categories
were found to be reflective in characterizing the key elements of their CSR content. A
fourth category of Responsible Business was added while analyzing LinkedIn posts to
include content that was related to CSR yet did not have a specific theme. For RQ2(a), a
total of 245 CSR-related posts were identified from the sample of 1,900 posts.

Table 2
*Categories and descriptions from Equinix's Corporate Sustainability annual report for
2021.*

Equinix's CSR Category	Description

Environment	- Reach 100% clean & renewable energy in operations - Scale renewable energy purchasing globally to move from 90% to 100% - Design for the environment - Increase investments in green data centers and offices - Reduce resource use - Deploy best-in-class technologies and strategies to reduce the use of all resources
Social	- Build a diverse & inclusive culture - Be a place where every employee can say "I'm safe, I belong, and I matter" - Promote health & wellness - Support the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all our employees - Connect our communities - Serve and connect our communities to opportunities of the digital world
Governance	- Drive global responsibility - Promote global responsibility through unwavering values and ethical practices - Advocate for change - Forge partnerships to advocate for innovation and action - Integrate ESG - Integrate sustainability into all aspects and levels of our business

Table 3

Equinix's corporate partners and their corresponding similarities to Equinix's CSR initiatives.

Companies	*Environment*	*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)*	*Communities*
Azure	X	X	X
Oracle	X		X
Havi	X		
Suzano	X		X
HFW	X	X	X
Nitori	X	X	X
Sentara			
Ford	X	X	
Elektrobit			
Servicenow	X	X	X
Sysco	X	X	X
Naver Cloud	X		
Google Cloud	X		
Zoom	X	X	X
Workday	X	X	X
Discovery Communications	X	X	X
Nestle	X		X
Cisco	X	X	X
Verizon	X	X	X
Salesforce	X		X
Agéncia Estado			
Smithfield	X	X	X
TIAA	X	X	X
AWS	X	X	X

Telstra	X	X	X
HKEX	X	X	
Children's Cancer Institute			
Tencent Cloud	X		X
SBI Smushin Net Bank	X		
MUFG	X	X	X
AstraZenca	X	X	X

Table 4
Categories formed from examination of Equinix's corporate partners' CSR webpages.

| Category	Definition
Sustainability	Corporate actions taken to reduce energy consumption and emissions, ensure sustainable product outsourcing, recycle, replenish clean water sources, and invest in biodiversity.
Diversity and Safety	Corporate actions taken to ensure there is diversity in identity amongst its employees, inclusion of undervalued identity groups in operations, and that employees are safe in their workspaces. Can also include general external investments into diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.
People and Communities	Corporate actions taken to financially invest in empowerment efforts amongst social groups and communities through specific programs.
Corporate Giving	Corporate actions taken to financially invest in philanthropy.
Volunteering	Corporate actions to offer or provide opportunities for its employees to volunteer for a charity.

Sustainability

Sustainability emerged as the top category of shared corporate values with 87% of corporate partners listing it as one of the main aspects of their CSR plan. Common focuses include increasing renewable energy and decreasing carbon emissions through operations and company impact. This corresponds with how frequently Equinix posts about sustainability on its LinkedIn. Out of 245 CSR-related LinkedIn posts, 142 (58%) are related to Equinix's sustainability efforts. The posts' content varies, from keeping online users updated about Equinix's sustainability efforts in its operations, to featuring webinars of corporate experts discussing how sustainability can be interwoven in specific industries. In addition, Equinix repetitively reposts content promoting its sustainability reports throughout the span of two years, which is exemplified in Figure 1.

Figure 1
One of Equinix's sustainability posts that it repetitively reposts on LinkedIn (Equinix, 2022f).
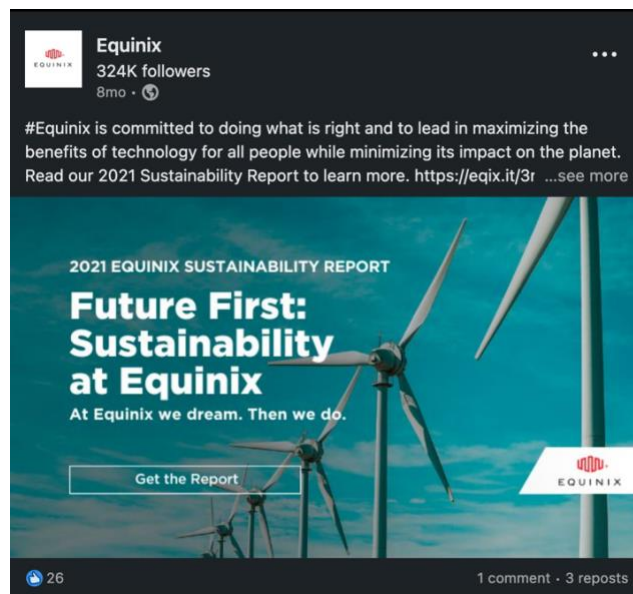

Despite sustainability being the most frequently posted CSR theme on Equinix's LinkedIn and the top shared CSR value amongst its corporate partners, posts containing

other CSR themes are more commonly interacted with in terms of social media engagement. The sustainability post with the highest level of engagement ranks eighth in the overall top performing posts with 363 reactions, three comments, and 43 reposts. As depicted in Figure 2, this post is a press release announcement about Equinix acquiring MainOne in West Africa. Through this acquisition, Equinix furthers its organizational goal in becoming "a leading African carrier-neutral digital infrastructure company" (Equinix 2022b).

Figure 2
Equinix's top performing sustainability posts detailing the acquisition of MainOne in West Africa on LinkedIn (Equinix, 2022b).
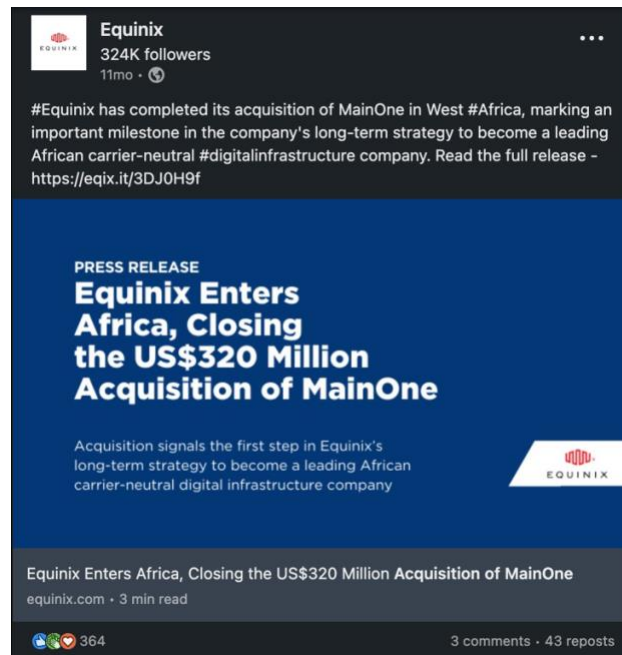

The second top performing CSR-related LinkedIn post about sustainability ranks 10th in the overall top performing posts with 298 reactions, three comments, and 15 reposts. The post's content in Figure 3 similarly coincides with being a press release announcement related to what Equinix is doing to include sustainability in its operations.

It delineates that Equinix is "increasing the operating temperate range" in its data centers (Equinix, 2022d). From this, energy use will be optimized to offset the company's carbon footprint.

Figure 3
Equinix's second top performing sustainability post detailing the increase in Equinix's operational temperature range on LinkedIn (Equinix, 2022j).
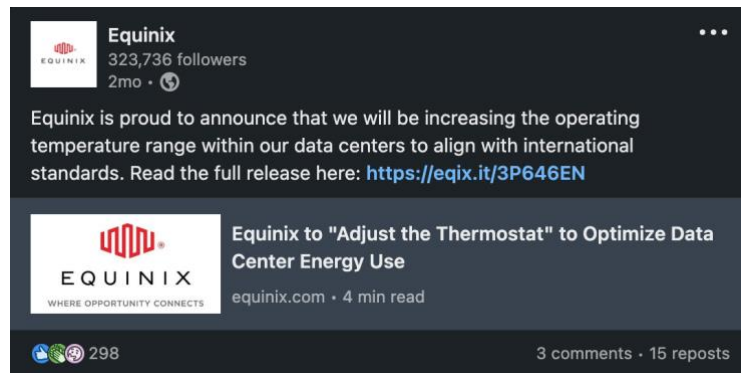
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) ranked the lowest category of shared corporate values with 56% of corporate partners listing it as one of the main aspects of their CSR plan. Common focuses amongst Equinix's corporate partners included prioritizing hiring employees with diverse identities from underrepresented groups and ensuring these individuals felt safe in their work environments. Despite this ranking as the lowest shared value amongst Equinix and its corporate partners, it is the second most frequently posted CSR theme on Equinix's LinkedIn. 77 out of 245 (32%) CSR-related LinkedIn posts are related to Equinix's DEI efforts. The posts' content ranges from recognizing those within the company for winning DEI awards, celebrating common DEI events like Pride month for the LGBTQIA+ community, and announcing what efforts Equinix is making to hire and support individuals with diverse identities from

underrepresented groups. As depicted in Figure 4, a phrase commonly used in some of these posts is that Equinix wants its employees to be able to say, "I'm safe, I belong, I matter" (Equinix, 2022d).

Figure 4
One of Equinix's DEI posts using the phrase "I'm safe, I belong, I matter," which frequently appears in its DEI posts on LinkedIn (Equinix, 2022d).

While DEI is the least common shared CSR initiative amongst Equinix and its corporate partners, four out of the top 10 posts with the highest LinkedIn engagement level are related to DEI. All four posts are recognizing Equinix's employees and the organization for winning DEI awards. As featured in Figure 5, the top performing CSR-related post out of the sample of CSR-related LinkedIn posts is a post congratulating the CEO on being named the top-rated CEO by Fairygodboss, an organization dedicated to increasing gender equity in the corporate world. This post received 1,137 reactions, 29 comments, and 61 reposts.

Figure 5
Equinix's top CSR-related post in terms of social media engagement on LinkedIn (Equinix, 2022i).

The other employee posts similarly congratulate individuals on their DEI

achievement. The third top performing CSR-related LinkedIn post about DEI ranks

seventh in the overall top performing posts with 381 reactions, 79 comments, and four

reposts. Specifically, as seen in Figure 6, this post congratulates the Vice President of

Product Finance at Equinix and includes a link to Equinix's blog about the recognition

that the employee received.

Figure 6
Equinix's third top performing CSR-related post in terms of social media engagement on LinkedIn (Equinix, 2022g).

Communities

Investing in communities is listed as one of the main components of 68% of Equinix's corporate partners' CSR plans. In the initial coding stage, the researcher included "communities" in the same category as DEI for Equinix under its 'Social' CSR initiative; however, the decision was made to expand communities into its own category due to the substantial number of corporate partners who listed it as a separate CSR component and the abundant amount of community-specific CSR posts on Equinix's LinkedIn.

The focus of the communities CSR initiative amongst Equinix's corporate partners is to invest in programing and progress within a community. The popularity of communities as a CSR value amongst Equinix's corporate partners is similarly reflected in the high levels of engagement on Equinix's LinkedIn posts that focus on this concept. While community-related posts only account for two out of the 10 top performing CSR-related posts, there are nine posts total out of the 245 data sample.

The community-related post with the highest engagement level is also the second most engaged post out of all of Equinix's top performing CSR-related LinkedIn content. As shown in Figure 7, this post is an announcement concerning Equinix's expansion efforts in Indonesia. Specifically, this effort is linked to previous communication about Equinix aiming to decrease the digital divide in underdeveloped countries. This post contains a link to a press release on Equinix's website and received 854 reactions, 13 comments, and 87 reposts.

Figure 7
Equinix's second top performing CSR-related post in terms of social media engagement on LinkedIn (Equinix, 2022h).
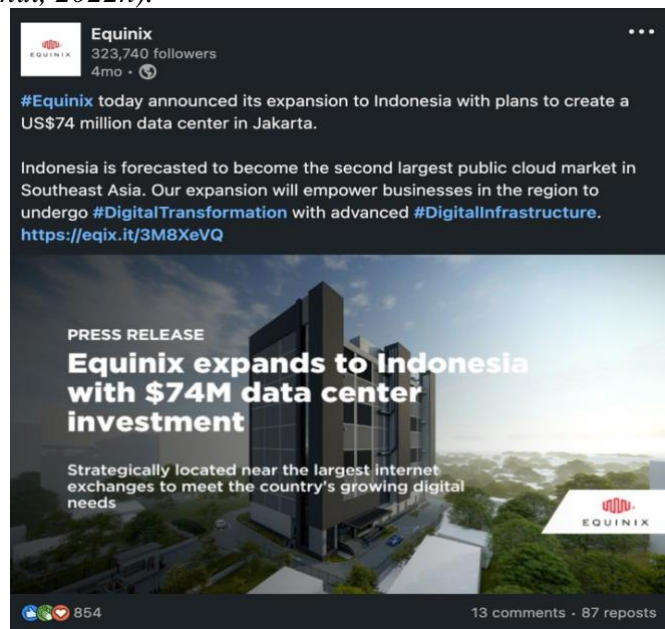
As shown in Figure 8, the second top performing community-related LinkedIn post in terms of social media engagement is a press release announcement about Equinix's support of Ukraine in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This post contains a link to

Equinix's website, where the page outlines the community investments Equinix is

making to support Ukraine. The post has 518 reactions and 49 reposts.

Figure 8
Equinix's second top performing community-related post in terms of social media
engagement on LinkedIn (Equinix, 2022c).

Responsible Business

The responsible business category emerged due to outlier posts that did not fit

into one CSR category yet were still related to CSR. In the sample, 38% of the posts (17

out of 245) are categorized as responsible business. This label was identified because the

various CSR-related content in this category focus on demonstrating Equinix's impact in

some way.

Specifically, a common type of post in this category is repetitive reposts urging

LinkedIn users to view Equinix's sustainability report. As shown in Figure 9, these posts

typically generate 20-30 likes, comments, or shares, and have been posted consistently

with minimal adjustments to the captions or graphic. Additionally, other posts include

references to the existence of Equinix's CSR initiatives.

Figure 9
An example of one of Equinix's posts that it frequently reposts to promote awareness
about its sustainability report (Equinix, 2022e).
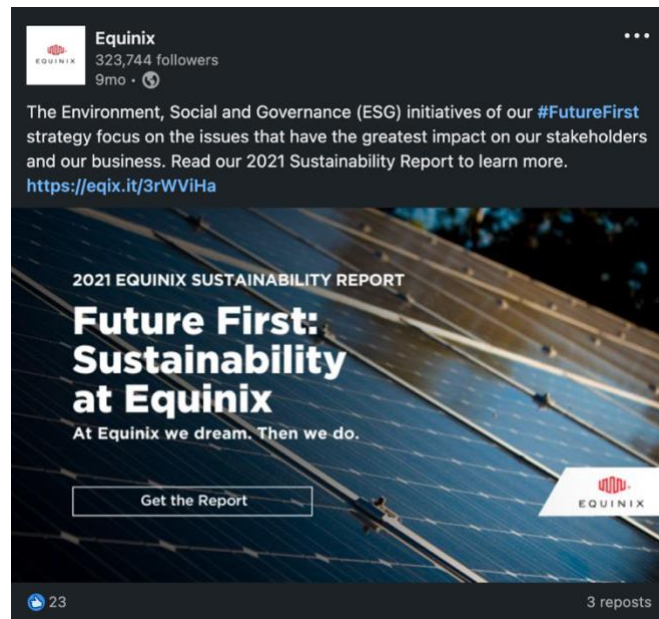
Summary of Results

To summarize, sustainability emerged as the most important shared corporate

value among Equinix's corporate partners, with 87% of partners featuring it as a

significant aspect of their CSR plan. Equinix's CSR-related LinkedIn posts focus more

on sustainability than any other CSR theme, yet the posts do not receive as much social

media engagement as other CSR-related posts. DEI is the least common shared CSR

initiative amongst Equinix and its corporate partners, but it is the second most frequently

posted CSR theme on Equinix's LinkedIn. Four out of the top 10 posts with the highest

LinkedIn engagement level are related to DEI, all recognizing Equinix's employees and

the organization for winning DEI awards. While communities as a category is not a

separate CSR value for Equinix, Equinix's corporate partners' CSR values often included

investing in communities as its own category in their CSR plan. Consequently, this led to

the decision to expand communities into its own category. Community-related posts from

Equinix on LinkedIn have some of the highest levels of engagement yet is promoted the

least.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

While Equinix and its corporate partners prioritize sustainability as a CSR theme, Equinix's LinkedIn posts about sustainability do not receive as much social media engagement as other CSR-related posts. Yet, Equinix's CSR-related LinkedIn posts focus more on sustainability than any other CSR theme. This demonstrates Equinix's desire to enhance its reputation as a sustainable company. However, it also denotes potential weakness in how Equinix is communicating its sustainability efforts or how much importance its followers place on sustainability.

Fernández et al. (2022) suggested a key element of cultivated CSR effectiveness on social media is curating messaging content that contains human-oriented appeals. Previous studies have shown that companies that engage in CSR messaging on social media achieve greater success when they specify numerical metrics and outcomes of their sustainability achievements. For example, Reilly and Hynan (2014) found that Coca-Cola was successful in its messaging of CSR by stating in one of its social media posts: "We distributed more than 10 billion fully recycle PlantBottle™ packages across 24 countries, eliminating the need for the equivalent of more than 200,000 barrels of oil since the debut of this innovative plastic bottle in 2009." While it is clear from Equinix's top performing posts related to sustainability that its LinkedIn users are attracted to posts that are providing timely updates about Equinix's sustainability efforts, it is possible that Equinix could improve interaction on these types of posts by providing content that furthers users' feelings of being informed and being a part of Equinix's growth as a company.

Despite Equinix's corporate partners prioritizing DEI as a CSR theme the least, Equinix's LinkedIn posts about DEI receive more social media engagement than other CSR-related posts. It is also the second most frequently promoted CSR theme on Equinix's LinkedIn page. Due to the high engagement levels that Equinix's DEI posts have received, Equinix should increase the DEI content it posts on LinkedIn. The higher engagement levels might suggest that Equinix's followers place a higher value on DEI and are interested in seeing the company's efforts in this area. By increasing more DEI content, Equinix may be able to further enhance its reputation as a socially responsive company.

Increasing engagement levels based on past posts is exemplified in previous social media research, which suggests users' engagement choices can be indicative of how they will engage with future content (Wang et al., 2021). For CSR researchers, this is an important consideration in assessing the effectiveness of DEI campaigns. To date, much of CSR research points to DEI initiatives typically focusing on employees (Becchetti et al., 2008; Grim & Johnson, 2021; Hon & Gamor, 2022). Based on the topics of the top performing CSR-related post in this category, as depicted in Figure 5 and Figure 6, it is possible Equinix's employees may engage more with DEI posts to support the inclusivity of their employer (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019; Testarmata et al., 2018). From this, highlighting more specific examples of DEI within the company, such as employees and events, could generate higher engagement amongst LinkedIn users (Gode et al., 2020).

Equinix has room to increase the number of community-related posts as a result of the large percentage of corporate partners list communities as one the main components of their CSR plan and low emphasis of communities from Equinix's LinkedIn page. Equinix can possibly increase engagement on LinkedIn by posting more CSR-related content since community-related posts have received more engagement. This recommendation is supported by previous social media research. Saxton et al. (2019) found that even though "Community Development" content was not posted as frequently, it generated higher engagement levels in their investigation of CSR subjects. Best practices in industry also indicate that publishing social media content similar to past posts that received high engagement will increase and maintain high user engagement (Kenan, 2022; McLachlan, 2020). From this, it is possible that Equinix can increase and maintain high user engagement levels by posting community-related posts more frequently. This could ultimately enhance its CSR strategy and brand reputation.

Finally, while the repetition of nonspecialized CSR posts in the responsible business category could be beneficial for new followers of Equinix's LinkedIn page, this type of content does not generate high levels of engagement. As a result, Equinix should consider creating more focused and targeted posts that highlight specific aspects of its CSR initiatives to drive engagement and better communicate the impact of its CSR efforts to its LinkedIn followers.

CHAPTER SIX

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is not without limitations. Specific limitations include how the company studied, time, engagement, and value impacted the results and conclusions. First, this study focuses on analyzing the CSR communication on LinkedIn of one B2B company. While this choice provides richness and specificity in analysis, further research should examine multiple B2B companies' LinkedIn accounts to assess industry-wide trends in usage.

Additionally, time influenced the sample and results. The study's duration was constricted to the closest time frame at the time of writing to provide the most up-to-date analysis of the case study's current CSR communication on LinkedIn. Future research should expand this time frame to identify long-term trends and changes in social media strategies on LinkedIn. The sample also included posts specifically related to real-time social issues that can generate polarized sentiments. This could have acted as another variable by impacting levels of user engagement and should be considered within future studies.

Another factor to be taken into account is how social media engagement is measured and examined. While the initial review of the data did not indicate a need to focus on this variable, sentiments may need to be formally measured in other cases. Specifically, some social media content can generate negative feedback, which could be inaccurately measured as a positive variable if only examined in the context of numerical data. To encapsulate this, future research should incorporate more measures of

engagement beyond interactivity of likes, comments, and reposts. While not present in this study, scholars should additionally consider incorporating engagement rate formulas, which can create meaningful metrics for success over longer periods of time.

Finally, more research should be conducted to understand the value that current and potential B2B corporate partners place on a company's LinkedIn communication. This will allow for communication scholars and practitioners to better account for the emphasis placed on the platform's content and messaging strategy when communicating CSR.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

While this study focuses on how one corporation communicates CSR initiatives on LinkedIn, the findings shed light on potential strategies and best practices that other B2B companies can consider when using LinkedIn for similar purposes. Specifically, this single case study of a B2B company offers a group of factors that can be considered in evaluating and strengthening a company's social media presence on LinkedIn. This study evaluates how Equinix communicated its CSR initiatives on LinkedIn by examining its shared CSR values amongst corporate partners, frequency of content posting, social media analytics, and analyses of messaging and content. Social media analytics play a crucial role in evaluating the effectiveness of a company's digital CSR communication strategy. The analysis of messaging and content can also help to identify areas for improvement and refine messaging to align with the company's overall CSR goals. While the shared CSR values between a B2B company and its stakeholders did not have a direct impact on social media metrics, these values were purposely highlighted in this specific company's LinkedIn content. The choice to remain consistent in communicating shared CSR values in an online format can reaffirm brand reputation by fostering trust and loyalty amongst a company's corporate partners. By considering these factors, B2B companies can leverage LinkedIn to effectively communicate their CSR initiatives and maintain positive relationships with their corporate partners.

Results suggest that Equinix's CSR-related LinkedIn content received more engagement when the content included information concerning sustainability efforts,

57

uplifting international communities, and included real-time examples in business operations. This corresponds with current B2B marketing trends, which suggest B2B buyers value companies that value sustainability (Yuen, 2023). Yet despite this type of content's popularity on LinkedIn, Equinix does not post this type of content and messaging as frequently as it does other types of posts. The paradox of this draws attention to the importance of companies continuously evaluating their social media strategies and adjusting their communication to match that of their stakeholders (Morehouse & Saffer, 2018).

Specific to the context of technology companies, this study provides insights into what types of online communication may be effective amongst similar audiences. While no definite conclusions can be drawn due to messaging being dependent on context, it is possible that characteristics of Equinix's top performing posts could be beneficial for other technology companies to emulate. The results show that more users interacted with posts that contained information about real-time CSR events happening in business operations, press releases, and links to the company's website. This suggests that Equinix's LinkedIn users value being informed about information in real-time and having an option to read more about it on an external website. Thus, timeliness and information-sharing may be relevant for other technology companies to incorporate within their messaging strategies.

Within the realm of CSR theorizing, this study contributes to understanding of how CSR messaging is implemented on LinkedIn. Within this case study, Equinix treated its CSR initiatives to gain and maintain brand favorability amongst its online users. It

additionally relied heavily on its postings about sustainability to further its brand identity as a "green company." This creates a basis for further exploration in how a social media platform may impact CSR messaging strategies.

Lastly, while these results are confined to one case, this study reveals an existing interest amongst LinkedIn users in viewing CSR initiatives. This study demonstrates that LinkedIn should be considered as a communication component when companies are developing their CSR communication strategies. This study argues that scholars should not discount or generalize LinkedIn as a simple social networking site when studying social media in research. By utilizing LinkedIn, B2B companies can effectively reach a professional audience who are actively engaged in business practices and decision-making. This can lead to potential partnerships, collaborations, and brand reputation enhancement. Additionally, LinkedIn provides a platform for companies to position themselves as socially responsible organizations, which can attract potential stakeholder groups who share similar values and interests. As social media continues to play a pivotal role in modern business communication, LinkedIn's potential as a powerful CSR communication tool should not be underestimated or overlooked.

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