

Exploring Web CSR Communication of the Algerian Banks

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Abstract:

Many scholars emphasized the benefits that can be gained from internet usage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication. Thus, we aim in this paper to explore the CSR communication on the Algerian banks' websites. We have adopted a descriptive study using a quantitative survey to analyze the Algerian banks' corporate websites, based on an adaptation of the analytical framework designed by Vitari et al. (2010). The sample comprised 19 websites of the Algerian banks that are subjects of the study. The results show that some Algerian banks communicate about CSR on their corporate websites. However, there is a low level of CSR information compared to other developing countries. Moreover, we have found a low level of CSR information communicated by the Algerian banks on their websites compared to other developing countries.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, csr communication, banks, corporate website, developing country

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the internet has become an important tool that helps improve companies' relations with their stakeholders (Tagesson, et al 2009, 353; Koswara, et al., 2015, 28). Therefore, corporations started to realize the essential role that the internet can improve the quality of their organizational communication (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007, 85). Many studies emphasize the importance of corporate websites in business communications (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007, 85). Unlike traditional mass media channels, a website can offer multiple sections in line with each targeted audience's expectations (Esrok & Leichty, 2000, 328). The corporate website allows the company to display its corporate identity and its management policy to the stakeholders (Dutot, et al., 2016; Nicoli & Komodromos, 2019). Furthermore, websites can easily offer information to a variety of stakeholders, and they also can bring a significant boost to the company's image (Vitari, et al., 2010; Gligor-Cimpoieru & Munteanu, 2014, 282) and build the company's reputation (Yudarwati, 2015, 230).

Surfing on a corporate website can lead users to read CSR or integrated reports (Zieita, 2017, 43). Corporate websites are also interactive tools because they enhance the dialogue with the stakeholders, especially when they offer the possibility to comment and share CSR content (Vitari, Bourdon, & Rodhain, 2010; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012, 293). In the last decade, scholars have gotten more interested in CSR communication via corporate websites due to the widespread use of the internet in business communication (Testarmata, Fortuna, & Ciaburri, 2018, 36). Within this context, studies emphasized the benefits of internet usage in CSR communication (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007, 85; Hinson, 2011, 102). Furthermore, many studies have addressed website efficiency as a communication tool about the company's social and environmental actions (Branco & Rodrigueus, 2006, 235).

The Socioeconomic change in the business world, particularly in the banking sector, has generated the concept of "socially responsible banking" (Scholtens, 2009, 159). Banks nowadays contribute to solving

social and environmental problems and influence communities by implementing a CSR policy (Belal et al., 2015). Accordingly, previous studies have shown that the industry sector represents one of the most influencing factors on CSR communication (Adams et Al., 1998, 2; Branco & Rodrigues, 2006, 232; Farache, et al., 2009, 3; Tan, et al., 2016, 13). Therefore, companies that might harm the environment are more likely to be subject to social pressure (Roitto, 2013), while the companies operating in sectors that are not considered harmful to the environment, such as banks, disclose relatively less environmental information (Clarke & Gibson-Sweet, 1999). However, the case is not the same with other social responsibility dimensions (Branco & Rodrigueus, 2006, 232), which means banks still might remain subject to social pressures. In this study, we focus on the websites' CSR communication of the Algerian banks. The main reason that stimulated our study is that there is not enough data regarding banks' online CSR communication in the Algerian context.

2. Literature review

2.1 CSR Communication in the banking sector

CSR communication is sometimes considered as part of public relations activities (Asvanyi, 2009, 18), and also the distribution of messages about the firm's CSR initiatives (Morsing, 2006, 171). In addition, CSR communication highlights the corporate's intentions, actions, and initiatives that are derived from the adoption of a responsible approach (Zieita, 2017, 42). Stakeholders influence organizational behavior (Husillos & Alvarez-Gil, 2008, 128), and the company's CSR communication is no exception.

Evache and Bahti (2010) argue that CSR information may vary depending on the specificity of each industry. Unlike heavy industries, banks may have fewer stakeholders' scrutiny in terms of information on their environmental performance (Clarke & Gibson-Sweet, 1999, 8). In this context, many studies have addressed the subject of CSR communication in the banking sector (Branco & Rodrigueus, 2006; Asvanyi, 2009; Laidroo & Oobik, 2014; Hetze & Winistörfer, 2015;

Lamboglia & D'Onza, 2015; Nicoli & Komodromos, 2019). Branco & Rodrigues found that the Portuguese banks with higher visibility among consumers seem to be more concerned to improve their image through CSR disclosure (2006, 232). From another perspective, Laidroo & Oobik found that the financial crisis has been most extensively reflected in nordic banks' CSR disclosures, supporting the expected increase in disclosure quantity and decrease in readability. However, the results failed to detect convergence in banks' subsidiaries and headquarter CSR disclosure practices (2014, 62).

2.2 CSR Communication on banks' websites in developing countries

Many studies have focused on the content of CSR reporting as well as, more recently, the determinants of CSR disclosure. Although most of these studies are conducted in Western and developed contexts, interest in developing countries has increased in the last decade (Georgiadou & Nickerson, 2020, 415). Accordingly, scholars argue that there is a positive correlation between CSR communication and company characteristics, such as industry (Tan, et al., 2016), firm size (Roitto, 2013) and profitability (Utgard, 2015). Moreover, external contextual factors may influence CSR communication, such as ownership (Haji, 2013) and external stakeholders' pressures (Khan et al., 2013; Islam and Deegan, 2008). In the banking sector, CSR communication can be influenced by the context in which banks operate, especially when they seek to foster a positive corporate image (Matrinuzzi and Krumay, 2013).

Research on bank's CSR communication in developing countries needs more insights, especially in Algeria. According to Georgiadou & Nickerson, online CSR disclosure in emerging economies is relatively limited (2020, 413). However, several studies have focused on banks' online CSR communication in developing countries/economies (Hinson, 2011; Yudarwati, 2015; Ramdhony, 2015; Koswara, et al., 2015; Hossain, et al., 2016; Masud, et al., 2018; Aracil, 2019; Georgiadou & Nickerson, 2020). Accordingly, Hinson et al. (2010)

argue that there is a decline in CSR communication has been observed in the emerging economies, including Middle East as well as Africa. Similarly, Hetze and Winistörfer found a very low level of online CSR communication of Middle Eastern banks as well as many African and Asian banks (2016, 514).

Within another context, the banks' online CSR communication does not necessarily reflect the reality of CSR implementation. In Ghana, for example, the Agricultural Development Bank was considered the main socially responsible bank in 2011, while it had the weakest online CSR reportage (Hinson, 2011). Moreover, about 70% of the banks in the UAE provide information on their CSR activities via their websites. However, the information presented is considered minimal in terms of quantity (Georgiadou & Nickerson, 2020). Within another context, the three Indonesian government-owned banks analyzed by Yudarwati (2015) consider CSR information on websites to be vital, despite the low interactivity level. In Algeria, Mahcine & Cherchem (2019) argue that sustainable development (SD) exists in the Algerian banking sector. Yet, no studies are focusing on CSR communication on the Algerian banks' websites. Accordingly, we aim through this study to explore the CSR communication of the Algerian banks through their corporate websites by proposing the following two main research questions:

RQ1. Do Algerian banks communicate about their CSR on their corporate websites?

RQ2. Do Algerian banks communicate differently about CSR on their websites from other developing countries?

3. Methodology

This is a descriptive study that explores web CSR communication of banks in Algeria as a developing country. Therefore, we have adopted a quantitative survey method that we have applied on the Algerian banks' websites using an analytical framework designed by Vitari et Al.(2010).

This analytical framework is divided into three main sections: Section 1. Corporate's general information (name, industrial sector,

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website address, and date of observation)

Section 2. Information on corporate website's homepage (CSR links and CSR terminology).

Section 3. Information on the overall corporate website pages (CSR reports, CSR internal links, Charter, audit, and social certifications).

Table 1. The analytical framework structure

Lev. 1	Description of Lev. 1	Lev. 2	Description of Lev.2	Lev. 3	Description of Lev. 3
Overview	General information	Company			
		Industrial sector			
		Website			
		Date of observation			
Home page	Information on website's home page	CSR links	Number of directly visible links refers to CSR or SD (terms like: Sustainable development, social responsibility, environmental responsibility, etc.)		
		Open links	Number of visible links refers in a broad sense to CSR, SD, such as: sponsorship, environment, climate change etc....		
		Terminology	The used terminology on CSR and SD on the company's website homepage		
Website	Information on all the website's pages	Report	Integrated report	Availability	Whether it is available for reading
				Years	Available issues per year
				Extent of CSR info.	Average number of pages on CSR info.
			CSR/SD report	Mention	Yes/No
				Availability	Whether it is available for reading
				Years	Available editions per year
				Number	Number of years
				Certified?	Whether it is certified by an external organization
				By whom?	Name of the organization
				Pages	Report length
		Charter	Information on the ethical/conduct code/charter	Mention	Yes/No
				Where?	Link
				Availability	Whether it is available for reading

		Internal CSR links	Number		
		Audit	Information on external social /environmental audit	Mention	Yes/No
				Where?	Link
				Availability	Whether it is available for reading
		Certifications	Information on Certification	Mention	Yes/No
				Which one?	
				Where?	Link
				Availability	Whether it is available for reading

Source: (Vitari, Bourdon, & Rodhain, 2010) with some modifications

3.1 Sample

The corpus of research was constituted by all the banks in Algeria, according to the list from the official website of the Bank of Algeria (2020), and the sample is represented by those banks in the list that meet the criterion of having an official website. Therefore, the volume of the sample included in the analysis is 19 cases: CPA, CNEP, Société Générale Algérie, Alsalam Bank, Bank ABC, Crédit Agricole Corporate Et Investissement Bank Algérie, HSBC Business, Trust Bank Algeria, Natixis, BNP Paribas El-Djazair, Gulf Bank Algeria, Banque Extérieure d'Algérie, BDL, Fransabank El Djazaïr, Housing Bank, BNA, Arab Bank, Baraka, BADR. The websites' analysis process has taken around two months, from January 2021 to February 2020. Only Citibank got excluded from the analysis because it does not have a specific website for Algeria, and the information communicated through their global website does not talk specifically about the bank's activities in the Algerian context.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Websites' CSR links

Amongst 19 websites, only 03 websites (15.8%) have one CSR link on their home pages mentioning, explicitly, the term of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). 05 websites (26.3%) have links on open terminology related to CSR, such as sponsorship, patronage, anti-corruption, management impact, commitment against breast cancer.

After analyzing the home pages, we explored the entire content of the Algerian banks' websites. We have found that only 03 websites contain (15.8%) internal CSR links, meaning that the Algerian banks do not strive to communicate explicitly about CSR on their official websites.

4.1 Websites' CSR supports

Website's CSR supports are documents used by a company to communicate about its social and/or environmental performances, such as CSR reports, charter (code of conduct), certifications, social audit.

- ✓ CSR reports: 08 websites (42%) contain annual activity reports (Alsalam, ABC, Trust Bank Algeria, AGB, BDL, Housing Bank, Baraka, Fransabank El Djazair). However, only some of AGB bank's annual reports contain chapters about the bank's CSR. On the other hand, there is no indication of CSR reports in all the 19 websites (00%).
- ✓ Charter: only Crédit Agricole has mentioned its three downloadable & readable charters, while there is no indication of the banks' charters in the rest of the websites (94.7%).
- ✓ Social/environmental audit: only Société Générale have talked about their social and environmental audit, which is not available for reading or downloading.
- ✓ Social/environmental certifications: in 17 websites (89.47%) there is no indication of this kind of certification, while BNP Paribas and Société Générale's mention the certification ISO 9001/2008 on their websites (it is downloadable only on Société Générale's website).

Table 2. Websites' CSR supports of the Algerian banks

	Annual report		CSR report	Charter	So/Env. audit mention	So/Env. certifications mention
	Number of issues	Av. Num. of pages on CSR info.				
CPA	00	00	00	00	No	No
CNEP	00	00	00	00	No	No
Société Générale Algérie	00	00	00	01	Yes/once	Yes (01)
Alsalam	08	00	00	00	No	No

ABC	14	00	00	00	No	No
Crédit Agricole	00	00	00	03	No	No
HSBC	00	00	00	00	No	No
Natixis	00	00	00	00	No	No
Trust Bank Algeria	05	00	00	00	No	No
BNP Paribas	00	00	00	00	No	Yes (01)
Gulf Bank Algeria (AGB)	16	06	00	00	No	No
Banque Extérieure d'Algérie	00	00	00	00	No	No
BDL	02	00	00	00	No	No
Fransabank El Djazair	09	00	00	00	No	No
Housing Bank	03	00	00	00	No	No
BNA	00	00	00	00	No	No
Arab Bank	00	00	00	00	No	No
Baraka	10	00	00	00	No	No
BADR	00	00	00	00	No	No

Source : The author

4.2 CSR Communication on the banks websites in Algeria as a developing country

There is a lack of insights on CSR communication determinants of the Algerian banks' CSR communication on their corporate websites. Nonetheless, Algerians seem to have fewer expectations regarding CSR information (Zieita, 2020, p.208). Accordingly, corporations may choose to communicate less about their CSR information if:

- Corporations operate in a marketplace where CSR information is not considered crucial in the competition (Reynaud and Chandon 1998);
- The corporations' activity sector is not harmful to the environment (Clarke & Gibson-Sweet, 1999). Which is the case in the banking sector;

The corporations try to dodge stakeholders' skepticism and scrutiny, especially since CSR messages are sometimes perceived as inconsistent or unreliable (Villagra and Lopez 2013, 207).

Moreover, a lack of banks' online CSR communication is assessed in developing countries (Hetze & Winistörfer, 2016). Nevertheless, contextual factors might lead to differences regarding interpretation, practice, and communication of banks' CSR in and across developing

countries. Accordingly, we can argue that Algerian banks do not communicate CSR on their websites similarly to banks from other developing countries. Many studies in emerging economies show that CSR communication levels on banks' websites seem to be higher than in Algeria. Georgiadou and Nickerson (2020) have found that about 70% of the domestic banks in the UAE provide information about their CSR activities, which is relatively higher than Algerian banks' CSR communication. Whereas, Indonesian government-owned banks consider that the CSR information is vital, shown on their corporate websites (Yudarwati, 2015).

Hetze & Winistörfer argue that Asian and African banks have less CSR reporting on websites than in America and Europe (2016, p. 512). However, the Algerian banks prefer more narrative CSR information with no CSR report on websites. On the other hand, banks in Indonesia (Yudarwati, 2015), Oman, and India (Hetze & Winistörfer, 2016) feature CSR reports and narrative CSR information on their websites.

According to the Social Disclosure Levels model (Zieita, 2017, pp. 44-47), we can argue that CSR communication on the Algerian banks' websites is a "selective highlighting" on some of the firm's CSR actions. In this context, corporations do not communicate about responsible activities. Therefore, data show that some Algerian banks share CSR information on their corporate websites. Nevertheless, the Algerian banks seem to be less keen to talk about CSR on their corporate websites, which determines the low levels of CSR communication. Even though the sustainable development policy is implemented in the banking sector in Algeria (Mahcine & Cherchem, 2019), knowing that CSR is coming from the concept of sustainable development in a corporate context (Hetze & Winistörfer, 2016, 502).

Hence, the Algerian context does not encourage the banks to be keener to disseminate their CSR activities via their corporate websites. As far as Société Générale Group goes, we found that the website of BRD in Romania contains annual activity reports when the Algerian branch (of Société Générale) does not disclose annual reports on its website. Accordingly, there are differences in the quantity and quality

of CSR commination. Although the two banks (the Algerian and Romanian) belong to the same group, Knowing that Société Générale is supposed to adopt a management policy/philosophy in its different branches around the world.

5. Conclusion

Since research on Algerian banks' CSR communication still needs more insights, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on CSR communication in the Algerian context as a developing country. Therefore, the main goal of this study is to explore the CSR communication of the Algerian banks' websites. Accordingly, we proposed two research questions: "RQ1. Do Algerian banks communicate about their CSR on their corporate websites?"; "RQ2. Do Algerian banks communicate differently about CSR on their websites from other developing countries?". As far as the RQ1 goes, we found only a few Algerian banks communicate about CSR via their corporate websites, even though the CSR information presented on these websites is minimal in terms of quantity. Regarding the RQ2, we found a low level of CSR information communicated by the Algerian banks on their websites compared to other developing countries.

According to stakeholders' theory, the context in which firms operate can determine how they communicate CSR. Thus, the quality and the quantity of web CSR communication of the Algerian banks might be explained by the specificity of the Algerian context, compared with other contexts, particularly with other developing countries.

Although our research findings give a breadth of exploration by focusing on the Algerian banks' CSR communication on their websites, the results are limited in one context. Hence, this cannot be generalized in other contexts that have their specificities, like Europe or even other developing countries. The current findings stimulate our scientific curiosity to study the quality and the quantity of CSR information communicated by the Algerian banks compared to those operating in other contexts. This research leads our way to investigate and analyze

transnational differences that shape the banks' web CSR communication based on the specificities of each context.

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