Corporate Citizenship online

How the web is used to enhance Corporate Citizenship

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1 INTRODUCTION

The CCCD is planning an internet platform on the topic of Corporate Citizenship (CC). Foreseen for the platform are informational, participatory and interactive offerings for target groups in academia, civil society, politics and the media.

The present study will provide, first of all, an overview of the current use of the internet on the topic of Corporate Citizenship in Germany. Further examples of applications and formats currently used in connection with the topic will be introduced with the help of the websites of international organizations, particularly from the UK and the USA.

Based on the thesis that the topic of Corporate Citizenship has a lesser presence on German websites than the broader topic of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), this research will also consider websites concerning the latter.

1.1 UTILIZATION CONCEPTS: INFORMATION, PARTICIPATION, INTERACTION

Internet based applications that enable interaction between people on a wider basis, with the help of which contact networks can be built, knowledge exchange can be organized, information can be arranged and this arrangement then be made accessible to other users, will also be labeled as Social Software (Richter/Koch 2007).

Through the development of Social Software, the possibility of participation and interaction through the internet has advanced substantially. Websites or their elements can be developed on different underlying utilization concepts.

The analysis of the use of the internet on the topic of Corporate Citizenship will differentiate the websites, as well as their individual elements, by underlying utilization concepts: conveyance of information, concentration on participation or interaction.

The analysis will be based on the following understanding of these three categories: websites, or their parts, that are built for information conveyance release information that has been compiled by an editorial team. Users can neither change this information nor comment on it.
Concentrating on participation enables users to generate content themselves as well as to publish, comment and assess (OECD 2007, P.17).

With interaction lies the opportunity for the user to get in contact with other users, to communicate with these contacts visibly or invisibly to others and to establish or develop a network. The communication methods can take many different forms: through text (internal platform email, chat, discussion forums), through pictures, through audio data (i.e. internet phone) or through video data (i.e. videophone). Internet platforms that offer these applications will be designated Social Media platforms, with reference to the concept of Social Software.

1.2 METHODS

The websites used in the analysis are, foremost, those of organizations known through CCCD’s working relationships to have an internet presence with a thematic focus on CC and/or CSR.

With the help of the search engine Google, additional websites from outside of Germany will be systematically sought. The results will be based on the search terms “gesellschaftliches Engagement von Unternehmen” (social engagement of companies a.k.a Corporate Citizenship), “Corporate Citizenship” or “Corporate Social Responsibility.” The websites listed on the first five results pages will be more closely examined and included in the analysis, provided the active thematic focus of the search inquiry is correct, the theme is innovatively implemented and/or a relevant party maintains the website.

Websites of the international organizations used in the analysis are exclusively the internet presences of corporate and organization networks as well as thematically relevant Social Media platforms.

Particular attention is paid to a few of these, like the Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship in the USA and Business in the Community in the UK, which are the international partners of CCCD. Others will be located through further internet research. Concerning the analyzed websites in general, it is understood that the selection made is in no way comprehensive. The inquiry was concluded on November 19, 2008.
## 2 UTILIZATION OF THE INTERNET ON THE TOPIC OF CC IN GERMANY

### 2.1 INFORMATION

The websites of a disproportionate number of players in various sectors that deal with the topics of Corporate Citizenship and/or Corporate Social Responsibility and their implementation in German companies are designed to convey information. To these belong:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Politics</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie (Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bmwi.de/BMWi/Navigation/Mittelstand/corporate-citizenship.html">www.bmwi.de/BMWi/Navigation/Mittelstand/corporate-citizenship.html</a></td>
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<th><strong>Economy</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e. V. (BDI) (Federal Association of German Industry, inc.); Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände e. V. (BDA) (Federal Association of German Employers Unions, inc.)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.csrgermany.de">www.csrgermany.de</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Economy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>GILDE-Wirtschaftsförderung, EU-Kommission und weitere Partner (GILDE- Economic Advancement, the EU Commission and other partners)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.csr-mittelstand.de">www.csr-mittelstand.de</a></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Non-Profit Organizations</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Centrum für Corporate Citizenship Deutschland (Center for Corporate Citizenship Germany)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cccdeutschland.org">www.cccdeutschland.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unternehmen: Partner der Jugend (UPJ) (Companies: Partners of the Youth)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.upj-online.de">www.upj-online.de</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.verantwortliche-untemehmensfuehrung.de">www.verantwortliche-untemehmensfuehrung.de</a></td>
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<th><strong>Foundations</strong></th>
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<td>Stiftung Unternehmensverantwortung (Corporate Responsibility Foundation)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.csr-news.net">www.csr-news.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertelsmann Foundation:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Database for mediatory organizations</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gute-geschaeftemacher.org">www.gute-geschaeftemacher.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The Initiative Unternehmen für die Region (Companies for the Region)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.untemehmen-fuer-die-region.de">www.untemehmen-fuer-die-region.de</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- CSR-WeltWeit (CSR-WorldWide)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.csr-weltweit.de">www.csr-weltweit.de</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These websites offer information on the topic of CC and/or CSR, in the fields of the economics, politics, academia and civil society. An overwhelming number of the mentioned German websites discuss the topic of Corporate Citizenship as a part of Corporate Responsibility. Corporate Citizenship is the central theme only on the websites of the Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie (Federal Ministry for Science and Technology), of the Ministerium für Generationen, Familie, Frauen und Integration des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (Federal Ministry for Generations, Families, Women and the Integration of the State North Rheine Westphalia), of the Non-Profit Organizations and of the Bertelsmann Foundation.

Found here are the following types of information:

-- General information on the topic and advice on implementation
-- Sample projects and information about the real-time involvement of companies
-- Research results
-- News about the topic
-- Notices about meetings (i.e. competitions, workshops, conferences)
-- Information about mediatory organizations

The platform CSR-Worldwide by Bertelsmann Foundation provides a database of CSR-activities of German companies abroad as well as general conditions for CSR-activities in countries all over the world.

In a broader sense, so-called Online Tools, like the “Demographic Risk Map” and the “World Map of Climate Politics” of Econsense, also belong to the category of informational offerings. These should be helpful in creating prognoses for developments in social- and climate- politics that are relevant to the CSR strategies of companies. Econsense’s “Klimatech-Atlas” (Climate-tech Atlas) gives an overview of technologies for climate protection in the fields of industry, energy, transportation and construction.

CSR-News offers a special search engine for the topic of CSR on the website: www.csr-search.net. This draws upon CSR-News’s collected data.

Along with the textual conveyance of information available on websites, further popular information tools, like video and audio podcasts, newsticker and newsletters, are used.
2.2 PARTICIPATION

Three German internet offerings that elect a participatory approach to dealing with the topic on the internet and/or with the use of the internet for the implementation of CSR, were located that fell within the scope of this research.

- Commentary Function

On the Social Media platform, **Utopia** – [www.utopia.de](http://www.utopia.de), registered members are able to comment on the content of corporate profiles.

On the news platform **CSR-News**, companies and organizations have the chance to make thematically relevant press releases public. For these, they can enable a commentary function. CSR-News provides domain moderators who can proof the commentaries before they are made available.

- Public Discussion Contributions

The project **Diskutiere!** ([www.diskutiere.de](http://www.diskutiere.de)), is the online discussion forum of the Non-Profit Organization UPJ – Unternehmen: Partner der Jugend e.V. (Companies: Partners of Youth, inc.) and of the telecommunications company O2\(^1\). The project offers companies, organizations and public administrations the opportunity to bring together themes that can be discussed by experts and interested parties for a specific amount of time. The idea is to stimulate and enable a stakeholder dialogue. Visitors to the website are invited to comment on the theme being discussed on the website. Finally, the discussion’s results are processed to become the basis for an off-line podium discussion and, in the case of the company O2, to be included as stakeholder opinions in the strategic development of the company.

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\(^1\) **diskutieren** is, according to a study on the internet supported sustainability reporting of companies in the year 2007, one of the few internet portals that makes use of the possibility of stakeholder participation and interaction via the internet. On the international level, according to the study, a few companies have begun to use the new possibilities for stakeholder communication. Among the DAX30 companies researched in the scope of the study there were, at that point in time, almost no translated international offerings that invited stakeholders to participation or interaction, at least in the area of sustainability communication. ([Blanke, Moritz / Godemann, Jasmin / Herzig, Christian (2007)])
2.3 INTERACTION

2.3.1 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS - OPEN OR CLOSED

Corporate Social Responsibility is the central theme of the Social Media platforms that will be presented here. These platforms will be sub-divided into two categories: open and closed platforms. Platforms will be labeled as open if private people, independent of their professions, can have access to it. Closed Social Media platforms are, on the other hand, only accessible to people who are connected with an institution in which they, in principle, occupy a position that deals with the topic of the platform.

2.3.1.1 OPEN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Utopia

Utopia is an internet portal that offers consumers information on the topic of strategic consumption and sustainable lifestyles. For the most part, the portal is based on information that has been made available by registered users. The registration is available for free to everyone. For about a year, private people have been able to design individual profiles in the Utopia community, get in contact with each other and build networks. Since November 2008, companies have also been invited to document their paths towards sustainability in their Utopia-profile - with descriptions of their commitments on their Sedcard, with Blog entries, pictures and video clips, as well as with open dialogue with stakeholders or other companies. For their part, the registered users of the portal, the so-called Utopisten (Utopians), are able to comment on the companies' entries and to get in contact with corporate representatives.

How well the offer to directly communicate with companies has been used has not been evaluated at this time. Because the platform was initially built on interaction between users and because the community, based on the data after one year, boasts over 30,000 registered users, it is not unlikely that this new offer has been well used.
2.4 SUMMARY

The topically relevant websites from representatives of different sectors in Germany are predominantly set up for the conveyance of information. Only one internet portal, the project Diskutiere! (Discuss!) operated cooperatively by an NGO and a company, is set up directly for participation. Another, CSR-News, operated by a foundation, has integrated only one participative element into its online presence. Utopia AG, a corporation that stays close to the idea of Social Entrepreneurship and speaks to targeted consumers, operates the only internet platform designed for interaction on this topic.

Until now the offer to place commentary and opinions on the corresponding pages has not often been utilized. Only 38 people took part in Diskutiere! (Discuss!’s third online discussion that ran for six weeks. (UPJ e.V., P.3) The commentary function of CSR-News can only be used by those who are previously registered. Only after logging in can commentary be composed and read. As it is, there is not much to read given that, during the last twelve months, only around three comments were posted per month. Only recently did the portal of Utopia AG enable interaction between stakeholders and corporate representatives. In this case, however, the portal already has more than 30,000 registered users who explain the sustainability backgrounds of their products critically. Therefore, it can be supposed that this community would actively use the opportunity to interact with companies. CCCD’s planned company platform differentiates itself in particular from Utopia.de in this way, that here social involvement (in the sense of CC) for the common good will be at the forefront, and the wide field of Corporate Social Responsibility for all areas of corporate practice will be less so.

3 USE OF THE INTERNET FOR THE TOPIC OF CC AND/OR CSR INTERNATIONALLY

For this part of the analysis, which deals with how the internet has been used outside of Germany on the topic, the websites of international corporate and organization networks as well as English language Social Media platforms will be utilized. Nearly all of these institutions have their headquarters in the UK or the USA.
Corporate and Organization Networks

- CSR Europe: www.csreurope.org (Headquarter: Belgium)
- Business for Social Responsibility: www.bsr.org
- Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship (BCCC): www.bcccc.net
- The Conference Board: www.conference-board.org
- Global Leadership Network: www.globalleadershipnetwork.org
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development: www.wbcsd.org
- International Business Leaders Forum: www.iblf.org
- The CRO: www.thecro.com
- Business in the Community: www.bitc.org.uk
- CSR360 Global Partner Network: www.csr360gpn.org

Social Media Platforms

- Net Impact: www.netimpact.org

  Net Impact is an association for students who would like to work in the field of CSR, as well as for those who are already employed in the field.

- Just Means: www.justmeans.com

  Just Means is a Social Media platform that was founded in 2007, which seeks to enable and foster a stakeholder dialogue between companies, organizations and private people on the topic of corporate responsibility.

- Corporate Responsibility Group: www.crguk.org

  The Corporate Responsibility Group’s website is a platform for a Peer-to-Peer Network of those responsible for CR, for those responsible for CR.
3.1 INFORMATION

International websites, especially those examined here from corporate networks and organizations that are headquartered in the UK and the USA, offer comprehensive information on the topic of CC and/or CSR in differentiated formats.

Informational content and formats that go beyond the offers of German websites are as follows:

- Regular articles, analysis and commentary on CSR topics from experts (i.e. Business in the Community - www.bitc.org.uk, Just Means - www.justmeans.com)
- Documentation and Subject Meetings: video recordings, summaries of papers (i.e. International Business Leaders Forum - www.iblf.org)
- Interviews with corporate representatives who are responsible for CC/CSR, or are representatives of applicable organizations (i.e. CSR360 Global Partner Network - www.csr360gpn.org, CSR Europe - www.csreurope.org)
- Overview of further education offerings, career manuals, etc. (i.e. Net Impact - www.netimpact.org)
- Database for the general conditions of labor regulations worldwide: Business for Social Responsibility - http://laborlaw.bsr.org

3.2 PARTICIPATION

Multiple of the analyzed international websites are set up not purely to be informative, but also to enable participation. The following elements are not in place on topically relevant German websites up to now:

- Opportunity to upload individual content: text, audio and video data

Platforms like the SR 360 Global Partner Network or the Corporate Responsibility Group offer the opportunity to upload thematically relevant documents. This includes information from conferences, working papers or PowerPoint presentations. They are made available to everyone, as opposed to exclusively to registered users.
On Just Means, paying members have the opportunity to upload data in various media forms, in order to report about their activities.

- Information Compilations

Multiple online offerings include job exchanges, through which users can view new offers (i.e. Business for Social Responsibility - www.bsr.org, Net Impact - www.netimpact.org).

Meetings and events can be announced on the platform by members (i.e. CSR360 Global Partner Network - www.csr360gpn.org, Just Means - www.justmeans.com)

- Release Evaluations

On the Social Media platform Net Impact, there is a consultant database that is compiled by users. Users can recommend consultants and evaluate them.

### 3.3 INTERACTION

#### 3.3.1 ONLINE LEARNING

One of the interaction-invested offers, which cannot be found on topically relevant German websites, is Online Learning. Online Learning is frequently a combination of chat, telephone and video conferences offered on the internet. This type of Online Learning is known by other catchphrases like Webinar, Web Seminar or Webcast. Offers like these come from the Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship and from The Conference Board, for example.

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2 The Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship (BCCCC) calls its Online Learning format a Webinar. A Webinar transmits, via the internet, a telephone-conference conversation of experts. At the same time, participants see PowerPoint presentations, to which the experts can refer, and can pose their questions in a Chat window. The Webinar moderators collect the questions, which are then answered verbally by the experts. The Social Media platform Net Impact offers the Online Learning Center among other telephone conferences with leadership ability. In the scope of these telephone conferences members can inform themselves about trends in the CSR field.
3.3.2 OPEN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Net Impact

Net Impact is an association for students who would like to work in the field of CSR and also for those who are already employed in it. The organization grew out of the Association of Students for Responsible Business (SRB) founded in 1993. Net Impact’s internet presence has both information and Social Media platforms. Therefore, the platform is built on a previously established active network that is external to the internet.

Anyone interested can become a member of Net Impact with the payment of the Membership Fee. In the Social Networking area of Net Impact, members can share contact information other members and can also create a contact list. This area is available to paying members and, for that reason, there is little information about the interactive possibilities available here.

The Net Impact Community has 150 so-called Chapters, location-groups of Net Impact members, worldwide. These receive infrastructural support from Net Impact as well as support for the design of their programs.

Just Means

Just Means is a Social Media platform, founded in 2007, that seeks to enable and foster a stakeholder dialogue between companies, organizations and private people on the topic of corporate responsibility.

Companies and organizations obtain, after paying the Membership Fee, the ability to present themselves and to publish thematically relevant news on the website. The achievement of a wide public for this platform is promoted, among other ways, through the optimization of contributions to a search engine. Interested people can create a profile for free, get in contact with companies and organizations by commenting on their online publications and by affiliating with companies’ and organizations’ networks on the platform. Companies and organizations can stay in touch and discussion with stakeholders. Along with common Social Networking features like self-presentation, message exchange and the build-up of an individual network, Just Means offers the opportunity to present personal résumés and to look for advertised positions put there by companies. In the Just Means Blog, the Just Means team and experts, key personalities in the topic field, for example, publish posts regularly.
Just Means distinguishes itself, not only through a myriad of technical applications that motivate users to interact, but by connecting itself to other Social Media platforms like Facebook, Twitter or to Blogs of paying members.

### 3.3.3 CLOSED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

**Corporate Responsibility Group**

The Corporate Responsibility Group’s website is a platform for a Peer-to-Peer Network of those responsible for CR, for those responsible for CR. Representatives of the target groups can be active on the platform after payment of a Membership Fee.

Here they can set up a profile, come together in conversation in the Discussion Forum, look for other members and make new contacts, present and utilize thematically relevant documents, advertise events as well as purchase and publish news. In contrast to Just Means and Net Impact, which make at least a part of their information publicly accessible, there is no information on CRG’s website that is available to non-members, with the exception of current events.

**CSR360 Global Partner Network**

CSR360GPN is the platform of the Global Partner Network. The network assembles over 120 Non-Profit Organizations that work on the topic of CSR. The website offers, on the one hand, to display outwardly the network and to inform about the activities of its members. On the other hand, the member organizations have the opportunity to interact with each other on the platform. Members of the organizations can, after they have created a profile, converse with each other in forums or upload documents and then make them available to other members.

Private people, who do not belong to organizations, are able to make a profile on the platform and to converse in the forum’s public field.
3.4 SUMMARY

The English language internet offerings on the topic of CSR and/or CC have, in comparison with the offerings on German pages, much more diverse information available in various formats and are more often built on interaction and participation. This is clear through both a tally of the participative elements that are integrated exclusively on international, thematically relevant websites and through the different Social Media platforms that are set up to target different actors.

The participatory offerings on the presented international websites are actively used – as far as a user can tell who does not have access to each platform on the member level. The most intensely used applications are the Job Exchange and the offer to advertise events. No public data is available as to the number of users of these international Social Media platforms.

4 CONCLUSION

The goal of this examination was to give an overview of the current use of the internet on the topic of Corporate Citizenship through institutions in Germany as well as international corporate networks and organizations.

The thesis that the concrete topic of Corporate Citizenship is explicitly in the foreground of only a few German institutions’ websites held true. The majority of these websites refer to the overall topic of Corporate Social Responsibility.

The analysis of the websites was carried out with the help of the underlying utilization concepts of Information, Participation and Interaction. It became clear that the German internet offerings were predominantly set up for the conveyance of information – there were hardly any participation or interaction applications. A comparison of the utilization concepts with their use on international websites drew attention to the fact that the informational offerings on these pages are more comprehensive and varied.

Moreover, it made clear that the utilization offerings on which the international target groups were aligned held more participative elements.
and encouraged enhanced interaction between users. This speaks to the
general trend of utilization offerings on the internet.

A detailed analysis of the utilization offerings’ assumptions was not undertaken
in the scope of this study. For the German websites considered here, however,
a tendency to slight the utilization of participatory offerings was recognized.

Based on the analysis, it becomes clear that the planned internet platform will
fill a gap: with regard to the presence of the topic of social engagement on
German language websites as well as with regard to participation possibilities
for stakeholders and interaction opportunities between stakeholders and
corporate representatives on the internet. These being offerings that are, at
this point in time, very limited.

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