

Press Media Coverage of Corporate Social Responsibility Revisited

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Roles of Printed media in a Democracy

- Media and especially the printed press have a very special position in most democratic traditions and political theory discourses on democracy.
- Media is expected to guard public interests and to prevent abuse of power by individuals and institutions in a democratic societies.
- The press is charged with the responsibility of
 - **brining significant issues to the attention of the populace,**
 - **provide them with the essential facts,**
 - **Provide factual and conceptual framework to interpret, analyze and understand these issues.**

Expected behavior of Media when violations occur

- Accelerated, intensified and expanded coverage of the news of:
 - gross violations of public trust,
 - business' violations of regulations endanger public safety or well-being
 - include larger and more abstract concepts related to these events and activities.

A multi-phase study of media behavior

To measure elevated response of media to gross violations of business regulations a multi-stage research project was devised.

Corporate Social Responsibility was used as a concept to cover more general business ethical behavioral expectation.

On April 10, 2010 a major Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico by BP occurred.

If social media did in fact react to this news on conceptual level as well as simple news one would expect higher number of articles and news coverage in major newspaper appearing using the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

A study was made in 2011 in which coverage of CSR in four major newspapers was measured 90 days before and 90 days after the date of oil spill. Results were reported in 2012.

An expanded follow up study was done in 2018 which is the subject of this report.

Literature Review

- CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE, (1999) THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN DEMOCRACY:A STRATEGIC APPROACH, June 1999
- Technical Publication Series, Center for Democracy and Governance, Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support, and Research, U.S. Agency for International Development Washington, D.C.
- [Pamela Taylor Jackson](#), [James Ronald Stanfield](#) (2004) “The role of the press in a democracy: heterodox economics and the propaganda model”, [Journal of Economic Issues](#), [June, 2004](#)
- United Nations, (2003) “Good News & Bad, ‘The Media, Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability””, United Nations Environment Program.
- *Whelan, G. 2012. The political perspective of **corporate social responsibility**: A critical research agenda. Business Ethics Quarterly, 22(4): 709–37. 10.5840/beq201222445 S1052150X0000525X*
- *Scherer, A. G . 2018. Theory assessment and agenda setting in political CSR: A critical theory perspective. International Journal of Management Reviews, 20: 387–410. 10.1111/ijmr.12137*
- *Lee, C. W. , & Romano, Z. 2013. Democracy's new discipline: Public deliberation as organizational strategy. Organization Studies, 34(5-6): 733–53. 10.1177/0170840613479233*

Methodology

- The study is composed of several stages. The first phase, consists of a statistical analysis of number of articles covering corporate social responsibility by four of the major newspapers in the United States, ninety days before and ninety days after the BP oil well disaster in the Gulf of Mexico on April 20, 2010.
- The assumption was that if in fact the printed media was involved in the business social responsibility as the guardian of public interest and major source to inform the citizenry, coverage of Corporate Social Responsibility should have increased in the days following the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.
- In this follow-up study another newspaper (*Washington Post*) was added to the newspapers surveyed. These papers were surveyed for a period of ninety days, from 4/20/2018 to 7/20/2018 for their coverage of CSR by counting the number of articles that appeared in these publications referring to CSR.
- Thus, the present survey covers articles that appeared in the *New York Times*; *Wall Street Journal*; *Christian Science Monitor*; *the Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Post* during this period. The result is reported in Table 1.

Number of Articles with Reference to CSR in Major Newspapers

During the Three Designated Time Periods

Dates of Publication/Issues	New York Times		Wall Street Journal		Christian Science Monitor		LA Times		Washington Post		TOTALS	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
2/20/-4/20/2010	12	7.8	57	35	10	8.6	6	18	24	9	109	15
4/20/-7/20/2010	19	12.3	46	28	8	7	8	24	70	26	151	21
4/20/-7/20/2018	123	80	60	40	97	84	19	58	173	65	472	64
Totals	154	100	163	100	115	100	33	100	267	100	731	100

Results

- The survey of the 2010, did not show any statistically significant difference between the coverage of the CSR by these major daily newspapers in the United States before and after the BP oil spill.
- The 2018 survey indicates a great increase in coverage of CSR by all these papers, except for *The Wall Street Journal* that retained its limited coverage in all these three surveys (57,46,and 60). All the other publications had increased their coverage of this topic significantly.
- Overall coverage by all the publications surveyed increased from 109 (before 4/20/2010) to 151 (between 4/20-7/20) to 472 (between 4/20 to 7/20/ 2018), an increase of 433%.
- This is a significant finding that warrants in further analysis and discussion.

Discussion

- As stated in the original survey report, the commonly shared general impressions regarding the ideological biases of these newspapers, leads one to expect significantly larger coverage of CSR in the so-called liberal newspapers (*New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post*) than in the so-called conservative ones (*Wall Street Journal* and *the Christian Science Monitor*). Data does not indicate any such pattern across the board. In fact the largest coverage of this CSR happened to be on the pages of the *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal*.
- However, the extended coverage of the corporate social responsibility by the *Wall Street Journal* falls very well in the general pattern of coverage by all these newspapers, namely no increase in coverage after the April 20th incident. In fact, there is a slight decline in the number of article on this topic after that date.

Discussion (continued)

- One significant exception is the *Washington Post* which had a markedly higher coverage of CSR after the 4/20/2010 incident.
- Of the other so-called liberal newspapers, *The New York Times* did in fact print more articles on the topic of corporate social responsibility after the oil spill. *The Los Angeles Times* also printed more articles related to this topic after the oil spill disaster, albeit not significantly more. This pattern, if it can be called a pattern, fits with the general impression of liberalism among the observers.

Table 2: Percentages of Change from 2010 to 2018

	NYT	WSJ	CSM	LAT	WP	Totals
4/20/- 7/20/2010	19	46	8	8	70	151
4/20/- 7/20/2018	123	60	97	19	173	472
% of Change	650%	130%	1250%	240%	247%	312%

Discussion (continued)

- Results of the 2018 survey are especially interesting in several regards:
 - The overall coverage of CSR is much higher than the previous survey. It is in fact greater by a factor of 433%
 - All the surveyed newspapers had significantly higher level of coverage of the topic as Table 2, below shows the percentage of increase in the two surveys.
 - The high numbers for *The Washington Post* in both surveys is especially interesting. :
 - The highest number both in 2010 and 2018.
 - Jumped from 24 (before 4/10/210) to 70 (after 4/10/2010) and then to 173 in 2018 .
 - One plausible explanation involves the location of its publication . The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico was a national scandal, reflecting on the actions and inactions of the Federal Government with a great deal of political activity followed the event.

Discussion (continued)

- The high numbers for *The Washington Post* in both surveys is especially interesting.
- This news paper had the highest numbers of related articles in its publications both in 2010 and 2018.
- Jumping from 24 (before 4/10/210) to 70 (after 4/10/2010) and then to 173 in 2018 is a phenomenon worthy of notice and seeking explanation.
- One plausible explanation involves the location of its publication. Washington, D.C., is the center of national political power and as such, it seems, most affected by events that have national ramification. The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico was a national scandal, reflecting on the actions and inactions of the Federal Government. Thus, as expected, a great deal of political activity followed the event. In all these interactions involving high level communications among the various parts of the government, concepts such as CSR inevitably must have assumed central position, hence being reflected in the press coverage of the news.
- Other newspapers published in other cities probably did not find themselves in the middle of similar flurry of political activities in their own cities.

Discussion (continued)

- This points also explains the relatively low percentage of increase in their coverage (247% versus 1250% and 650%) from 2010 to 2018. It can be argued that *The Los Angeles Times* was “protected” by the geographical distance from Washington, DC, and *Wall Street Journal* was shielded by their ideological aloofness from the environmental concerns that engulfed the controversies.

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