Impact of Global Brand Chief Marketing Officers’ Corporate Social Responsibility and Sociopolitical Activism Communication on Twitter

Peren Özturan and Amir Grinstein

Abstract
Chief marketing officers (CMOs) engage with their stakeholders on social media platforms to create a digital impact. CMO communication on societal issues is understudied despite heightened global attention to brands’ social practices. This poses three research questions: (1) How central is corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sociopolitical activism in the communication of global brands’ CMOs?, (2) Does CMOs’ communication about CSR or sociopolitical activism have a digital impact?, and (3) How do brand origin (i.e., geographic location of headquarters) and CMO nationality (U.S. vs. non-U.S.) moderate the CSR/sociopolitical activism–digital communication impact? Drawing on expectancy violation theory, this research (Ntweets = 17,468 over NC莫斯 = 81) finds that CMOs rarely publish CSR or sociopolitical activism communication on Twitter (5.3% and 3.2%) and demonstrates a higher digital impact of retweets for CSR and a lower impact for sociopolitical activism tweets than regular communication. Furthermore, non-U.S. headquarters and CMO nationality strengthen the positive effect of CSR communication and weaken the negative effect of sociopolitical activism communication.

Keywords
corporate social responsibility, CSR, sociopolitical activism, CMO, social media, global brands

Online supplement: https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031X221104077

Two central trends have significantly affected global firms in recent years: brands’ engagement in societal issues and digitalization. First, organizations have increasingly engaged in societal issues such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), taking stakeholder1 expectations into account while enhancing the triple bottom line (i.e., economic, social, and environmental performance; Kang, Germann, and Grewal 2016), and corporate sociopolitical activism (i.e., explicitly supporting or opposing one side of a partisan sociopolitical issue; Bhagwat et al. 2020). Second, the digital world, with its constant interaction between brands and various stakeholders on social media platforms, has accelerated the international spread and impact of brands, making it easier to know what a brand is doing around the globe (Sheth 2020). This has enabled firms to engage in international marketing activity despite geographic and psychological distance, the typical impediments of operating overseas (Gielens and Steenkamp 2019; Katsikeas, Leonidou, and Zeriti 2020).

In addition, these trends bring new opportunities, especially for leaders such as chief marketing officers (CMOs). Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn enable top managers in general to engage with stakeholders with the intention to create a digital impact, with a potential link to their brands (Babić Rosario et al. 2016; Okazaki et al. 2020). CMOs in particular are critical, given their centrality to communication with external stakeholders (Germann, Ebbes, and Grewal 2015; Nath and Mahajan 2011), especially around societal issues (Benett and Welch 2009; Mishra and Modi 2016). CMOs need “to consistently understand and connect to the brand they represent” (Dietz 2020), “align

1 A stakeholder-based view of CSR mainly acknowledges the community, natural environment, employees, suppliers, customers, and shareholders as key CSR targets (El Akremi et al. 2018), and in this study, we assume that CMOs’ followers in a social network are linked to these stakeholder groups.

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[their] external identity to match [their] brand,” and “engage authentically with [their] community” (Douillet Guzmán 2020), underscoring their critical role in societal and digital trends.

The effect of CMO communications in the social media space is an understudied but worthwhile topic, according to research in marketing examining top management teams and applying upper echelons theory (e.g., Whittier et al. 2021). A key reason is that communication can either help or hinder the marketing organization’s ability to attract and retain customers, employees, and partners (Moorman 2020). The topic of CMO communication on societal issues is also understudied despite heightened global attention to brands’ social practices (Özturan and Grinstein 2017). The topic also has practical implications. CMOs prioritize being on social media (Gesenhuys 2015; Neustar 2015) for sense giving, impression management, and networking (Heavey et al. 2020). That is, CMOs dedicate considerable work time to networking activities to enhance their social capital and influence (Engelen, Lackhoff, and Schmidt 2013) and report social media as a source for gaining insights, due to the authenticity of the content and users (Hostelley 2021).

Given this background, the current research intends to offer two contributions. First, this research examines the aforementioned novel trends in tandem with a focus on global brand CMOs. In doing so, it sheds light on the degree to which global brand CMOs’ CSR- and sociopolitical activism–related communications on social media (i.e., Twitter) have digital impact (i.e., retweets). Postmodern consumer culture has traditionally granted marketing leaders cultural authority, with marketers portrayed “as cultural engineers, organizing how people think and feel through branded commercial products” (Holt 2002, p. 71). This mission still applies (Moorman 2020) and is becoming more prominent on new social media platforms, as CMOs can directly voice issues important to society and swiftly receive responses to distinguish themselves from their peers in the industry. Second, from an international marketing perspective, this research, to the best of our knowledge, is the first to compare the impact of CSR communication and sociopolitical activism communication in light of two factors: global brands’ origin (i.e., geographic location of their headquarters [HQ]) and CMOs’ nationality. A sizable percentage of marketing leaders report that they personally believe it is appropriate for executives to communicate on societal issues; yet this varies substantially across CMOs and their brands (Moorman 2020). We therefore examine these two factors and categorize them according to whether the global brand’s HQ is in, or the CMO is from, the United States or elsewhere, because this distinction may explain some of that variance.

With these contributions, we build on recent advancements in the literature and address research gaps. Specifically, Okazaki et al. (2020) investigate CSR communication and analyze its content for global brands without distinguishing cross-country variations. We extend such work by examining both CSR and sociopolitical activism communication, analyzing communication and its digital impact at the level of global brand CMOs, and distinguishing between origins of global brands or their CMOs, which is crucial for adopting an international marketing perspective.

**Hypothesis Development**

A plausible theory to guide CMOs’ networks’ responses to their CSR and sociopolitical activism communication is expectancy violation theory (Burgoon and Hale 1988; Burgoon and Le Poire 1993). This theory suggests that a deviation from one’s expectations will result in cognitive arousal and heightened attention, which will lead to reevaluation of the focal actor—here, the marketer’s communication (Afifi and Metts 1998; Yang, Saffer, and Li 2020). The larger the gap between expectations of behavior and actual behavior, the greater is the effect on downstream evaluations and actions, such as engagement (Burgoon and Hale 1988). This is consistent with the perspective that customer satisfaction requires a (positive) gap between customer expectations and the actual service delivered (Oliver 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1988). We apply this theoretical framework to our first set of hypotheses (H1 and H2) to explain how, compared with regular communication, CMOs’ CSR and sociopolitical activism communications are less expected, and we determine a CMO network’s reaction to these types of communication. Note that we define “regular communication” as any communication that is not related to CSR or sociopolitical activism (for examples, see the Web Appendix). We then apply expectancy violation theory to our second set of hypotheses (H3 and H4) to explain how, compared with the United States, the CSR and sociopolitical activism communications of CMOs in other countries are less expected, and we determine a CMO network’s reaction to these types of communication.

CSR and sociopolitical activism differ in multiple ways, though both are driven by stakeholder demand. CSR typically entails generally accepted, nondiverse, prosocial issues (Bhagwat et al. 2020), such as support of education or disaster relief. According to this view, firms hold power and responsibility to contribute to the world in which they operate by taking into account their stakeholders and society at large (Smith, Drumwright, and Gentile 2010). Furthermore, CSR is often part of a company’s strategic plan, and as a result, many CSR efforts and communications are unlikely to elicit a negative response from stakeholders (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020).2 Studies on the impact of CSR have demonstrated that CSR activities typically provide the firm with multiple benefits in terms of the stock market, customer satisfaction and loyalty, and employee satisfaction, to name a few (e.g., Mishra and Modi 2016; Sen, Bhattacharya, and Korschun 2006).

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2 A minority stream in the CSR literature examines some conditions under which stakeholders are more suspicious of the brand’s CSR efforts and motive, which can lead to a negative reaction (e.g., Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz 2006).
Conversely, sociopolitical activism addresses controversial and divisive topics, such as gun control or LGBTQ+ rights. Such issues are perceived differently across and within countries and may have unplanned spillover effects (Lee and Tao 2021; Vredenburg et al. 2020). When a firm engages in sociopolitical activism, it can, on the one hand, drive social change (Key et al. 2021) and benefit the brand by demonstrating its values and satisfying some consumer segments and employees (Gaines-Ross 2017). On the other hand, given the divisive nature of sociopolitical activism practices, firms are likely to create a polarized response across stakeholders (Bhagwat et al. 2020; Gürhan-Canli, Sarial-Abi, and Hayran 2018; Hambrick and Wowak 2021). Anecdotal examples highlight the mixed views of stakeholders on global brands that take a stand on a controversial sociopolitical issue (e.g., reactions to the Gillette, Nike, and Chick-fil-A campaigns; Vredenburg et al. 2020), and recent empirical studies reveal a negative effect on consumers (Klostermann, Hydock, and Decker 2021; Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020) and investors (Bhagwat et al. 2020).

Guided by the logic of expectancy violation theory, we propose that both CSR and sociopolitical activism communications are less common and less expected than regular communication (i.e., non-CSR, nonsociopolitical; Cortado and Chalmeta 2016; Özütan and Grinstein 2017). Transferring the aforementioned brand-/firm-level findings to the CMO level, we argue that global brand CMOs’ social media communication on less expected CSR topics is likely to be a pleasant surprise to communication receivers, which will result in higher engagement within CMOs’ network than communication with regular content. At the same time, sociopolitical activism communication, which is also less expected than regular communication but is likely to be a less pleasant surprise to communication receivers given its divisive nature, will likely result in lower engagement within CMOs’ network than communication with regular content. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**H1**: Global brand CMOs’ CSR communication has a greater digital impact than regular communication.

**H2**: Global brand CMOs’ sociopolitical activism communication has a lesser digital impact than regular communication.

Structural and dispositional factors can affect CMOs’ communication effectiveness, similar to that of chief executive officers and top management teams (Whitler et al. 2018). We focus on two key marketing- and internationalization-related moderating variables: brand origin and CMO nationality. Brand origin refers to the geographic location of the HQ, and CMO nationality refers to the brand CMO’s national background. Of particular interest is the distinction between the United States and other countries, given the way CSR and sociopolitical activism have evolved and are still evolving globally.

The U.S. and non-U.S. networks may respond differently to CSR and sociopolitical activism communication. Expectancy violation theory can explain these differences. In the context of CSR, the theory proposes potential returns through the creation of positive deviations in expectations compared with regular content of a digital message, especially when it is less expected. CSR trends, which originated in the United States, have gradually globalized (Becker-Olsen et al. 2011; Eteokleous, Leonidou, and Katsikeas 2016). Furthermore, U.S. firms are ahead of firms from other countries in terms of their CSR activities and reporting these to the public (Forte 2013; KPMG 2020; Maignan and Ralston 2002). Although CSR communication is not often communicated by CMOs, as we noted previously, given CSR’s U.S. origins and relatively longer history, it should be more expected by the network of U.S. brands and CMOs than the network of non-U.S. brands and CMOs. For the latter, CSR practices and communication are newer, more exciting, and less expected by their network. Therefore, we expect the network of U.S. brands and CMOs to be more used to CSR than the network of non-U.S. brands and CMOs, which will result in the former being less intrigued by and therefore less engaged with CSR communication.

Conversely, sociopolitical activism is likely to cause potential losses by creating negative deviations in expectations compared with a regular digital message, despite growing expectations from multiple stakeholders for brands to take a stand on sociopolitical issues (Gaines-Ross 2017; Yang, Saffer, and Li 2020). In our empirical case, and as also evident from the literature and media, brands’ sociopolitical activism and issues are concentrated mostly in the United States (Branicki et al. 2021; Hambrick and Wowak 2021; Yang, Saffer, and Li 2020). U.S. firms invest substantially in lobbying efforts in the form of corporate political advocacy (Vadakkepatt et al. 2022), and to fill the void in U.S. citizens’ trust in the government, firms take a stance in leadership to align their brands with social causes (Key et al. 2021). Thus, the network of U.S. brands and CMOs will expect sociopolitical activism communication more than the network of non-U.S. brands and CMOs, resulting in the latter being less intrigued by and engaged with sociopolitical activism communication. Formally, we hypothesize the following:

**H3**: Compared with regular communication, the greater digital impact of global brand CMOs’ CSR communication is stronger for (a) non-U.S. brands and (b) non-U.S. CMOs than their U.S. counterparts.

**H4**: Compared with regular communication, the lesser digital impact of global brand CMOs’ sociopolitical activism communication is weaker for (a) non-U.S. brands and (b) non-U.S. CMOs than their U.S. counterparts.

**Empirical Study**

The study is based on an examination of Twitter data ($N_{tweets} = 17,468$ by CMOs of top global brands). We aim to determine how ubiquitous digital CSR and sociopolitical activism
communications by CMOs of global brands are, what the digital impact of this communication (retweets) is, and what the moderating factors are (i.e., brand origin and CMO nationality).

**Sample**

Data came from publicly available Twitter feeds of CMOs leading the marketing function among the top global brands (Brand Finance 2016; Interbrand 2016). We checked corporate web pages, LinkedIn profiles, and the internet to identify the related brands’ global (or, if nonexistent, the U.S.) head of marketing function with titles such as CMO and vice president of marketing, following prior work (e.g., Germann, Ebbes, and Grewal 2015). The initial data set comprised 214 global brands whose CMOs were more readily identifiable on the internet. We focused on the personal Twitter accounts of these executives (N = 109). Anecdotal examples from our data reveal that some of the CMOs’ tweets directly relate to the brand they represent, whereas others reflect their own personal views (for example tweets, see the Web Appendix), which we ultimately control for in our models. We identified CMOs who actively tweeted at least once during the data collection period, making it possible to source communications of a subsample (N = 81). For both the independent and dependent variables, we tracked the Twitter activity of these CMOs for a two-year period between November 2015 and November 2017, which is a longer period and covers a larger sample than similar recent work (e.g., Okazaki et al. 2020). A research assistant identified the CMOs, another used a Python code to extract the Twitter data, and one of the authors checked the results of the coding (i.e., ensuring that the search indeed referred to CSR and sociopolitical activism communication rather than a mere word mismatch; e.g., CRM in the context of customer relationship management and not cause-related marketing). Table 1 provides descriptive statistics, and the raw data with the Python code are available on request.

**Measures**

We measured digital impact with total retweets (M = 5.74), log-transformed to overcome skewness (before log-transformation, 1 is added to avoid missing values in the estimations). Rather than an inside-out measure capturing endorsements such as likes, views, or follows, retweets—a form of electronic word of mouth—diffuse the message to new audiences and thereby capture an outside-in perspective (Glozer and Hibbert 2018). The degree of interactivity can alternatively be measured by analyzing the use of @ signs (e.g., Etter 2013); yet such personal conversations do not appear in the followers’ timelines. By contrast, electronic word of mouth reflects participation in a broader conversation (Akpinar 2018). That is, coconstructing messages is possible with retweets (see Boyd, Golder, and Lotan 2010), thus creating dialogues and exemplifying the engagement role of social media. Overall, retweets are a stronger indication of digital impact than other metrics (Guerra et al. 2017; Vargo 2016; see also Encore 2015).

Regarding our focal independent variables, we coded a tweet as a CSR communication (CSR dummy = 1, M = 5.3%) or a sociopolitical activism communication (activism dummy = 1, M = 3.2%) if it contained terms from a designated list. Building on prior work, the CSR list (Okazaki et al. 2020; Peloa and Shang 2011) included terms such as “cause-related marketing,” “conservation,” “corporate social responsibility,” and “environmental,” while the sociopolitical activism dictionary (i.e., Bhagwat et al. 2020; Milfield and Flint 2021; Moorman 2020; Nalick et al. 2016; Vredenburg et al. 2020) included keywords such as “politics,” “immigration,” “LGBT,” and “gun control.” The full lists are available in the Web Appendix.3

A research assistant checked firms’ and CMOs’ websites and LinkedIn profiles to identify our moderating variables. We measured brand origin by the geographic location of the HQ of the firm that owns the brand (Samiee 2011). Following previous research (Stremersch and Verhoef 2005), we used country of undergraduate studies to designate CMOs’ country of origin. Of the 81 global brands, 15% were headquartered outside the United States, and 27% had non-American CMOs. We standardized the CSR and sociopolitical activism variables and the moderating brand origin and CMO nationality dummy variables (for both, 1 indicates non-U.S.) to reduce multicollinearity (Cohen, Cohen, and West 2003). We controlled for valence (measured through the widely used TextBlob sentiment analysis, which rates a tweet from negative [−1] to positive [+1]; M = .21), length of tweet (M = 93.15; log-transformed in models to avoid skewness), use of video (a dummy variable coded as 1 for a tweet including a video; M = .02), use of images (a dummy variable coded as 1 for a tweet including a photo or a picture; M = .21), and brand relatedness (a dummy variable coded as 1 for a tweet including the brand name; M = .18).

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3 We checked the validity of our categorization with five academic and industry experts in the areas of marketing, communication, and public relations who have studied or practiced CSR and/or sociopolitical activism and have an average experience of 18.6 years in the field. The keywords in our categorization and grouping identified by these experts achieved an intercoder reliability of 79%, which we deemed acceptable (Rust and Cooil 1994). Furthermore, we approached CSR and sociopolitical activism as reflecting a continuum, as research indicates that consumers view these topics on a spectrum (see Chatterji and Toffel’s [2019, p. 60] exhibit “Is it appropriate to take a stand? What consumers think”). Also noteworthy in our data set is that some tweets (N = 32) included both CSR and activism content (e.g., “So proud to work @Accenture—we have a strong commitment to inclusion and diversity for all. #PrideMonth”), and some tweets included more than one keyword from either category in its content. For example, “Trump rally speaker fantasizes about death of Hillary Clinton via @POLITICO for iOS” has three keywords with activism content and “You don’t have to give millions—volunteering in your own community makes our world better #UN #CharityDay” has three keywords with CSR content. The reported results are robust if we include a difference variable (nCSR − nSPA) that varies from −3 and 3, where 0 means neutral (i.e., for tweets with both types of content), −3 means highly sociopolitical activism related, and 3 means highly CSR related.
As omitted variables could determine retweets that are potentially correlated with the CSR and sociopolitical activism tweet variables, we decided to endogenize this communication variable. Specifically, we regressed the CSR and sociopolitical activism tweet dummies on several variables, including a CMO’s number of followers (M = 7,060; log-transformed in models), gender (a dummy variable coded as 1 for female; M = .43), the type of degree earned (a dummy variable coded as 1 for business and economics and 0 for the rest; M = .81), and the highest degree earned (a dummy variable coded as 1 for graduate and 0 for undergraduate; M = .53).\(^4\) We provide the measurement of all variables entered in the models in the Web Appendix.

### Analysis and Results

In our analysis, we used simultaneous regressions based on full information maximum likelihood estimators to test our hypotheses in MPlus 7.4. As some unobserved variables may affect the three endogenized variables, we freed the error terms in their equations to correlate, similar to seemingly unrelated regressions:

\[
R = \alpha_R + \beta_1\text{CSR} + \beta_2\text{ACT} + \beta_3\text{BO} + \beta_4\text{CMON} + \beta_5\text{CSR} \\
\times \text{BO} + \beta_6\text{CSR} \times \text{CMON} + \beta_7\text{ACT} \times \text{BO} + \beta_8\text{ACT} \\
\times \text{CMON} + \beta_9\text{VIDEO} + \beta_{10}\text{PHOTO} + \beta_{11}\text{LEN} \\
+ \beta_{12}\text{VAL} + \beta_{13}\text{BR} + \epsilon_R,
\]

\[
\text{CSR} = \alpha_{\text{CSR}} + \beta_{14}\text{GEN} + \beta_{15}\text{BUS} + \beta_{16}\text{LEV} + \beta_{17}\text{FOL} + \epsilon_{\text{CSR}},
\]

\[
\text{ACT} = \alpha_{\text{ACT}} + \beta_{18}\text{GEN} + \beta_{19}\text{BUS} + \beta_{20}\text{LEV} + \beta_{21}\text{FOL} + \epsilon_{\text{ACT}},
\]

where R are retweets, CSR is CSR content, ACT is sociopolitical activism content, BO is brand origin, CMON is CMO nationality, VIDEO is dummy video, PHOTO is dummy photo, LEN is length of tweet, VAL is valence of tweet, BR is brand relatedness of tweet, GEN is gender of CMO, BUS is highest degree of CMO (business), LEV is highest degree of CMO (graduate), and FOL is the number of the CMO’s followers on Twitter. In addition, \(\beta_{1\rightarrow3}\) represent the main effects and \(\beta_{4\rightarrow8}\) the interaction effects. The model as a whole is statistically significant (\(\chi^2(53) = 11,951.3, p < .001\)), and R-square values served as fit measures (Table 2). The R-square of retweets was .134.\(^5\) These results

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\(^4\) Because CMOs’ communications may correlate with organizational engagement in CSR- or sociopolitical-related topics (Maak, Pless, and Voegtlin 2016) and this may vary across industries (Campbell 2007), we also included the brand’s perceived social responsibility (assessed with a separate study in Amazon Mechanical Turk, N=190) and firms’ main line of business (business-to-business vs. business-to-consumer) and goods versus services dummy variables in our models. The reported results are robust with the inclusion of these variables.

\(^5\) When we analyzed the effects of the CSR tweet and sociopolitical activism tweet variables on the probability of retweets (i.e., incidence, rather than the current log-transformed variable that captures magnitude) by running a probit regression, the results remained similar. The R-square of the retweet incidence was .249.
suggest that the CSR content shared by CMOs has higher retweets than regular content ($\beta = .013$, $p = .040$). Moreover, the sociopolitical activism content shared by CMOs has lower retweets ($\beta = -.24$, $p = .001$). These results lend support to both $H_1$ and $H_2$.

Next, we report the interaction effects of our focal communication variables and international factors on digital impact, presented in Table 2. While brand origin has a positive effect on CSR content and retweets ($\beta = .12$, $p = .052$), CMO nationality does not exert a significant moderation effect ($\beta = -.001$, $p > .100$). Thus, $H_3$ is partially supported. Regarding the moderation of the digital impact of sociopolitical communication by global brand CMOs, we find that the negative relationship is not weakened for non-U.S. brands ($\beta = .066$, $p > .100$) but is for non-U.S. CMOs ($\beta = .038$, $p < .001$). Thus, $H_4$ is partially supported. In line with our theoretical arguments, non-U.S. brands have a greater digital CSR communication impact, while U.S. CMOs have a lesser digital sociopolitical activism communication impact. Figure 1 displays the interaction effects, using standard simple slopes procedures (Cohen, Cohen, and West 2003).

**Discussion and Implications**

Our key finding is that, on average, global brand CMOs are involved in communicating about CSR and sociopolitical activism practices to a limited degree; yet, when they do so, their communication of CSR content has a greater impact and communication of sociopolitical activism content a lesser impact than regular tweets. These findings can be explained by expectancy violation theory, which shows that, compared with regular communication, both CSR and sociopolitical activism communications deviate from CMOs’ networks’ expectations, in either a positive way (CSR) or a negative way (sociopolitical activism).

Furthermore, the moderation analysis suggests that the effectiveness is more positive for CSR content when the brand is international (non-U.S.) and less negative for sociopolitical activism content when the CMO is international (non-U.S.). In this case, expectancy violation theory again shows that networks expect CSR and sociopolitical activism communications more, and thus they are less excited and engaged in the United States than in other locations where such practices are newer. Overall, considering the message content in relation to brand origin and CMOs’ nationality has a more nuanced impact than a mere CSR or sociopolitical activism communication with no linkage to the global brand or CMO.

This research has three implications for marketers of global firms, for global brands, and for international marketing strategies. First, CMOs need to be cognizant of the difference in responses to digital CSR and sociopolitical activism communications. On the one hand, CMOs may want to consider including CSR topics in more than 5.3% of their communications (as we have found) to increase their digital impact. On the other hand, CMOs need to handle sociopolitical activism tweets with caution, as these engender mixed opinions and polarization to such a degree that they have a negative association with the likelihood to be retweeted. CMO attention to social media communications is essential, as marketers are central in external communication and marketing is responsible for identifying leading trends in the global environment (Benett and Welch 2009; Jaworski 2011; Rooney 2019). Moreover, CMO support (or lack thereof) of societal issues may influence the core of corporate strategy (Moorman 2020), in line with predictions in upper echelons literature in marketing (e.g., Whittet al. 2021) that top managers’ values are consequential for organizational choices and activities.

Second, country of origin influences consumer response to CSR and sociopolitical activism communications. The brands we studied operate across the globe and cater to consumers across many countries. The finding that CMOs’ communications have a differential digital impact on their network when they or their brand is from the United States or elsewhere indicates that CMOs should take into account the expectations of their network, as network members may interpret and react to similar content differently depending on who the CMO is and which brand they represent. That said, the overall reaction of CMO networks is critical and suggests that social and sustainable issues are still not salient but based on the priorities of many stakeholders, especially consumers (Malter et al. 2020).

This highlights an emergent global socially consciousness segment that marketers should pay attention to; marketers should also determine whether social media and word of mouth constitute a topic of “prime interest in understanding marketing effects in a digital era” (Oh et al. 2020, p. 156).

Third, our research relies on text analysis (Balducci and Marinova 2018; Berger et al. 2020); the method enabled us to tackle a multidisciplinary topic in marketing that cuts across sociopolitical engagement, digital impact, and the role of marketing leadership by integrating different sources of information (i.e., Twitter, LinkedIn, and firm websites). Our study showcases an application of this methodology for future international marketing researchers to generate insights (e.g., Okazaki et al. 2020, 2021). In the midst of a global digital transformation due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Deloitte 2020), managers’ direct communications with stakeholders, including customers (Steimer 2020), and combined use of traditional and social media (Hoekstra and Leeflang 2020) further heighten the importance of digital communication channels’ text analysis as a tool in global branding research and practice.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Our work has several limitations that may inspire future research. First, our empirical work focused on an informal
communication channel of global brand CMOs, not a formal brand channel. Future research could specifically examine how CMOs’ CSR and sociopolitical activism communications compare with more formal brand communication in the context of online engagement. This would help determine whether and to what extent global brand outcomes corroborate with and can be predicted by managerial communications and impact. Whereas upper echelons theory suggests that organizational outcomes are shaped by top managers’ characteristics and behaviors (Hambrick and Wowak 2021), this notion can also be argued against, as such engagement is, for some organizations, beyond marketers’ primary role and instead is a nonmarketing task (for a recent debate, see Whittier [2022]).

Second, comparing expectancy violation in terms of CSR versus sociopolitical activism communications would be of value. Our predictions were based on these communications’ impact compared with that of regular communication. A related idea for future research is to distinguish CMOs’ CSR and sociopolitical activism communication from that of other executives across functions and leadership roles. For some global brands (e.g., Unilever), other executives and functions lead CSR communication (Weed 2016) or are engaged in calculated sociopolitical activism strategies to sway public policy outcomes (Maks-Solomon 2016) or are engaged in calculated sociopolitical activism communication from that of other executives across country of origin, culture). Whereas we provided arguments drawing on expectancy violation theory, future research could test for these mediational explanations in experimental work.

Table 2. Impact of CMO’s Digital CSR and Sociopolitical Activism Communications on Twitter.

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<tr>
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<th>CSR Tweets</th>
<th>Activism Tweets</th>
<th>Retweets</th>
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<td>p-Value</td>
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<td>CSR × CMO nationality</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.034</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism × Brand origin</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of video</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of photo</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand relatedness</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: p-values are two-tailed, except for hypothesized paths.
Finally, our research focused on global brands headquartered mostly in the United States and on Twitter data with audiences of no geographical focus. Future work would benefit from including global brands from various other geographic areas, testing other social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn), and assessing the impact on the nondigital space in the short and long run (e.g., stock price, sales; Babić Rosario et al. 2016; Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels 2009). Of further interest is the way consumers in specific geographic locations (to overcome potential confounds in this study) and different markets (e.g., developed vs. developing) react to marketers’ digital CSR and sociopolitical activism communications, which would be an invaluable pursuit as “research in international marketing mainly covered the developed parts of the world (especially large and powerful economies), but neglected emerging economies and less-developed countries” (Eteokleous, Leonidou, and Katsikeas 2016, p. 599). We hope our work sparks more attention to the opportunities that can shape and define the new boundaries and roles of global brands, their marketing leadership, and the channels used for their communications on CSR and sociopolitical activism issues.

Associate Editor
Petra Riefler

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Marketing Science Institute, (grant number 4000057).

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