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3 THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL

5 NETWORKING COMPANIES:

7 APPLYING POLITICAL

9 CSR THEORY TO GOOGLE,

11 FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

13

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19 ABSTRACT

21 Purpose – *Social networking sites (SNS) are enjoying growing popular-*

23 *ity and have triggered new ethical issues including risks of deception,*

25 *social grooming, cyber-bullying and surveillance. This development along*

27 *with the growing power of SNS providers calls for an investigation of*

the CSR engagement of SNS companies. The chapter examines to what

extent three prominent providers – Google, Facebook and Twitter –

fulfill their responsibilities.

29 Methodology/approach – *The chapter draws heavily on a politicized*

31 *concept of CSR, namely ‘corporate citizenship’ (Crane, Matten, & Moon,*

33 *2008a; Matten & Crane, 2005) or ‘political CSR’ (Scherer & Palazzo,*

2007, 2011) and discusses the role SNS providers play in administering

citizenship rights. The chapter takes a qualitative case study approach.

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37 Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility: Perspectives and Practice

Critical Studies on Corporate Responsibility, Governance and Sustainability, Volume 6, 259–282

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39 ISSN: 2043-9059/doi:10.1108/S2043-9059(2014)0000006005

1 Findings – *Facebook, Twitter and Google have not only made clear*
 3 *commitments to act responsibly, they actually enhance the citizenship*
 5 *status of their users in many ways, e.g. by offering a platform for democ-*
racy activists. Deficiencies and contradictions also become visible,
e.g. SNS providers inhibit citizenship by failing to provide sufficient priv-
acy protection.

7 Research limitations/implications – *The chapter is limited by its case*
 9 *study approach, but provides valuable insights to an industry with consid-*
 11 *erable influence. It contributes to CSR research by applying and testing*
the politicized concept of CSR in the context of SNS providers.

13 Originality/value – *Although SNS have received appraisal as effective*
 15 *tools of CSR communication, there has been little attention to CSR*
policy and practice of the companies providing social networks. This
is unfortunate since the activities of SNS providers directly impact on
millions of users worldwide.

17 **Keywords:** Social networking sites; social media; CSR; corporate
 19 citizenship; CSR communication

21

23 Social networking sites (SNS) continue to grow in popularity as sites for
 25 users to share information and to network. Facebook has seen the biggest
 27 growth in recent years with more than 840 million active users globally in
 29 early 2012 (Facebook Inc., 2012b), while the micro-blogging service
 31 Twitter has 100 million (Jackson, 2012) and the relatively new Google+ 90
 33 million users (Google Inc., 2012a). Social networking euphoria has spread
 35 to the business world and many companies have embraced social media
 37 as part of their communication efforts. The interactive, non-hierarchical
 39 character of social media facilitating the communication with a whole
 range of stakeholders has been highlighted, and the potential as effective
 platforms for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication
 has been recognized (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). New ethical issues
 have emerged ranging from the potential to facilitate deception, social
 grooming and cyber-bullying to surveillance through SNS and the usage of
 private data for marketing purposes. These problem areas affect network
 users, but also challenge the role of technology and SNS providers that
 are profit-oriented companies, but also have responsibilities towards users
 and broader society. The questions of what the responsibilities of SNS

1 companies exactly are and to what extent they are fulfilled lie at the core of
2 this chapter.

3 Ethical issues of online communication have started to draw interest
4 from some computer science and CSR academics, e.g. Google's response to
5 Chinese censorship has been examined in detail (Brenkert, 2009; Dann &
6 Haddow, 2008). But overall, the opportunities that the CSR lens offers to
7 the analysis of the responsibilities of SNS companies have been hardly
8 availed. This is unfortunate since the degree to which SNS companies fulfill
9 their responsibilities impacts on numerous users and society as a whole.
10 This chapter aims at filling this research gap by analysing the CSR engage-
11 ment of three companies that provide widely used networking tools with a
12 global reach: Google, Facebook and Twitter. The chapter draws heavily on
13 a stream of CSR literature that focuses on the political role of corpora-
14 tions, known as 'corporate citizenship' (Crane, et al., 2008a; Matten &
15 Crane, 2005; Moon, Crane, & Matten, 2005) or 'political CSR' (Scherer &
16 Palazzo, 2007, 2011).

17 The chapter takes a qualitative case study approach and is informed by
18 a variety of external and internal company sources, including documents
19 and statements from SNS providers, NGOs, and governments, online
20 resources and media coverage. The chapter is empirical in nature, and
21 ontributes to understanding the responsibilities of SNS companies and the
22 role they play in administering citizenship rights. Further, a contribution to
23 CSR theory is intended by applying and testing the politicized concept of
24 CSR in the SNS case.

25 In a first step, literature on CSR and ethics in the SNS context is
26 reviewed and the politicized concept of CSR is introduced. Next, the case
27 study is presented by portraying briefly the three SNS companies, outlining
28 why companies increasingly take over political roles, and examining the
29 political role SNS providers play based on social, civil and political rights
30 associated with liberal citizenship and complemented by environmental
31 citizenship. Finally, the challenges of pluralism and diversity and the need
32 to engage in dialogue are briefly discussed.

33

35

LITERATURE REVIEW

37

38 CSR has attained a high profile in recent years: many companies have **AU:2**
39 learnt to understand that business policies and strategies should not only
be profitable but also be desirable in terms of the objectives and values of

1 society. The CSR engagement of SNS providers has rarely been in the focus
2 of academic literature, although the ethical challenges of social networking
3 sites have been recognized by some scholars. Ethical issues of Internet tech-
4 nology have become the focus of applied ethics under the headline ‘Internet
5 ethics’, ‘cyber ethics’ or ‘information ethics’ (Moore, 2005; Spinello &
6 Tavani, 2004). This emerging field of research has recently provided
7 valuable insights regarding legal and ethical issues in the SNS context like
8 data disclosure and lack of privacy (Smith, Dinev, & Xu, 2011). Ethical
9 issues of SNS have been examined with focuses on the behaviour of users
10 (e.g. Li, 2007), on the role of technology itself (Light & McGrath, 2010),
11 and sporadically on the role of SNS companies (e.g. Chen, 2009). Chen
12 (2009) applied social network analysis to argue that SNS providers acquire
13 peculiar legal and moral responsibilities by virtue of their central position
14 in the online world. SNS companies are more likely to be aware of the
15 actions undertaken by other actors in the network, and therefore are to be
16 held responsible for the wrongdoing by others simply by knowing.

17 The chapter builds on existing research on Internet ethics, but goes
18 beyond previous studies by providing a more detailed, comprehensive
19 picture of the responsibilities of selected SNS providers. For this purpose,
20 the appropriate understanding of CSR has to be determined. The literature
21 on CSR reflects a well-established field, with a range of different approaches
22 (Garriga & Melé, 2004; Melé, 2008; Schwartz & Carroll, 2008). There is no
23 single definition of CSR agreed upon either by academics or practitioners of
24 CSR (Carroll, 1999; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; Valor, 2005). Yet, some
25 widely shared notions can be identified, most notably the assumptions that
26 corporations ought to consider social and environmental issues besides
27 striving for profit, that they ought to behave ethically, and that philan-
28 thropy and community involvement is desirable (Banerjee, 2008).

29 One of the most accepted and widely used CSR concepts is Archie
30 Carroll’s model conceptualizing four types of responsibilities for the
31 corporation that are presented as consecutive, interrelated layers within a
32 pyramid (Carroll, 1979, 1991; Carroll & Buchholtz, 2012): (1) The model
33 depicts economic responsibility as the basis for all subsequent responsibil-
34 ities, i.e. the responsibility to produce goods and services that society wants
35 and to sell them at a profit. (2) Legal responsibility refers to the obligation
36 to fulfill the economic mission within the framework of legal and regulatory
37 requirements. (3) The ethical responsibility describes the obligation to do
38 what is right, just, and fair. (4) Discretionary/philanthropic responsibility is
39 where an organization goes beyond its everyday expected duties, e.g. by
40 making donations. Carroll’s model is a pragmatic and in many contexts

1 useful model for describing and explaining CSR, but it has its limitations
2 that apply also in the case of SNS providers: (1) The static, hierarchical
3 pyramid is too simplistic to capture the complexity of CSR in practice
4 (Crane & Matten, 2010). (2) Neither variation of CSR approaches across
5 regions and nations are taken into account (Visser, 2006), nor the pluralism
6 of legal and moral systems that many globally operating companies
7 are confronted with. (3) Carroll's model has not been able to incorporate
8 changed expectations towards business, e.g. regarding environmental
9 responsibilities (Visser, 2006). (4) The model neglects the political role of
10 corporations that has to be recognized in light of a diminishing role of the
11 nation state and increased power of corporations.

12 The latter points to an alternative valuable theoretical basis to study the
13 responsibilities of SNS companies: a politicized concept of CSR. Matten
14 and Crane's (2005) article has been ground-breaking in the field arguing
15 that in the changing environment of a globalized world, boundaries
16 between the state, business and civil actors are blurred and some companies
17 have begun to assume a state-like role. Matten and Crane conceptualize
18 corporate citizenship (CC) in an extended view, going beyond the limited
19 view that identifies CC with strategic corporate philanthropy, and the
20 equivalent view of CC that conceptualizes CC almost synonymous to exist-
21 ing conceptions of CSR. They posit that governments fail to provide citi-
22 zenship rights ever more, and accordingly corporations play an increasing
23 role in enabling civil rights, providing social rights and channelling political
24 rights (Matten & Crane, 2005). Corporations assume a political role in
25 three different ways: where government ceases to administer citizenship
26 rights, where government has not as yet administered citizenship rights,
27 and where the administration of citizenship rights is beyond the reach of
28 the nation state (Matten & Crane, 2005). The extended concept of CC as
29 proposed by Matten and Crane (2005) is primarily descriptive, but it also
30 points to new corporate responsibilities, specifically to questions about
31 accountability and potential threats to democracy. Scherer and Palazzo
32 (2007, 2011) further developed the concept of the political role of corpora-
33 tions by presenting a CSR approach based on the Habermasian concept of
34 deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1996) with the goal of embedding the
35 corporation in democratic processes of defining rules and tackling global
36 political challenges.

37 The key strength of framing the activities of SNS providers in a frame-
38 work of political CSR is that it allows for opening up a 'debate on the
39 conditions, prerequisites, typical patterns, and limitations of corporate
participation in power sharing in society' (Crane, et al., 2008a, p. 29).

1 The concept contributes to clarifying in what way corporations are taking
 3 over roles in administering citizenship rights, but also provides a normative
 5 basis for evaluating corporate responsibilities based on the assumption that
 7 corporations should participate in governance.

8 **APPLYING POLITICAL CSR TO GOOGLE + ,** 9 **FACEBOOK AND TWITTER**

11 *The Case Study: Facebook, Google + and Twitter*

13 Facebook, Inc. was founded in 2004, is based in Menlo Park, California,
 15 and has more than 3,000 employees in 29 offices worldwide. The site
 17 provides registered users with a personal profile, enables members to create
 19 networks, and offers messaging and chatting services and sharing of photos
 21 and videos. Facebook is deeply integrated in the online world, e.g. many
 23 websites have implemented Facebook's 'Like Button'. Since the subscrip-
 25 tion to Facebook is free, the business model depends on advertising. The
 company filed for an initial public offering in February 2012, revealing
 revenue of \$3.71 billion in 2011 (SEC, 2012). CEO Mark Zuckerberg has
 stressed Facebook's social mission and its objective to make the world
 more open and connected (SEC, 2012). But the company has also been
 criticized for some of its network features and business practices, most
 notably regarding privacy.

Google, Inc. was founded in 1998, has its headquarters in Mountain
 View, California, 30,000 employees and more than 70 offices globally.
 Google's success started with its web search engine, but now the company
 offers a multitude of online services and products. In 2011, Google created
 the networking tool Google+ that shares many functionalities with other
 social networks, but offers also unique features such as the possibility to
 group people into different social circles. User numbers are growing
 rapidly. Google is one of the most profitable Internet companies, publicly
 traded since 2004 and has reported revenues of \$37.9 billion in 2011
 (Google Inc., 2012a). A code of conduct governs its business practice
 (Google Inc., 2009), including the famous mission statement 'Don't Be
 Evil'. Google has a reputation for its innovative corporate culture and has
 been ranked as one of the best employers (Greene, 2012). The company is
 engaged in philanthropy through the Google.org branch. Critics of Google
 have complained about a variety of nuisances like the possible misuse and

1 manipulation of search results, censorship issues, copyright violations and
2 privacy concerns.

3 Twitter, Inc. was founded in 2006, is based in San Francisco, California,
4 and has 900 employees worldwide. The micro-blogging service allows users
5 to post messages, so-called tweets, with a limit of 140 characters that are
6 delivered to the author's network. Twitter is free for registered users and
7 does not provide any advertising policy. Twitter's revenues per user are
8 relatively low compared to those of other Internet companies, but are
9 rising: Twitter earned nearly \$140 million in revenue for 2011, up from a
10 reported \$45 million in 2010 (Jackson, 2012). One of its operating princi-
11 ples is 'Be a force for good' (Diaz-Ortiz & Stone, 2011, p. 3). It positions
12 itself as an altruistic company that supports charity, e.g., by supporting
13 NGOs to use Twitter for social causes. Twitter has been relatively seldom
14 the target of criticism, although it has also faced SNS-typical problems like
15 abusive use.

17

Corporate Power and the Rise of Self-Regulation

19

20 In the wake of globalization, deregulation and privatization, the power of
21 corporations, especially large multinational corporations (MNCs), has
22 heavily increased in recent years (see, e.g., Bonanno & Constance, 2010;
23 Chandler & Mazlish, 2005; Cowling & Tomlinson, 2005). The concept of
24 power has been discussed and researched for decades, mainly by political
25 scientists and sociologists, in the context of individual and collective power,
26 and has been broadly defined as 'the ability to alter others' behaviour to
27 produce preferred outcomes' (Nye, 2011, p. 10). In the corporate context,
28 the focus is often narrowly on 'market power', i.e. the ability of companies
29 to influence prices (Motta, 2004, p. 40), but corporate power also impacts
30 the development of societies in a more general sense (Filho, 2012).
31 Corporate power rests on immense resources, revenues and the global reach
32 of corporate activities, and becomes visible by the potential influence of
33 corporations on people's lives, most notably by providing jobs, products
34 and wealth, but also on policy-making and the public debate. Corporate
35 power has provoked acceptance and animosity (Bendell & Bendell, 2007).
36 Critics have pointed to examples of abusive use of power, e.g. regarding
37 rising global inequality through unfair trade practices and exploitation
38 (Madeley, 1999; Woodman, 2012), concerning negative impacts on the
39 environment as in the case of the BP oil disaster (Ladd, 2012), or in terms
of the greedy, risk-oriented behaviour that contributed to the recent

1 financial crisis (Igan, 2011; Visser, 2010). But increased power implies
increased responsibility (Davis, 1960), and companies may not only use
3 their power to advance their own interests, but also the interests of wider
society, e.g. human rights (Cragg, 2010; Nolan & Taylor, 2009; Wettstein,
5 2012; Wood, 2012).

The Internet industry is no exception to the phenomenon of growing
7 corporate power. Its commercial era begun with the sudden rise of many
newly created start-ups (Zook, 2005), but has meanwhile created large,
9 globally operating companies that increasingly dominate significant market
segments. Most notably, the growing market power of Google has been a
11 public concern for years (see, e.g., Orey, 2009; Rule, 2011) and has resulted
in antitrust investigations in the United States and the EU. The power of
13 SNS companies is reflected in impressive user rates and market shares.
Their continuing growth is often explained by the network effect known as
15 Metcalfe's law stating that the value of a network is proportional to the
square of the number of its users (see McAfee & Oliveau, 2002). Power is
17 also constituted by the decisive role SNS companies play within networks:
Due to the central position of the SNS provider in a network the relative
19 power and accordingly also responsibilities are immense, since considerable
influence may be exerted over users (Chen, 2009).

21 Growing corporate power has been accompanied by the rising impor-
tance of self- and co-regulation (Albareda, 2008; Cragg, 2005; Mattli &
23 Woods, 2011; Vogel, 2010). Transnational corporate activities and issues of
global reach such as climate change have challenged the regulatory capacity
25 of governments and constitute a new role of corporations in governance
(Crane, et al., 2008a; Levy & Kaplan, 2008; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). The
27 pressure by civil society towards companies to engage in self-regulation has
grown. Hard law has increasingly been complemented by voluntary agreed
29 upon soft law, by codes of ethics and international guidelines such as the
principles developed by the UN Global Compact (Rasche, 2012). The
31 nation state is not completely on the retreat, as it had been prominently
argued several years ago (Strange, 1996). Instead, governments together
33 with corporations and civil society have started to globally regulate issues
in collaborative networks (Detomasi, 2007; Kobrin, 2009).

35 The difficulties of states to define appropriate regulation hold for SNS
as well. The Internet has created a number of governance issues such as
37 copyright, security, information privacy and surveillance (Brousseau,
Marzouki, & Méadel, 2012; Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund, & Sandoval,
39 2012; Haufler, 2001; Smith & Boardman, 2007). Information technologies
are complex, its impacts far-reaching and changes are developing rapidly,

1 so that it is difficult for national regulators to define and implement suffi-
 2 cient legislation (Werle & Feick, 2010). States are not giving up their
 3 responsibility to regulate technology – many states are currently drawing
 4 stricter rules – but initiatives for self-regulation are increasingly encour-
 5 aged, for instance regarding data protection and child privacy (De-Miguel-
 6 Molina, Oltra-Gutiérrez, & Sarabdeen, 2010).

9 *Social Networking Providers Administering Citizenship Rights*

11 Following Matten and Crane (2005), the investigation of the political role
 12 of SNS providers is based on liberal citizenship and the social, civil and
 13 political rights associated with it (Marshall, 1964). Corporate responsibil-
 14 ities are examined by focusing on ‘the role of the corporation in administer-
 15 ing citizenship rights for individuals’ (Matten & Crane, 2005, p. 173). The
 16 notion of liberal citizenship has primarily shaped Western democracies, but
 17 due to economic, political and social changes, the concept has been frag-
 18 mented and broadened in recent years. It has been complemented by newer
 19 forms of citizenship such as environmental, cultural and cosmopolitan citi-
 20 zenship that are not specifically located within the nation state like tradi-
 21 tional liberal citizenship, but are global rights (Isin & Turner, 2002; Moon,
 22 Crane, & Matten, 2006; Turner, 2001). In the following the three liberal
 23 components of citizenship – civil, social and political rights – and the role
 24 and responsibilities of SNS providers in governing those rights are ana-
 25 lysed. Due to its high relevance the concept of environmental citizenship
 26 (Crane, Matten, & Moon, 2008b) is discussed as well.

27 *Civil Rights*

29 Freedom of expression, the right to property and other civil rights protect
 30 the individual from abuses and interference by governments and private
 31 actors. Corporations may play a disabling or an enabling role regarding
 32 the administration of civil rights for citizens (Matten & Crane, 2005), e.g.
 33 by discouraging or encouraging authoritarian regimes to respect the free-
 34 dom of their citizens.

35 The Internet offers unprecedented opportunities to spread and receive
 36 information, and has put freedom of expression in a new light, especially
 37 since SNS like Twitter have embraced a role as catalysts for free speech.
 38 But freedom of expression can be an intricate issue for Internet companies,
 39 as the decision by Google to adapt to censorship requirements in China
 revealed in 2006. Google argued that providing restricted information was

1 better than no information, but the decision to submit its search engine to
 3 Chinese legal requirements was still criticized for infringing on the freedom
 of expression out of business interest (Brenkert, 2009). Google changed its
 approach to censorship thereupon. In 2008, Google co-founded the Global
 5 Network Initiative (GNI) to protect and advance freedom of expression
 (Google Inc., 2012c). Google withdrew from Mainland China in March
 7 2010, and continued to offer search services from unfiltered servers in
 Google Hong Kong, thereby circumventing censorship (Eko, Kumar, &
 9 Qingjiang, 2011).

Censorship and filtering requirements continue to challenge SNS provi-
 11 ders, and involve legal issues, but also necessitate discerning between just
 and unjust law, weighing profit and ethics, and balancing freedom of
 13 expression and local cultural norms. SNS have been blocked in several
 countries, e.g. Facebook and Twitter in China since 2009, when rioters
 15 used SNS to organize anti-government demonstrations. However, rumours
 about Facebook planning to enter the Chinese market and to obey local
 17 laws continue (McDonald, 2012). Even in democratic countries the decision
 whether to cooperate with the government may cause difficulties, as the
 19 Indian case shows: Twitter has cooperated unofficially with the government
 to censor critical tweets since 2011, following the argument that the history
 21 of violent social and religious protests necessitated Internet regulation. In
 February 2012, Google and Facebook decided to block material considered
 23 religiously offensive after private petitioners took them to court over
 debatable images. Google and Twitter also announced plans to allow
 25 country-specific censorship of content that might break local laws. Civil
 rights groups have opposed the blocking of content as a threat to democ-
 27 racy (Roychoudhury & Arakali, 2012), and globally observers warned that
 the role of SNS as a beacon of free speech was put in danger (Crary, 2012). **AU:3**

29 However, in some cases censorship of SNS content is clearly necessary,
 notably to prevent potential misuse for criminal purposes. All SNS plat-
 31 forms have had problems with cyber-bullying and safety risks (Li, 2007),
 and have taken measure to counter abusive use of SNS and to protect chil-
 33 dren and young adults using those platform. Google, Facebook and
 Twitter run online safety centres to advise users on online safety, and have
 35 installed tools to simplify the notification of inappropriate behaviour.
 Facebook also runs a Safety Advisory Board, including representatives
 37 from NGOs, to improve online safety.

The Internet has created new conflicts over intellectual property (IP) and
 39 SNS companies play an important role in administering property rights.
 Facebook, Twitter and Google have recognized their responsibility to

1 protect patents, copyrights, and trademarks, and have made commitments
2 to remove infringing content from their networks. Yet, Google has itself
3 come under the spotlight for copyright violations with its efforts to make
4 digital copies of millions of books (Liedtke, 2011). There is a continuing
5 debate among policy-makers, business and the wider public on how to best
6 handle IP issues in the online context. In the United States, the Stop Online
7 Piracy Act (SOPA) is currently under discussion, aimed at combating
8 online trafficking in copyrighted intellectual property and counterfeit
9 goods. Facebook, Google and Twitter have opposed the bill arguing that
10 such a law would compromise the freedom of expression and hinder inno-
11 vation (International Business Times, 2011). Another critical aspect is own-
12 ership of the content published in SNS.

13 The right to privacy is another civil right highly relevant in the SNS con-
14 text. The Internet has significantly impacted our understanding and prac-
15 tice of privacy, as exemplified by Mark Zuckerberg's statement, 'Privacy is
16 no longer a social norm' (Johnson, 2010). However, the right to privacy is
17 a salient issue for every Internet user, specifically in terms of information
18 privacy. Public concern about the consequences of online openness is ris-
19 ing, but network users still tend to provide personal information freely and
20 publicly. This openness is at least partly a result of the design of user inter-
21 faces and privacy settings (Gross & Acquisti, 2005), and a lack of data pro-
22 tection by network providers has often been criticized.

23 Facebook's privacy policy has frequently met with criticism for its weak
24 design, tendencies to drive information disclosure and repeated changes
25 without giving adequate notice to users (Johnson, 2010; Semitsu, 2011).
26 One central allegation that Facebook currently is confronted with is the
27 creation of 'shadow profiles' by collecting data from websites that include
28 Facebook features such as Like buttons (Albanesius, 2011). Facebook's
29 business model depends on user data to sell targeted advertising, but the
30 company also necessitates users' trust and therefore has often responded to
31 uproars about privacy. It was due to public pressure that Facebook has
32 enabled users to choose their own privacy settings and to control what
33 types of information are shared automatically with users and friends
34 (Facebook Inc., 2011). The company is also confronted with increasing
35 political scrutiny: In December 2011, the Irish data protection commis-
36 sioner requested changes for improvement of privacy issues to which
37 Facebook agreed, including greater transparency about its facial-
38 recognition feature and the usage of European users' data (Walsh, 2012).
39 The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has filed a complaint against
Facebook for 'a number of instances in which Facebook allegedly made

1 promises that it did not keep' (Federal Trade Commission 2011a), accusing
Facebook among others of sharing personal information with advertisers.

3 Google's first attempt to start a social networking tool in 2010, Google
Buzz, had severe privacy flaws, and was alleged by the FTC to use decep-
5 tive tactics and violate its own privacy promises (Federal Trade
Commission, 2011b). In March 2011, Google agreed in a settlement with
7 the FTC to implement a comprehensive privacy programme and to
undergo regular privacy audits. With the failure of Google Buzz, Google
9 launched Google+ featuring higher privacy standards, e.g. by allowing
sharing of content with specific user groups (Jacobson, 2011). In January
11 2012, Google caused an outcry when it announced a change in its privacy
policy to enable sharing of data across multiple services, a step that seemed
13 to confirm concerns about the enormous amount of data at Google's disposal
(Bosker, 2012).

15 Twitter has been commended for protecting anonymity by allowing the
use of pseudonyms and for notifying users before turning over private
17 information that have been requested by governments (Twitter Inc., 2011).
Twitter's handling of privacy issues has evoked comparatively little criti-
19 cism, although Twitter was accused by the FTC in the aftermath of two
hacker attacks 2011 of putting users' privacy at risk by failing to safeguard
21 their personal information (Federal Trade Commission, 2011a).

AU:4

23 *Political Rights*

Political rights, like the right to free elections, enable the individual to partici-
25 pitate in the exercise of political power. Corporations may not have the
right to vote, but they influence policy-making, participate in governance,
27 and provide an arena for citizens exercising political rights (Matten &
Crane, 2005).

29 Since Internet regulation has become a major issue, SNS providers have
started to invest considerable effort in attempts to influence policy-making.
31 Google spent \$9.7 million on lobbying in Washington, DC in 2011
(Liedtke, 2012), whereas Facebook spent \$1.35 million (Facebook Inc.,
33 2012a). Additionally, both Google and Facebook have launched political
action committees (PACs) to support candidates in U.S. elections, and are
35 also lobbying EU institutions. Twitter has been less active in the lobbying
field, but has also installed a policy team that monitors and advocates public
37 policy. The lobbying of SNS companies primarily focuses on
technology-related issues like online piracy, cybersecurity and privacy, but
39 Google has also taken action to support social and environmental issues
like renewable energy legislation.

1 SNS companies have started to engage in self-regulation and governance
2 processes together with governments and civil society. The Global Network
3 Initiative, a multi-stakeholder group of corporations, NGOs and academics
4 founded in 2008, seeks to safeguard freedom of expression and privacy
5 against government infringements. Participating companies agree to com-
6 mon principles and make a number of specific operational commitments.
7 While Google is a founding member, neither Facebook nor Twitter has
8 joined. The ‘Safer Social Networking Principles’ were agreed between
9 online service providers in 2009 on the initiative of the European
10 Commission with the goal of protecting children and young people online.
11 Twitter abstained, but Google and Facebook agreed to the principles and
12 to the implementation of corresponding measures. These initiatives are not
13 the only examples of self-regulation and multi-stakeholder collaboration in
14 the field of Internet technology, and all of them constitute important steps,
15 since the inherently global, complex nature of the Internet necessitates
16 internationally oriented self-regulation measures. But the impact of these
17 initiatives is limited as long as important players in the field fail to partici-
18 pate. Moreover, neither Google or Facebook nor Twitter has become mem- **AU:5**
19 ber of the UN Global Compact, one of the most important initiatives in
20 global governance, signed by about 7,000 companies that voluntarily com-
21 mit to align their operations and strategies with 10 universally accepted
22 principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-
23 corruption.

SNS providers also act as a conduit for the exercise of citizens’ political
25 rights. SNS offer users increased access to information and opportunities
26 for participation in public debates. Policy-makers have discovered SNS as
27 a way to rally support, and to debate political and social issues with citizens
(O’Dell, 2011). The 2009 election crisis in Iran revealed the crucial role
28 SNS may play in non-democratic environments by giving voice to activities
29 and by raising global attention to protests. The importance of Twitter was
30 underlined as the U.S. government approached the company to ensure the
31 continuous flow of information during the uprisings (Burns & Eltham,
32 2009). In the Middle East uprisings in 2011 social media were again a cen-
33 tral way of communication, and many spoke of a ‘Twitter revolution’
34 (Hounshell, 2011). However, critical observers pointed out that SNS not
35 only serves dissidents, but also the secret services as platforms for gathering
36 intelligence about protests (Morozov, 2009).

Another area in which SNS offer an arena for exercising political rights
39 is the rather new development of political action against corporations.
While in Western democracies many citizens seem to lose interest in

1 politics, political change has been increasingly sought by pressuring cor-
 2 porations through campaigns or boycotts (Hertz, 2002; Holzer, 2010). SNS
 3 offer a platform for activism and protest politics by facilitating loosely
 4 structured, transnational protest networks (Bennett, 2003). SNS providers
 5 themselves have become the target of activists. For example, in 2010, nearly
 6 29,000 users deactivated their Facebook accounts on ‘Quit Facebook Day’
 7 to protest against weak privacy provisions.

9 *Social Rights*

10 Social rights like the right to education, health care or security are designed
 11 to provide the individual with a level of economic and social well-being
 12 that permits effective participation in society (Marshall 1964). Generally
 13 the state provides citizens with those rights, but corporations increasingly
 14 play a providing role in this field (Matten & Crane, 2005), most notably in
 15 countries with weak welfare state provisions, e.g. by improving working
 16 conditions, supporting deprived schools and providing health care.

17 Philanthropy is one way for corporations to contribute to areas that are
 18 not or not sufficiently covered by the welfare state. Some leaders of SNS
 19 companies have committed themselves to charity, among others
 20 Facebook’s founder Zuckerberg who donated \$100 million to the Newark,
 21 N.J. public school system (Evangelista, 2010). Social networks provide an
 22 important platform for charitable organizations. New ways to raise dona-
 23 tions through SNS have emerged, e.g. by allowing individuals to contribute
 24 small amounts to specific charitable projects. SNS providers encourage
 25 charitable organizations to use their networks. Facebook runs frequent ses-
 26 sions aimed at helping charitable organizations to develop and execute
 27 SNS strategies. Twitter has set up a ‘Corporate Social Innovation and
 28 Philanthropy’ team that guides how to use Twitter for social causes (Diaz-
 29 Ortiz & Stone, 2011), and offers pro-bono and discounted advertising to
 30 charities. The Twitter-affiliated blog Hope140.org highlights non-profit
 31 initiatives and its own investment in projects, such as the campaign for
 32 earthquake relief in Japan, International Literacy Day, and the Hope for
 33 Haiti campaign. Google offers non-profit organizations access to dedicated
 34 services, e.g. free advertising. The philanthropic branch Google.org
 35 donated \$115 million in 2011, especially to support science education and
 36 the education of girls, to fight slavery and trafficking, and to use technol-
 37 ogy to solve problems. Moreover, Google.org has developed technologies
 38 to help address global challenges. For example the tool ‘Flu Trends’ uses
 39 search data to provide early warning systems for possible disease out-
 breaks. In 2011, the Google-funded Institute for the Internet and Society

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1 was opened at Berlin's Humboldt University to study issues like privacy in
the digital era.

3

Ecological Citizenship.

5 The concern over the impact of modern society and economy on the environ-
ment has grown considerably and accordingly the concept of citizenship
7 has been complemented by 'ecological citizenship', a popular, but diverse
concept (Melo-Escribuela, 2008). It allows for complementing liberal citi-
9 zenship with the right to a safe environment, and derives specific responsi-
bilities for corporations towards non-humans, future generations and
11 citizens that it affects through its resource utilization (Crane, et al., 2008b).

SNS providers face the challenge of dealing with an infrastructure that
13 consumes significant amounts of electricity (Murugesan, 2008). Facebook
has committed itself to operating in a sustainable way, but the company has
15 been repeatedly criticized for neglecting its environmental responsibility
(Tonelli, 2010). The company has undertaken measures to counter concerns
17 by enhancing energy efficiency in its data centre in Oregon (International
Business Times, 2011a), by targeting to run on renewable energy and by col-
19 laborating with Greenpeace in the promotion of green energy (Greenpeace
International, 2011b). Google is regarded to be a leading green company in
21 the IT industry (Greenpeace International, 2012). The company has invested
considerably in renewable energy projects since 2007, including wind farms,
23 geothermal companies, and solar projects (LaMonica, 2011), has underta-
ken measures to improve energy efficiency, especially regarding data centres
25 (Google Inc., 2012, 12 February), and has designed environmental friendly
headquarters with solar panels generating electricity for the campus.
27 Google.org has supported ecological projects like the development of plug-
in electric vehicle technology. The company has also promoted a stronger
29 U.S. clean energy policy and the EU's greenhouse gas targets. Twitter has
no overall environmental strategy, but has taken smaller steps, e.g., to
31 enhance water saving. According to Greenpeace, Twitter is lacking behind
in terms of green energy use (Greenpeace International, 2011a). However,
33 Twitter, among other SNS tools, indirectly supports environmental issues
by offering a platform for green activists and NGOs like Greenpeace.

35

37 *Pluralism, Human Rights and Deliberation*

39 Today corporations are confronted with pluralism and cultural diversity,
resulting in potential for fragmentation, incoherence and conflict as well as

1 difficulties to maintain legitimacy in the face of multiple norms, values and
2 beliefs (Kraatz & Block, 2008; Palazzo & Scherer, 2006). Globally operat-
3 ing companies such as Google, Facebook and Twitter face various political,
4 legal, cultural and moral systems. The homogenizing effect of the Internet
5 regarding value systems is limited as, e.g., the formation of a culturally spe-
6 cific SNS like the Islamic oriented 'Salamworld' shows. Globalization and
7 increased connectedness of economies and societies have both challenged
8 and amplified the need for global moral norms (Apel, 2008; Beauchamp,
9 2010; Wieland, Wallacher, Reder, & Karcher, 2006). While recognizing the
10 reality of pluralism and diversity, universal norms seem crucial to guide
11 decisions in various legal, moral and cultural contexts, especially in cases of
12 ambiguity and conflict. This point of view is underlined by the natural
13 rights perspective that acknowledges the corporate duty to critically con-
14 sider the ethical substantiation of laws (Ostas, 2004).

15 Human rights can guide SNS providers dealing with legal, ethical and
16 cultural differences. Citizenship rights and human rights overlap to a
17 certain extent, but unlike traditional citizenship, human rights are not spe-
18 cifically located within the nation-state, but are global, 'inalienable rights
19 of all members of the human family' (UN General Assembly, 1948).
20 Human rights are moral rights, but have gained a legal basis through inter-
21 national covenants such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
22 (UN General Assembly, 1948). Many scholars discern an active role for
23 corporations in the protection of human rights (Arnold, 2010; Cragg, 2000,
24 2010; Kobrin, 2009; Wettstein, 2012; Wettstein & Waddock, 2005). Yet,
25 the human rights concept has its limits: States regularly proclaim their
26 adherence to human rights norms, but a common global understanding
27 of human rights is lacking (Whelan, Moon, & Orlitzky, 2009). The concept
28 is non-binding, vague and has often been criticized as a mere Western
29 idea (Pollis & Schwab, 1979). SNS providers face the challenge of how
30 to substantiate human right imperatives in concrete situations, e.g. regard-
31 ing freedom of expression that is a highly valued norm in the Western
32 context, but can constitute conflict with religious beliefs in other cultural
33 environments.

34 Another way for SNS providers to handle ambiguous, conflicting
35 demands resulting from multiple norms, values, and beliefs is to engage
36 in dialogue and reach consensus by taking a deliberative approach as
37 proposed by Palazzo and Scherer (2006; 2007). In a deliberative view, not
38 every issue needs to be solved through an unlimited democratic discourse,
39 but administrative routine has to be suspended when a public discourse
emerges, e.g., when NGOs push a given issue into public awareness

1 (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). In that case, the company should engage in a
2 dialogue, justify its position, consider alternative arguments and convince
3 in order to facilitate broadly accepted decisions and mutual understanding
(Palazzo & Scherer, 2006).

5 SNS providers are in a good starting position for a deliberative
6 approach. Communication is their core business and they can rely on their
7 own technology to facilitate exchange, even though interaction is complicated
8 by the large number of users. Google, Facebook and Twitter all have
9 made commitments to openness and dialogue, for instance Google under-
10 lines in its code of conduct the importance of responsiveness to user needs
11 and open communication (Google Inc., 2009). The companies offer
12 dialogue via blogs, company and employees pages on their networks. SNS
13 companies have been active participants in public discourse, either on their
14 own initiative, e.g. in the case of the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), or
15 reactively for instance when NGOs pushed for Green IT. While Twitter is
16 holding off, Google and Facebook have started to engage in institutiona-
17 lized multi-stakeholder collaboration like the 'Safer Social Networking
18 Principles' initiative. Company-internal processes of SNS providers seem to
19 reflect ideal conditions for the deliberative approach: Google claims to
20 have a dialogue-orientated corporate culture 'in which everyone is a hands-
21 on contributor and feels comfortable sharing ideas and opinions' (Google
22 Inc., 2012b), Facebook underlines its open, meritocratic culture and
23 Twitter is known for its democratic organization structure. On the other
24 hand, there have been repeatedly complaints about lacking transparency
25 and scarce responsiveness to stakeholders. For example, Facebook has
26 been consistently hesitant to react to demands for enhanced privacy protec-
27 tion, suggesting that the company primarily acts in the case of considerable
28 public pressure. Another example of an apparent lack of willingness to
29 interact are the difficulties journalists encounter with press requests.
30 Moreover, despite commitments to openness, none of the SNS companies
31 publishes a CSR or sustainability report, although Google provides consid-
32 erable company information online.

33 If SNS companies take further steps to enhance the conditions for a
34 democratic dialogue with stakeholders, the deliberative approach could
35 contribute not only to handling culturally varying rules and expectations
36 but also to sustain corporate legitimacy (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006).
37 Ultimately, this would also be a way to counter concerns about the lack of
38 democratic mandate and accountability of these companies, because the
39 deliberative approach embeds corporations in processes of democratic
will-formation and control (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Social networks have millions of members worldwide and refusing their use has become increasingly difficult. This development underlines the importance of SNS providers taking their responsibilities seriously. As the chapter has shown, Facebook, Twitter and Google have not only made clear commitments to act responsibly, they actually enhance the citizenship status of their users in many ways, e.g. by offering a platform for democracy activists. But deficiencies and contradictions have become obvious, e.g. when SNS providers inhibit citizenship by failing to provide sufficient privacy protection. Political CSR has proved useful in examining their role and responsibilities which is an interesting aspect because this stream of research has hardly been lined by empirical studies (but see Baumann & Scherer, 2010). One of the basic assumptions of political CSR, namely that states lose regulatory powers, has been confirmed to a certain extent, i.e. by the difficulties of national governments to regulate social networks sufficiently. However, policy-makers are still able to exert pressure, and the reaction by SNS companies alternating between cooperation, acceptance, and opposition reveals the continuing importance of legal frameworks. Some SNS companies have started to engage in self-regulation, but technology-related initiatives have so far failed to attract all major players in the field. Normative implications come into play, as this chapter concludes with a call for participation in processes of global governance and discourse.

Further research could focus on the consequences for CSR communication practice. Promoting social media as powerful CSR tools seems problematic as long as SNS providers do not better meet their responsibilities. Awareness regarding problematic aspects of SNS is rising, and some CSR professionals have even reported to abstain from using Facebook due to lacking privacy protection, especially since CSR standards like ISO 26000 require companies to ensure privacy and data protection. Another aspect that has to be ceded to future research is the evolution of SNS companies and their roles and responsibilities. Technology is developing fast, SNS companies are growing rapidly and corporate culture is changing. The impact of these changes on the CSR engagement of Google, Facebook and Twitter could be examined based on insights from organizational learning models.

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