Connecting Corporate and Consumer Social Responsibility Through Social Media Activism

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Abstract
To highlight aspects of activism obscured by a focus on legitimacy and ideology, this article argues that shifting focus from legitimacy and ideology to identity, problem-solving and dialogue is needed to understand emerging forms of social media native activism that connects consumer social responsibility (CnSR) and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Taking this view as a basis for social activism offers a valuable perspective for understanding some emergent forms of social media activism toward business. Two cases of social media native activist organizations working to create movements are examined from this problem-solving and dialogue-based perspective—Carrotmob and the GoodGuide. These cases represent examples of a post-dialectic frame for understanding how social media can affect approaches to activism.

Keywords
activism, consumer social responsibility, CSR, post-dialectic frame

Introduction
What is consumer social responsibility (CnSR) and how can it play a role in activism? In the context of the food industry, Manning (2013) conceptualizes CnSR as part of push–pull dynamic between corporations and consumers with consumers pulling on corporate financial, environmental, and social responsibility through their purchasing actions. In this model, information flow connects the corporate and consumer social responsibilities; However, information flow is addressed indirectly from a branding and consumer data perspective rather than as a dialogue. From a consumer behavior perspective, Pigors and Rockenbach (2016) found that corporate social responsibility (CSR) behavior was a key consideration for consumers when they needed to choose between competing products. Here again, the consumers are cast in a role related to social responsibility through action and reaction to corporate choices, but not as directly engaged in helping corporations develop those choices. Finally, Quazi, Amran, and Nejati (2016) developed a model for understanding consumers in the Journal of Consumer Studies. This model has six elements—supporting business growth, critical appraisal, action, social impacts, environmental impacts, and solidarity. From a management perspective, these articles demonstrate that businesses are aware of consumers’ roles in social responsibility and concerned about building an alignment between CSR and CnSR. However, a gap in understanding how this alignment can be accomplished still exists, leaving a space for activists to engage in Manning’s (2013) push–pull dynamic through affecting information flows about relevant responsibility issues and their framing. These management scholars build models related to consumer awareness about impacts of their own choices, inferring an unarticulated need for consumers to engage in co-constructing sustainability knowledge with businesses. The two cases addressed in this article demonstrate ways in which activist leaders address this need to connect CnSR with CSR from a peer production approach—rooted in problem-solving, identity, and dialogue, arguably a social media native approach to activism. This can be defined as an approach including an understanding of social and technical affordances for social media platforms together with

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the problem-solving opportunities of peer production on digital platforms described by Brabham (2008).

This social media native approach to activism differs in focus from other forms of digital activism due to its dependence on a combination of social media platform technical affordances, intentional communities, and peer production features directed toward an activist goal. This approach can be understood as a contrast to activism that depends on ideology, which can be communicated through many channels, and is amplified in digital media environments. The connection between CSR and CnSR by the leaders in their framing of these two activist movements offers a place where problem-solving, identity, and dialogue between consumers and companies becomes visible and demonstrates a social media native approach in action. Activists connecting CSR and CnSR can be understood as employing a form of knowledge management at the societal level, which, in turn, can constitute a form of socio-technical (re-)design at the interface of business and society. Thus, social media native activism connecting CnSR and CSR is based on a consumer-driven approach that opens up possibilities for consumer action based on problem-solving activities in dialogue with businesses—emerging from, connected to, and communicated through digital networks.

This approach challenges current assumptions about the nature of activism toward business. For example, Den Hond and De Bakker (2007) portrayed activism as ideology driven, and negatively focused toward corporations in their model for activism. Their model demonstrated activists as ideology driven by presenting tactics for de-institutionalism and re-institutionalism as processes driven by the type of ideology underlying the activists’ approaches—radical or reformist. This focus on ideology and typology fits with ideologically driven activism such as Greenpeace, or People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), organizations that were actively engaging with business frames in the early 1980s, before the emergence and penetration of Internet and social media technologies in the public sphere. These organizations use social media to amplify their messages, but their ideologically driven stances toward business practices and field-level frames predate social media contexts. Thus, they can be understood as having a social media adaptive approach to activism. This framing enables businesses to objectify activists as carriers of ideology.

Consumers and activists using social media are then subject to a second form of objectification in business theory, treated as objects to be engaged from perspectives rooted in consumer relationship management (CRM) in the marketing literature (Campbell, 2003; Payne & Frow, 2005). CRM leverages technology from a corporate-centered perspective to engage consumers in meaningful dialogue to customize products and attract, develop, and retain them as customers (Campbell, 2003, p. 375). CRM includes purposes that range from specific information technology solutions to the creation of corporate value (Payne & Frow, 2005). Even when focused on corporate value creation, these models treat activists, consumers, and customers as tools for fulfilling corporate strategy—an inherently object-based perspective. This corporate subject–consumer/activist object interrelationship is underscored by studies analyzing activism through legitimacy and ideology (Kelly Garrett, 2006). This, in turn, hinders dialogue and problem-solving interactions between activists and businesses—in both theory and practice.

Understanding social media native activism, on the other hand, requires shifting focus to subject–subject interactions. This enables activists to be approached for co-constructing knowledge together with businesses, rather than as ideology carriers involved in de-legitimizing and re-legitimizing field-level frames and using tactics, which could be symbolically or materially harmful to corporations. When we focus on practices instead of ideology and legitimacy, subject–subject interactions—including problem-solving and dialogue—are able to come into focus. To understand social media activists connecting CnSR and CSR, a shift from ideology and legitimacy-based analysis to practices based on identity, problem-solving, and dialogue is needed. This view enables understanding how social media–based activists use practices and knowledge to engage consumers in social movements who are positive toward both business and their activist concerns. Thus, in the case of social media native activism, digital communication practices are based on interactions for co-constructing knowledge that can lead to solutions for shared and recognized problems.

In this article, two cases of social media native activist organizations are examined from this problem-solving and dialogue-based perspective—Carrotmob and the GoodGuide. These organizations were designed to use social media affordances to create movements aimed at engaging consumers in CnSR linked to and affecting business performance of CSR. Findings support the notion of a socio-technical (re-)design in progress at social media interfaces between business and society. This (re-)design includes the following: (1) sense-making, (2) the production of new knowledge through linguistic and rhetorical configurations in discourse, and (3) the cultural production of new forms of practice. These practices can be used to create subject–subject interactions to deal with problems, which can be solved through meaningful interactions between subjects who share a stake in the problem.

Along with management scholars’ focus on contentiousness of activists in social movements toward business, social movement scholars also focus on ideology and framing, often resulting in conceptualizing activists as working against institutions. For example, Uitermark and Nicholls (2012) included movements as expressing “criticisms of the existing order of things and project alternative futures” in their definition (p. 3); Youmans and York (2012) discussed tensions between sociopolitical goals of activists and commercial interests of social media platforms, inferring a dialectical tension between the two (p. 315); and Theocharis,
Lowe, van, Deth, and Garcia-Albacete (2015) focused on uses of social media in changing or contributing to “political communication, mobilization and organization of social movements” (p. 202). All three use an interpretation of social media affordances in a social, user context focused nature, rather than a focus on technical possibilities and alignment with the business context of social media platform providers. The combination of social movement and business literature approaches to defining activism emphasizing ideology creates a contentious space.

Ideology is problematic because it overlooks opportunities afforded by social media native activists, using social media’s technical affordances in positive ways with a focus on CSR. Social media native activism can be defined as post-dialectical because rather than working to bring together the opposing sides of sociopolitical movements and business practices, social media native activism works to create movements that leverage technological affordances such as connecting networks of networks, distributed problem-solving, and contesting forms of knowledge through providing alternatives. Because these actions are productive in nature and positive toward the field-level frames in business, they contribute to the shaping of practices through combinations of small distributed actions—much like a swarm (Riley, 2014) approach to change acknowledging the intertwined nature of sociopolitical action and business interests in platforms, and worked in the problem-solving spaces connecting them. Thus, unlike the four social media activist movements described by Youmans and York (2012), social media native activist movements work within the commercial logic of social media platforms, representing the future in the present through their collective problem-solving activities and shared interpretations and re-interpretations of the problems they work to solve. As such, social media native activists are not vulnerable to “changes in rules and architectures” (Youmans & York, 2012, p. 317) in the same way as sociopolitical movements based on ideology.

This article examines two cases of activist organizations that are grounded in social media, established both through and due to the technical and contextual affordances of social media platforms. As such, these organizations also exhibit a key characteristic in their activism—a problem-solving focus. This problem-solving perspective is useful for understanding a new activism toward business—one that does not effectively fit classification schemes such as Van Laer and Van Aelst’s (2010) social movement action repertoires. This new type of activism uses the affordances of social media to engage businesses and consumers in problem-solving dialogues aimed at Horton’s (2003) activist architectures of everyday life. These problem-solving dialogues are not rooted in a specific ideological stance toward business, but rather focused around broader topics, which can encompass multiple ideological stances and multiple identities. They are brought together through practices aimed at influencing architectures of everyday life around them.

The activists in question can be understood as social media native activists, because affordances of the technology affect their approach to activism. This contrasts with Youmans & York’s (2012) use of affordances for sociopolitical goals such as providing forums for critique, helping to form public opinion, and providing logistical assistance to protest organizers (p. 317). This means that grounding the study in both Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-related social movement and socio-technical design literatures can help us understand how and why problem-solving becomes a primary focus across these activist organizations. When these fields are discussed together, emphasizing key differences and commonalities lays groundwork for shifting socio-technical design concepts from the organizational to the societal level. To analyze how technology-motivated activists used social media to lay the groundwork for a positive activism toward business, this article then examines how multiple cases of social media native activism arose simultaneously starting in the year 2008. Finally, to unpack the “how” aspect of this problem-solving activist stance, the article uses a theoretical framework including layers of sensemaking, linguistics, and rhetoric, with concepts from socio-technical design.

Theoretical Framework: From Technology-Supported Social Activism to Socio-technical (Re-)design at the Societal Level

This section examines some highly cited works in social movement and management literatures that frame and categorize social movements, demonstrating their focus on ideology. Identity and ideology can be understood as present in any situation; however, a way of seeing can also be a way of not seeing (Burke, 1966). To bring to light aspects of activism that are obscured by a focus on legitimacy and ideology, this section lays groundwork for understanding activism from a new angle. Here, focus shifts from ideology leading to a negative view of activism to how some activists engage in positive problem-solving and dialogue. This perspective enables understanding emerging activist organizations with strategic and dialogue-based strategies toward business for solving problems related to (re-)defining CSR by including CnSR.

Social movements are often examined from perspectives of identity, legitimacy, and ideology (Hirsto et al, 2010), resulting in social activism being understood as contentious toward business. In a literature review on social movements and ICTs, Kelly Garrett (2006) uses concepts of framing, mobilizing structures, and opportunities afforded by technologies focused on increased reach as key themes. This prioritizes ideology and portrays activism in terms of spreading ideology. Conceptually, notions of framing and mobilizing depend on legitimacy concerns and ideologies for online action content; such dependence precludes a
problem-solving focus. The ensuing tie between activist identity and ideology is demonstrated below as a strong tie, with ideology shaping identity. Prioritization of ideology leaves a gap for understanding identity in other terms, such as problem-solving practices—which this article will demonstrate as key to connecting CSR and CnSR in social media spaces.

**ICT Affordances Employed at the Ideological Level**

In a technological sense, social media affordances are described as filtering, recommendation and reputation systems (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Benkler (2006) describes this as peer organization through production, curation, and integration. In the open source development literature, social media affordances are approached through *a socio-technical theory of organizing* where these attributes affect work that facilitates autonomy and local locus of control while maintaining relatedness (Howison & Crowston, 2014). These affordances and their effects, according to Gerbaudo (2014) offer ways to “bring about new forms of soft and distributed leadership” (p. 266).

Technology-supported social activism focuses on ways in which ICT affordances affect possibilities for action in social movements. Social movement literature approaches social media and ICT as part of a larger system used by activist organizations to engage in framing, shifting mobilization structures, and expanding opportunities for communication transnationally (Kelly Garrett, 2006). The issue of framing highlights configurations of power and knowledge, prioritizing ideology. Hensmans (2003) focuses on ideology in framing through his classification for Social Movement Organizations (SMO), which includes positioning in terms of progress and justice, identifying an antagonist, and discursive strategy. He defines SMOs as ideological actors seeking power in an institutional field. This classification recognizes discourse as strategic, and as evidence for positioning choices. However, ideology comes to the forefront in his typological analysis, focusing attention away from problem-solving and dialogue, which requires conceptualizing SMOs as interactants able to engage productively with business in online interfaces.

Focusing on ideology, Hensmans turns to logics of equivalence and difference that highlight antagonistic relations. In a similar vein from management literature, Den Hond & De Bakker’s (2007) classification of activists toward business highlights an ideological stance (e.g., radical or reformatory) and describes a typology for arguments and activities corresponding to different states of institutional change. These categories focus on tactics toward corporations in symbolic and material terms, from SMO characterized by interests, identities, and ideologies. Hiristo Portikivi, & Molsander. (2010) also posit the nature of social movements as antagonistic toward business. They use a case study of activists arguing about different themes including the “atomization of the corporation,” and using discourse to establish an ideology for CSR criticizing the Finnish state for allowing a Finnish company offshore move. In these articles from the management and social movement literatures, social movement actors and organizations appear to be relegated to logics and ideologies that are tactical and confrontational. This leaves a gap in understanding activists from other angles, which do not prioritize ideology. Thus, a new basis for understanding activists using problem-solving in society as their focus can be useful to explore this gap. This conceptual basis can be rooted in a synthesis of concepts related to identity, enabling an understanding of emerging forms for *social media native* activism. In the next section, this article synthesizes a set of concepts that have their key focus in identity, and come from social movement, socio-technical design, and management literatures.

**Beyond Ideology: Material Architectures of Everyday Life**

In contrast, the social movement scholar Horton (2003) moves beyond ideology when he describes activism as identity performance through material objects. He argues that understanding architectures for green identity in terms of materials, times, and spaces would be fruitful for deepening social movement literature. Horton describes this architecture as the materiality, time and space used not only during activism activities, but in the daily lives of activists performing “green identity.” This notion of *material architecture for daily living* as a basis for identity fits with concepts from fields of organizational communication and socio-technical design. In the following discussion, *material architecture for daily living* is combined with key aspects of organizational literature related to communication and socio-technical design. This combination offers an approach to social media-based activism focused on broad themes versus ideologies, enabling diversity in activists’ ideas and interpretations at the practice level.

Architectures of *everyday living* offer resources for enacting identity in social and work contexts. Organizations can be treated as microcosms of society, and can also be understood as having characteristics from Castells’ (2000) definition of social structures:

Social structures are organized around relationships of production/consumption, power, and experience, whose spatial–temporal configurations constitute cultures. They are enacted, reproduced, and ultimately transformed by social actors, rooted in the social structure, yet freely engaging in conflictive social practices, with unpredictable outcomes. (p. 5)

To map the experience element in Castells’ relationships of production/consumption, power, and experience,
organizational theory related to sensemaking is used. Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld (2005) defined organizational sensemaking based on meaning and identity, such that situations and environments can literally be talked into existence. They explain sensemaking as a constitutional element in organizational culture and claim that it consists of communication, relating to experience, identity, and meaning. In turn, Castells’ definition of culture invokes a parallel description at the societal level, based on symbolic communication and interaction with the environment that crystallizes to form cultures. Through this metaphorical connection, we can argue for sensemaking as an initial piece to a layered understanding of social media–based activism in society.

Once we have established parallels between organizational-level and societal-level constructs, it is possible to extend this metaphorical connection to technology, enabling a macro perspective for socio-technical design (Kampf, 2012) informed by our understanding of socio-technical design at the organizational level. As society is connected by a shared set of ICT systems based on social media platforms, the impact and use of these platforms can be approached from a socio-technical design perspective. Mumford (2006) describes the past, present, and focuses on the future of socio-technical design by reflecting on the field in terms of humanistic values that set ends equally important to means. Her reflections include interactions between society and business through what Castells (2000) refers to as relationships of “production/consumption” (p. 5). If we build on this direction for socio-technical design, concepts useful for understanding how people interact with technology in organizational settings may also apply at the societal level.

Scaling key socio-technical design concepts from organizational to societal levels, leads to the work of Suchman, Bloomberg, Orr & Trigg, key scientists in socio-technical design from the XeroxParc research center. As they combined anthropological observations with technology in organizational settings, they concluded that systems development is about cultural production of new forms of practice rather than creating intrinsically meaning-filled objects (Suchman, Blomberg, Orr, & Trigg, 1999). Because they are comparing cultural products as new forms of practice to meaning-filled objects, the notion of meaning can be understood as an intrinsic element. In a society-level context, cultural production was defined by Manovich (2009), demonstrating a shift in socio-technical interactions from the organizational to the societal level. Consequently, notions of cultural production of new forms of practice can be useful for exploring and understanding organizational design issues and the design and effects of social media platforms, as well as applied to meaningful practices enacted on social media platforms by activist organizations. The cultural production of new forms of practice can be seen as functioning through social media architectures of daily life—architectures that activists can use to engage with businesses in joint problem-solving ventures.

The cultural production of new forms of practice engages social media users in processes of knowing. Blackler (1995) combines concepts from the impact of new technologies to the field of knowledge management. He argues for shifting focus from typologies of knowledge to understanding knowing as a dynamic process, which is mediated, situational, pragmatic, and contested. This knowing as a dynamic process can also be used to examine social media native activists’ uses of social media communication practices to actively contest forms of knowledge the cases examined here. This concept includes contesting accepted knowledge and producing new knowledge. Both aspects are enacted through communication in social media contexts. To understand the connections between these concepts and Weick’s sensemaking, a focus on language use in pragmatic and rhetorical terms is employed. In the next section, discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis will be explored as a means for demonstrating configurations of societal and social media discourses. These configurations reveal connections between sensemaking-level enactments and socio-technical design-related concepts such as the cultural production of new forms of practice, and enable activists to visibly engage in developing knowledge together with business via social media.

Configurations of Societal and Social Media Discourses Connecting Sensemaking to Social Media Practices

In this third section of the theoretical framework, configurations of societal and social media discourses demonstrate two processes for connecting enactments of social media native activists to technology mediated strategies, namely, the cultural production of new forms of practice, actively contesting forms of knowledge, and producing new knowledge at interfaces between business and society. These two processes—terministic screens and entitlement—consist of configurations combining language choices in writing social and online media posts with their connection to complex systems of ideas in society. Using Gee’s (1996) system of discourse analysis differentiates (D)iscourse or societal-level systems of ideas from (d)iscourse or actual terms and forms of language used in a communication instance such as a Facebook post or Twitter post, or YouTube video. As both levels of discourse are present together in culturally meaningful communication, rhetoric can show how connections can be configured in different ways. Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical notions of terministic screens and entitlement are used to demonstrate these configurations for (D)iscourse and (d)iscourse. Burke (1966; 1984) uses terministic screens as a reductive language process, where terms narrow the possible field of meanings. This process is depicted in Figure 1. Here, word choices in (d)iscourses are a subset of the entire system of ideas available in the (D)iscourse.
The second process of configuring (D)iscourses and (d)iscourses can be seen in entitlement. According to Burke, entitlements emerge from productive language processes in which we produce shared “terms” as shorthand for situations. Examples can be nicknames given as a result of shared experiences, and which remind us of the situation leading to the nickname. Entitlements act as reminders, and from a meaning perspective, embody more content than is evident for outsiders who have not shared the situation. Entitlements as a configuration of (D) and (d) can be seen in Figure 2. Figure 2 demonstrates (d) as an entitlement or shorthand for a larger discourse depicted by (D).

These reductive and productive language processes work together to demonstrate how language use or terminology derives meaning from larger discourses. Examples of entitlements will be used to demonstrate how the socio-technical processes of developing new cultural forms of practice and actively contesting forms of knowledge emerged from the enactment phase of Weick’s sensemaking process.

Figure 3 depicts a layered analysis framework with Weick’s sensemaking as the macro layer, followed by discursive and rhetorical choices in the social media language used. These choices exemplify entitlements for engaging in CSR practices with business and provide terministic screens intended to support consumers in their practices related to corporate CSR. The deployment of entitlements and terministic screens inherent in the activists’ problem-solving activities can be seen as leading to the cultural production of new forms of practice, and the contesting of accepted forms of knowledge around CSR. Threads connecting these three layers together include the following: (1) identity emerging from sensemaking practices for defining problems; (2) identity encapsulated in the “terms” or specialized words with shared meaning used to communicate about CSR; and (3) identity playing out in new cultural forms of practice, contesting knowledge, and producing new knowledge about the interface between business and society.

Social Media–Based Activism at Two Distinct Interfaces Between Business and Society—Case Studies of Carrotmob and the GoodGuide

The cases examined were chosen because they take a positive stance toward business as they work to build social movements, and they emerged together in 2008, shortly after the world-wide economic crisis. This positive reaction stands out in contrast to the negative stances toward business, and the finance industry in particular that led to the Occupy movements a few years later. The activists use social media, mobile, and new media channels to contribute to the agendas and underlying system of ideas about CSR. Social media platforms they use include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Pinterest. They do so in different ways—building relationships with businesses, or acting as mediators between consumers and business. In each case, they engage in problem-solving with businesses by offering contexts for making sense of CSR through enacting CnSR, creating an explicit connection between CSR and CnSR rooted in consumer practices. These cases were followed by the researcher from 2008 to the present through observation and participation on mailing lists, as well as a rhetorical analysis of the original websites, and social media presences including YouTube videos, Twitter accounts, and Facebook pages.

These cases are (1) Carrotmob.org using social and mobile technology to organize local consumer action led by Brent Schulkin and (2) GoodGuide.com using mobile technology to enable consumers to access CSR information at the point of purchase established by Dara O’Rourke. After a short case
Carrotmob.org Using Social Media to Organize Local Consumer action

Carrotmob works to build local movements to connect consumers with local businesses so they can participate in the cultural production of the new practice called Carrotmobbing. This practice connects social media spaces with offline spaces through the use of YouTube videos to facilitate dialogue about reducing ecological footprints between consumers and local companies. The practice is described by Hoffman and Hutter (2012) as having four key stages—preparation, auction, action, and outcomes. Carrotmobs begin with a preparation stage where local members choose an industry. Examples across the Carrotmobs in their YouTube channel6 include coffee shops, grocery stores, and convenience markets. Then they contact multiple businesses in the area, asking them to compete with each other to be chosen as a Carrotmob venue for an event. This competition is documented on YouTube, and can include local Carrotmob members acting as or bringing in consultants to help them see how to reduce resource use. Then, local members work to energize the competition, and encourage local residents to vote on which business will be Carrotmobbed, depending on their offers to engage in the campaign theme focus. Once the winning business is chosen, the action is planned, and the outcomes are measured by local volunteers, communicated on YouTube and linked to local chapter Carrotmob accounts in Facebook, and Twitter. Many of the event videos through 2013 are also linked to the official Carrotmob website, www.carrotmob.org. The model was replicated in many different countries, resulting in over 50 Twitter channels using the word Carrotmob or a translation of it (i.e., in Finland, Carrotmob was translated to PorkkanaMafia), most of them linked to Facebook pages. Only a handful of these Facebook pages and Twitter accounts showed activity in 2016, indicating the movement is still alive, but is much smaller in scale.

Carrotmob can be understood as having a social media native activist frame that connects CnSR to CSR through their initial enactment on social media by posting videos in YouTube explaining their model for changing business and demonstrating the first Carrotmob event. The initial video told the story of the origins of the Carrotmob idea and was narrated by the founder, Brent Schulkin, telling about how he went to different stores in his neighborhood and asked them to offer a percentage of the profits toward reducing their ecological footprint. The video then showed his networking strategy and some footage about the initial event, complete with information about its success. This information was couched in music and dancing, demonstrating how Carrotmob activism could also be fun. The idea was picked up by activists in different cities, leading to more videos documenting the auctions, actions, and outcomes of Carrotmob events. This led to competition between local branches to see who could get a business to donate the highest percent of profits, so the local movements maintained awareness of geographically dispersed events, and inspired each other by sharing their videos on YouTube.

The subsequent dynamic sensemaking process for the movement can be traced through the establishment of local Carrotmobs in different cities in the United States, Europe, and Australia. This was documented through a combination of YouTube videos, local Carrotmob websites, and local Carrotmob Twitter accounts and Facebook pages. Social Media Activity shifted from the initial YouTube platform to include Facebook and Twitter, with communication that went beyond Carrotmob events with links other issues, activist groups, and causes. The idea was reinterpreted to fit different cultural and contextual understandings of consumer and corporate responsibility, resulting in events focused on employee rights in Washington DC, and support for stores selling fair-trade products in Jönköping, Sweden.

The Carrotmob movement demonstrates that the act of giving a new type of event a catchy title such as Carrotmob can be seen as a productive activist process, or a kind of entitlement created through the global sharing of local events on social media platforms. The term “Carrotmob” was “entitled” or became shorthand for consumers connecting with businesses to do “good things”—from reducing ecological footprints to fair-trade and beyond. Currently, this term appears in Wikipedia sites and is translated into different languages and cultural contexts. Thus, online platforms and social media networks acted as a vehicle for the entitlement, Carrotmob, and enabling global dispersion. This entitlement captures global connections and local meanings at the same time, and is easily recognizable. It also works to facilitate dialogue between local businesses and consumers—dialogue initiated by consumers as a new form of CnSR working to affect CSR.

Subsequently, technology mediated strategies were enabled through the spread of Carrotmob. Here, all three strategies from Figure 3 are present. Carrotmob engages in (1) the cultural production of new forms of practice toward business by focusing on encouraging consumers to become activists by using their ability to influence local businesses around them, as well as activate their network of networks to join them through documenting the process on social media platforms. Effects of this strategy of Carrotmobbing include opening up new questions about the role of consumers in communicating with businesses about CSR issues, and offering a framework for consumers to enact CnSR in the local businesses they interact with on a daily basis. Carrotmob demonstrates (2) actively contesting forms of knowledge through contesting an understanding of CSR as corporate driven, instead offering consumers a way to dialogue, partner and influence CSR choices made by the local businesses around them. Carrotmob also contests the definition of a
non-profit because the original Carrotmob organization in the United States was unable to apply for non-profit status in 2012 because of its structure (Schulkin, 2012). Here the issue was that having a central mission dedicated to helping businesses be more sustainable was not considered appropriate because it supported profit-making enterprises. Finally, Carrotmob engages in (3) producing new knowledge about the interface between business and society using a social media presence to demonstrate that CnSR activism in local contexts can initiate productive dialogues with businesses to agree on CSR problems and work together to solve them. Effects of this new knowledge can be seen through local Carrotmob organizations that are still active in a few cities, continuing to practice CnSR toward businesses, working to influence business practice of and understanding toward CSR. It can also be seen in corporate desires to better understand the effects of Carrotmob, seen in Unilever’s hiring of Brent Schulkin as a consultant to work with their CSR practices, spreading this emergent conception of CnSR beyond the local business interactions to a multinational global company.

Carrotmob can thus be understood as a social media native activist movement. Because of the focus on problem-solving, the Carrotmob event can be interpreted locally and, although not a large-scale movement at this time, it has spread globally. It has moved between platforms, and shifted shape from 2008 to the present—moving from YouTube as a social media platform for communicating the fun aspect of events through video to Facebook and Twitter accounts working to educate consumers about environmental sustainability and business practices. Carrotmob is still active on Twitter and Facebook in a few places, particularly in Germany and France. Active Twitter accounts include @carrotcommunity for France, @carrotmobFFM for Frankfurt, and @carrotmobgem for Grenoble were active in 2016, and the US-based Twitter account, @carrotmob documented a meeting between Brent Schulkin and the head of the French movement in December 2016, demonstrating local movements as connected globally to some extent. Carrotmob Europe has also, although so far unsuccessfully, crossed into a crowdsourcing activist community at makesense.org, representing a reframing of the movement as a form of social entrepreneurship. Over an 8-year period, the Carrotmob movement has remained active in social media spaces at the international level. As current Carrotmob activists continue their sensemaking processes, it will be interesting to see whether new entitlements emerge, and how these changes affect the cultural production of new forms of practice related to Carrotmobbing, and whether they offer new ways of connecting CnSR with CSR.

In this case, one can see implications for understanding the potential of CnSR-driven interactions with business on CSR definitions and practices by business, as well as implications for understanding social media native activism as an emerging form of activism that is post-dialectic in nature. First, CnSR-driven interactions focused on problem-solving in Carrotmob activities have been documented in social media spaces as positive experiences for both business and consumers. This leads to an opportunity for CSR researchers and practitioners in Corporate Communication settings to move beyond a Corporate-centered understanding of CSR communication on social media between consumers and companies based on legitimacy strategies (Colleoni, 2013) to an understanding of the entwined nature of CnSR and CSR, and ways that consumers and companies can engage in problem-solving practices together—either problems initiated by consumers, as we saw in the Carrotmob case, or problems raised by companies as seen through the management literature addressing CnSR. Second, implications for understanding social media native activism include the dynamic interactions between users, platforms, and offline contexts that enable Carrotmob to go beyond using social media for amplification of ideology, and coordination of events to using it for distributed problem-solving, which is not vulnerable to social media platform policies and system changes because it intertwines with the technical affordances of social media as well as the social affordances of business-driven social media platforms and their architectures. This enables activism scholars to consider social media in ways that go beyond dilemma pointed out by Youmans and York (2012) as the “mismatch between the commercial logic of platforms such as Facebook and the needs of activists using social media as public information infrastructure” (p. 317).

GoodGuide.com: Enabling Consumer Access to CSR Information at the Point of Purchase

GoodGuide also emerged in 2008 as a B-corporation aimed at building a social movement around consumer awareness of environmental, social, and health impacts of products at the point of purchase. GoodGuide works to support the practice of reflective purchasing, where consumers consider the impact of their practices and how it communicates their CnSR to companies. This movement is technology based and represents a CSR to CnSR direction of communication because it is company and standard driven, in contrast to Carrotmob’s consumer-driven approach to connecting CnSR and CSR. GoodGuide was established as an intermediary between business and consumers to give consumers instant access to third party scientific information about products at the point of purchase. GoodGuide’s business model generates revenue as a third party intermediary between consumers and corporations focused on connecting CSR product knowledge with CnSR preferences. In 2012, the GoodGuide was sold to United Laboratories (UL), a standards company that has continued to offer the GoodGuide free to consumers as a purchasing tool, and has created a second product designed for business purchasers based on GoodGuide’s rating technology. UL continues to maintain the GoodGuide social media presence in Facebook.
and on Twitter; however, the focus of the postings has shifted from encouraging consumers’ involvement in developing a deep understanding of the impact of their purchases and working to improve their CnSR choices to a marketing effort for consumers to use the GoodGuide and products it evaluates. The founder of the company can be seen as an activist because he established a social media presence for engaging consumers in reflecting on their purchasing behaviors and effects, and encouraging them to communicate about their concerns so GoodGuide could act as a mediator between consumers and companies around CSR issues. GoodGuide used a social media native framework as Carrotmob did; however, it could be seen as a less functional example of social media native activism because it fails to engage consumers as CnSR activists on social media platforms. This appears to result from the company offering both the problem and solution, instead of engaging CnSR activists in creating solutions together with GoodGuide, and enabling joint understandings to emerge.

GoodGuide can be understood as having a social media native activist frame that connects CnSR to CSR through their initial enactment on social media by posting videos in YouTube that explain GoodGuide’s smartphone app, and the problem of consumer health issues related to product consumption. The initial video was shared through Facebook and Twitter to engage consumers in CnSR through using the GoodGuide app, resulting in news coverage, and social media attention in the form of likes and followers. In the dynamic process of sensemaking for the movement, GoodGuide has since narrowed its focus on social media to communication about health as a CSR and CnSR topic, with its social media presences moving from YouTube videos which it used from 2008 to 2012, to Facebook and Twitter. This dynamic process of sensemaking is also reflected in GoodGuide’s shift from Benefit Corporation to becoming part of United Laboratories (UL), a company that produces standards for consumer safety used by product manufacturers. Due to the business model and focus on consumer safety, GoodGuide’s mission converged with the concerns of standards organizations, leading to the buyout by UL.

In contrast to Carrotmob’s productive approach to creating a new concept for connecting CSR and CnSR, GoodGuide uses a reductive approach—through product filtering categories for the GoodGuide app, Toolbar for Amazon purchases and product databases. GoodGuide’s categories and scientific descriptions of product ingredients can be understood as terministic screens—working to focus CnSR efforts around building awareness of information related to health, environment, and society. Intended effects of the purchasing app and toolbar were to motivate consumers to build habits of learning about the products they consume at the time they buy them. However, evidence of the extent to which this works is lacking in the social media presence because participation is mostly push from GoodGuide with consumers given a ‘learner’ role rather than a problem-solving role.

Although GoodGuide is a corporate entity, it also takes on an active role as a mediator between CSR and CnSR and can be seen as social media native activism because it uses all three social media native strategies from the model in Figure 3. It can be understood as activist because the founder, Dara O’Rouke, a supply chain professor at the University of California Berkeley, began the company to do activist work on the problem of product effects on consumer health. His work on developing an app that consumers could use at the point of purchase was intended to support consumers in focusing on the materiality of CSR and their CnSR actions, rather than being caught up in the image and idea-driven world of branding and marketing. In considering GoodGuide as a social media native form of activism, it also can be understood as demonstrating all three of the technology mediated strategies from Figure 3. For (1) the cultural production of new forms of practice toward business, GoodGuide represents a new form of technology-enabled practice that helps consumers learn about products and their effects on health at the point of purchase through smartphone and web apps, which are shared through social media platforms. Built into the apps are tools to help consumers keep track of their health, environment, and safety goals related to purchasing. Here it can be argued that GoodGuide attempts to affect cultural practices toward business by envisioning the point of purchase CnSR information checking as a new form of practice. The terministic screen of the health category in the apps also acts to refocus consumers from being influenced in their purchasing behavior by brand identity to understanding health effects from the products and making informed choices. In terms of choices, whether the app is being used by consumers effectively is not apparent on the social media presence. Because UL is refocusing the product in a B-2-B context, it is likely that GoodGuide failed to establish a movement from the CnSR side. In terms of (2) actively contesting forms of knowledge, GoodGuide contests accepted definitions of CSR by corporations, which do not include Health as a category for action and reporting (Roome, 2005). This led to UL, a standards development company becoming interested in products effect on health as a key category of interest for standards. Finally, for (3) producing new knowledge about the interface between business and society, knowledge about product composition and independent testing of products was created by the GoodGuide in their laboratories, establishing the category of Health as a relevant issue connecting CSR with CnSR. In this case, the original intention of activating a Health focused CnSR practice was transformed into UL’s development of a B-2-B product for industries who care about health effects of products and want to act in a socially responsible manner.

In contrast to Carrotmob’s CnSR to CSR communication efforts on social media, GoodGuide’s communication efforts focus on developing a mediating company that pushes CSR to consumers. This could be characterized as a CSR to CnSR communication effort which addresses the three levels of the
social media native activism model, and the social media presence indicates a problem-solving focus, thus, it could be argued as being an instance of social media native activism. However, it is different in nature to the Carrotmob case because consumers are not the core activists here, but rather, GoodGuide and UL—companies that work to mediate consumer–corporation interfaces through standards development and consumer education. In going back to the earlier definition of a social media native movement as being focused on problem-solving, rather than ideology and legitimacy, this case might be construed as a weak form of social media native activism since GoodGuide pushes its framing of the problems and solutions to consumers trying to practice CnSR, instead of engaging in defining problems and solutions together as the Carrotmob case demonstrated.

Conclusion

In building a theoretical framework for understanding social media native activism, this article challenges understandings of activism toward business, shifting the focus from activists working in a field framed by ideology and legitimacy to deconstruct and reconstruct corporate field frames to activists using social media technology to connect CnSR with CSR. These cases demonstrate possibilities for consumers to engage productively with business around society-level problems on social media in two different ways—engaging directly in problem-solving and dialogue with business as Carrotmob enabled them to do, or communicating through standard setting mediators such as the GoodGuide and UL. These cases contribute initial possibilities for applying concepts from the framework for social media native activism to understand ways in which social media technology enables activism to move beyond the dialectic constraints imposed by ideology and legitimacy. The framework for social media native activism could be seen as an example of a post-dialectic framework for approaching social media as a space where consumer, public, and corporate interests are intertwined, and social media native activism can be construed as problem-solving process working in social media spaces. Directions for further development related to connections between CnSR and CSR include the following: (1) investigating activism in standards development through mediating companies like the GoodGuide and UL, or (2) elaborating on how other cases may demonstrate different configurations between problem-solving activities and roles connecting CnSR and CSR than those found in Carrotmob and the GoodGuide.

The social media native activism framework connecting CnSR and CSR presented here focuses on enabling activist scholars to see ways in which social media activism can go beyond amplifying ideologies and developing legitimacy strategies to problem-solving practices in intertwined spaces—where field-level structures are reshaped by small social media actions across globally distributed movements. These cases—Carrotmob and GoodGuide—offer examples of social media activism that can be understood through problem-solving approaches, which can set the stage for the development of theory and practice focused on problem-solving at the intersection between CSR and CnSR. The model for social media native activism developed in this case comparison opens up ways for investigating activism from a post-dialogic frame of reference, where the connections and information flows between CSR and CnSR practices and their material effects for solving shared problems become part of the primary focus in understanding emergent forms of activism toward business.

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