

# **Communication of Corporate Social Responsibility by Chocolate Brands in Germany**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Ethical branding can provide a critical point of differentiation especially in highly saturated markets such as the European food markets. In fact survey data suggest high and increasing levels of consumer interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (e.g. Dawkins 2009; Edelman 2011; European Commission 2009; LLC 2010a, b; Nielsen 2008; PBS et al. 2009; Smith 2009; Schoenheit et al. 2007). However, to consider the ethical performance of firms in their e.g. purchase, investment and employment decision, consumers have to be provided with adequate information (Wood 2010, p. 72). The question, “Do food processors and/or retailers indeed communicate their social and environmental engagement to consumers so that they can consider this in their purchase decisions?” motivated this research.

Among the many potential communication channels that allow disseminating information about (food) company’s CSR involvement to consumers’ (certified) labels on product packages are the ones most easily visible and accessible for consumers. Product labels regarding Cause-related Marketing (CrM) campaigns belong into this group. A market investigation regarding CSR related information on chocolate products was conducted in a large self-service grocery shop and a discounter in December 2010 in Bonn. The survey reveals that there is no CSR communication on chocolate product packages. This result surprises especially given that according to Fries and Müller (2011) CrM is likely to play a greater role for hedonistic products like chocolate. In a second step the websites of major chocolate brands were analysed. Results indicate that while companies in the chocolate sector do not communicate their CSR involvement on the product packages they do so in the internet, and in most cases even to a considerable extent.

This paper presents the results of the market as well as the web analysis, discusses the issue of brand image for companies’ communication of CSR but also investigates the main addressees of CSR communication.

Keywords: CSR, communication, consumers, chocolate

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Ethical branding can provide a critical point of differentiation especially in highly saturated markets such as the European food markets. In fact survey data suggest high and increasing levels of consumer interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (e.g. Dawkins 2009; Do well do good 2010a, b; Edelman 2011; European Commission 2009; Nielsen 2008; PBS et al. 2009; Smith 2009; Schoenheit et al. 2007). However, to consider the ethical performance of firms in their e.g. purchase, investment and employment decision, consumers have to be provided with adequate information (Wood 2010, p. 72). The question “Do food processors and/or retailers indeed communicate their social and environmental engagement to consumers so that they can consider this in their purchase decisions?” motivated this research.

Among the many potential communication channels that allow disseminating information about (food) company’s CSR involvement to consumers’ (certified) labels on product packages are the ones most easily visible and accessible for consumers with product labels regarding Cause-related Marketing (CrM) campaigns belonging into this group. For this reason a market investigation regarding CSR information on chocolate products was conducted in large self-service grocery shops and a discounter in December 2010 in Bonn. In addition, the websites of major chocolate brands were analysed with respect to the extent of firms’ CSR communication.

This paper is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides background information on firms’ possibilities to communicate CSR as well as the research object; chocolate. Chapter 3 presents the study design for the market and the internet analysis. The results of the market analysis are presented in chapter 4 while the results of the web analysis can be found in chapter 5. Chapter 6 concludes the paper.

## **2. CSR COMMUNICATION MEANS AND PRODUCT SELECTION**

Whether a food processor or retailer really incorporates ethical issues in its management strategies needs to be ‘trusted’ by consumers. In this context the underlying information asymmetry becomes an issue. Enterprises can mitigate the degree of asymmetric information by signalling their superior social and ecological performance to consumers thereby complementing information on e.g. quality and prices so far provided (Schoenheit et al. 2007, p. 13). This, however, is not without problems. With respect to the truthfulness of information, theory and empirical research on the economics of information reveal that fraudulent information is most likely and most harmful in case of credence attributes (e.g. Rubín 2000, p. 272). CSR is a credence attribute characterized by a high level of complexity. To verify the truthfulness of information on CSR – even after a consumer’s purchase decision – is difficult

if not impossible due to considerable or even prohibitive high information costs, thereby leaving considerable room for fraud. The dilemma is that the communication of credence attributes implies exactly what it actually wants to achieve, trust (Schoenheit et al. 2007, p. 13).

Signalling CSR activities by firms have gained considerable relevance over the last decade with enterprises having a large variety of instruments to design their CSR communication. Information regarding the ethical and ecological initiatives of a company can be distributed by in store advertisement as well as advertisement in print media, the TV, radio and the internet (e.g. via their website) (e.g. Du et al. 2010, p. 13; Jones et al. 2007, p. 587; Lang et al. 2006; Schoenheit et al. 2007, p. 24). Companies' CSR online communication is the rule in large food enterprises especially in Europe (see Lang et al. 2006). Main advantages are the possibility for firms to pursue their own agenda setting thereby avoiding the gatekeeper function of traditional media. In addition, online communication allows for interaction between the business and its stakeholders. A growing number of food enterprises use in addition CSR labels to communicate their social and/or environmental involvement. CSR labels refer to the production process of the respective product and/or the environmental quality of the (package of the) product but in general do not provide a statement regarding the whole CSR achievements of the company (Lang et al. 2006; Schoenheit et al. 2007, p. 24). CrM campaigns are in general as well advertised with a product label. CrM is a marketing tool where the product purchase leads to a target-oriented donation regarding a designated cause promoted on the product by label. Thus, CrM enables consumers to contribute with their purchase to a good cause. CrM has gained increasing popularity over the last decade and seems especially of relevance in the food sector (Oloko 2008). The strength of CSR information in the form of product labels (including CrM) is their visibility and the ease of accessibility for consumers.

The expositions reveal that companies have many possibilities to communicate their corporate responsibility. The different means can complement each other as the information distributed can differ as does the target audience/the stakeholders primarily addressed.

Chocolate is one of the most favoured luxury foods of German consumers; 11.4 kg are consumed per person per year (International Confectionery Association 2011). The most important producing country is the Ivory Coast which account for 40 % of global cacao production (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit 2011). Child labour, non-sustainable wages for producers and deforestation are important issues related to cacao production in the Ivory Coast. Accordingly, companies that use cacao as input are confronted with social and environmental issues in the producing countries. Their business policies can influence the environmental impact of cacao production and can change producers' livelihood. According to consumer surveys German consumers are strongly against child-labour, and care about the externalities of production in general and ecological production in particu-

lar. Thus, CSR activities of companies in the chocolate industry can potentially serve as an important differentiation strategy if communicated to consumers.

In the empirical analysis we will investigate whether companies producing chocolate products indeed advertise any CSR activities on the products package. As discussed above this form of advertisement is easily visible for consumers at the point of sale and thus offers the potential of product differentiation. However, it might be that the primary objective of companies in the chocolate industry that engage in CSR is not product differentiation but is to obtain a license to operate. Thus, the main addressee might not be the ordinary consumers but activists and NGOs. In this case companies might engage in and communicate CSR activities, though not necessarily on the product but on e.g. their website.

### **3. STUDY DESIGN**

The two stage study was carried out as follows: First, a complete inventory count of the chocolate products available in selected German supermarkets has been conducted focusing on CSR communication on the products. In the second stage, CSR communication on the web pages have been analysed for selected companies.

#### *Market analysis*

In December 2010 an assessment of the complete range of chocolate products such as chocolate bars has been conducted in different supermarkets in Bonn, Germany. To account for the plurality of private brands on the one hand and manufacturer's brand on the other hand the discounter Aldi Süd and the full-range provider Edeka were selected for the investigation. At Aldi Süd two private brands (Moser Roth and Choceur) and one manufacturer's brand (Ritter Sport) are available while Edeka offers mostly manufacturer's brands (Feodora, Milka/Kraft, Snickers/Nestlé, Lindt, etc.) (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Chocolate Brands and Manufacturers**

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Manufacturer</b>	<b>Store</b>
Choceur	Not available	Aldi Süd
Moser Roth	Not available	Aldi Süd
Ritter Sport	Alfred Ritter GmbH & Co KG	Edeka, Aldi Süd
Lohmann	Delitzscher Schokoladen GmbH	Edeka
Gut & Günstig	Not available	Edeka
Feodora	Feodora Chocolate GmbH & Co KG	Edeka
Ferrero	Ferrero Deutschland GmbH	Edeka
Grothe, Mr.Tom, Nippon, Romy	Hosta Schoko GmbH	Edeka
Milka, Toblerone, Cote D`or, Marabou	Kraft Foods	Edeka
Lindt	Lindt & Sprüngli GmbH	Edeka
Trumpf, Schogetten	Ludwig Schokolade GmbH & Co KG	Edeka
Bounty, Milky Way, Mars, Snickers, Twix	Mars GmbH	Edeka
Choco Crossies, Nestle, Kit Kat, Lion, Nuts	Nestle	Edeka
Alpia, Karina, Reichardt, Sarrotti	Stollwerk GmbH	Edeka
Zentis	Zentis GmbH & Co KG	Edeka

Source: authors' research.

#### *Internet analysis*

Based on the results of the market analysis selected brands were identified for a detailed webpage analysis conducted in January 2011. Selection criteria were first the fact whether a company signals CSR on its products. Second, it was planned to consider companies of different price levels in the internet investigation. To assess the chocolate manufacturers CSR communication systematically the analysis started with the search for the following keywords on the respective websites:

- Sustainability
- Environment
- Social
- Responsibility
- Health
- Animal welfare / Tierschutz
- Engagement
- Company
- Sponsoring
- Charity
- Activities

These keywords were selected as they all relate to CSR. They were pre-tested with websites of companies not included in the final analysis. All articles that used one or several of the

above keywords were investigated more closely, e.g. at which place/under which headline/topic in the web presence they showed up.

#### **4. RESULTS OF THE MARKET ANALYSIS**

The result of the market analysis is that none of the chocolate brands advertised their social and environmental commitment on the product package at the time of the survey. Thus, neither manufacturer brands nor private brands used CSR as a means to differentiate their own products from those of their competitors. Due to this result 'CSR communication on the product' could not be used as criterion to select those brands to be analysed in detail via an internet analysis. Thus, the selection of brands for the internet analysis was exclusively based on the pricing scheme.

#### **5. RESULTS OF THE INTERNET ANALYSIS**

We selected Lindt & Sprüngli, Ritter Sport and Choceur for the web analysis. Lindt & Sprüngli is a high-price chocolate not available in the discount, Ritter Sport is medium priced and available in the discount as well as in full-range supermarkets and Choceur is a low-price private chocolate brand only available at the discounter Aldi Süd.

Lindt & Sprüngli is located in Kilchberg/Switzerland, reports a sales volume of 1.9 billion EUR in 2009 and has 7,409 employees. 100 g of chocolate costs 2.20 EUR. The impression and brand image is high quality due to Swiss production (Lindt & Sprüngli 2011a).

Ritter Sport is sited in Waldenbuch/Germany. Sales of the company amount to 274 Mio. EUR in 2009. 800 employees work for Ritter Sport. 100 g of chocolate costs 0.85 EUR. The image is 'dynamic' which is influenced by advertisement and the chocolates quadratic form (Ritter Sport 2011a).

The home of Aldi Süd is Mülheim/Ruhr/Germany. The company reports neither sales volumes nor number of employees. 100 g of chocolate of the private brand Choceur costs 0.35 EUR. Aldi is the most trusted retail brand in Germany (Aldi 2011a).

Whereas there exists a website for Lindt & Sprüngli and Ritter Sport providing information on the various products of those brands this is not the case for Choceur. Aldi Süd in general does not provide any information on single products, their manufacturers and other aspects related to a particular product. Therefore, the analysis for the brand Choceur is based in the Aldi Süd web presence. Furthermore, there is no search button available at Aldi Süds' web page. Therefore, the keywords at the Aldi Süd websites had to be searched manually and it might be that not in all cases keywords were detected. Accordingly, the results of the keyword analysis of the three brands – as summarised in Table 2 - are not perfectly comparable.

The keyword analysis provides a first hint that the communication of CSR is of considerable greater relevance for Lindt and Ritter Sport compared to Aldi Süd.

Besides, the sitemap of the homepages were analysed. A sitemap facilitates the orientation at a homepage.

**Table 2: Results of the keyword analysis**

Keyword	Brand		
	Lindt & Sprüngli	Ritter Sport	Choceur
Activities	37	25	0
Animal welfare/protection	0	0	0
Charity	1	6	0
Company	30	52	1
Engagement	8	20	0
Environment	9	31	1
Health	6	36	0
Responsibility	21	19	0
Social	0	2	1
Sponsoring	0	0	0
Sustainability	9	6	1

Source: authors' analysis based on Aldi Süd for Choceur (2011a); Lindt & Sprüngli (2011a); Ritter Sport (2011a).

## 5.1 LINDT AND SPRÜNGLI

*Lind and Sprüngli's homepage* (Lindt & Sprüngli 2011b) was organised in several bullet points. The header consists of the main navigation groups 'products', 'world of chocolate', 'company', 'Lindt Fanclub', 'service', the search button as well as a link to the online-shop. At the bottom of the page, the footer, links to 'investors', 'social responsibility', 'contact', 'newsletter', 'legal issues', 'company details' and 'global' are visible. A link to facebook also exists.

From the header 'company' there are links to the site 'Social Responsibility' which can also be directly reached over the respective footer. This information is furthermore divided in the subgroups 'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)' which is just the headline, 'Chairman's Statement', 'The Lindt Promise' with the areas 'Sustainably Sourced', 'Sustainably Produced' and 'Sustainably Consumed', 'Policies', 'Memberships', 'CSR Committee', 'Contact'. The information regarding 'Sustainably Sourced', 'Sustainably Produced' and 'Sustainably Consumed' is very detailed. For example, Lindt & Sprüngli informs about a pilot project in Ghana where they pay price premiums for the cocoa beans and reports also the donation volume reaching the Ghana traceable project.

Under 'Chairman's Statement': the CEO of Lindt & Sprüngli presents an overview to the company's engagement starting from the responsibility at the level of product development, the resources used, over the environment to the employees.

'The Lindt Promise' is a promise regarding sustainability in the areas of sourcing, producing and consumption. The respective paragraphs highlight the sustainable handling of resources, promise traceability and underline the relationship in partnership with supplier. 'Sustainably Consumed' refers to the quality and safety of the products that are assured via monitoring and guarantees that the product is always of best quality.

Under the heading 'Policies' the reader is informed about the credo of quality, engagement, qualification, customer orientation, social responsibility and economical issues which altogether are stated to form the basis for the success of the brand.

'Memberships' is the eighth navigation point and lists the company's memberships in various associations and NGO and provides a link to the respective organisations which are the World Cocoa Foundation (WCF), the Sustainable Tree Crops Program (STCP) and the UN Global Compact.

The 'CSR Committee' "consists of three members of the Board of Directors. This Committee supports the Board of Directors in setting the strategic direction for the activities of the company".

Additional CSR information is presented in the annual report which can be found under 'investors'.

Interestingly, all CSR information is just available in English. Only the annual report is written in German and contains a summary of the English version of the CSR page..

### *Assessment*

The internet analysis reveals that the CSR information available on the website of Lindt & Sprüngli is very detailed and comprehensive. It covers all dimensions of CSR. In addition, Lindt & Sprüngli is not only member in some international organisations such as the UN Global Compact and NGOs but also initiated own projects related to cocoa production.

## **5.2 RITTER SPORT**

*Ritter Sport's homepage* (Ritter Sport 2001b) was organised in several bullets. The header consists of the main navigation groups 'company', 'products', 'brand and quality', 'Ritter Sport-Friends', 'visit us', as well as a link to the online-shop and a choose language button. At the bottom of the page links to 'contact', 'newsletter', 'legal issues', 'company details', 'data protection notice', 'sitemap' and 'press' are visible. A link to facebook exists as well.

The CSR information can be found under 'company' and called 'engagement'. It is grouped in three topics: ecology, Nicaragua engagement and art sponsorship. Under the topic 'ecology' the enhancement of production processes, the product package and logistics is explained.

Energy seems to be an important field of engagement as not only energy efficiency measures are presented but information is also given which energy is used in the production process. Furthermore, awards such as the one of 'Ökomanager des Jahres' given to the CEO of Ritter Sport are mentioned.

The long-term engagement in Nicaragua is linked to the small-farm cocoa production for Ritter Sport in a cooperative founded in Nicaragua in 1990. Comprehensive information is provided regarding the cooperative and its social implications for the producer families. A film is also placed on the webpage.

The art sponsorship information is less detailed than the information available for the other two issues. It just shortly states that the sponsorship of young artist is regarded as investment in the future.

### *Assessment*

From the website analysis it becomes obvious that Ritter Sport is engaged in all three dimensions of CSR. In contrast to Lindt & Sprüngli, Ritter Sport is not a member of international organisations concerned with issues such as child labour or sustainable production (or at least does not communicate this) but focuses its CSR activities on own initiatives. For example, the Nicaragua engagement is related to the sustainable production of chocolate in a developing country whereas the promotion of art in developed countries is another focus. But, it remains unclear how much money is attributed to the projects.

## **5.3 CHOCEUR**

*Aldi Süd's homepage* (Aldi Süd 2011b) was organised in several bullets. The header consists of the main navigation groups 'actual offers', 'range of goods', 'online services', 'customer information', 'career' and 'company'. At the bottom of the page links to 'legal issues', 'company details', 'data protection notice', 'sitemap' are visible.

CSR information is placed under 'company' and named 'responsibility' with three navigation points called 'supply', 'environment', and 'people'. In addition, information on the CR policy of Aldi Süd is provided. This CR policy explains on nine pages what Aldi Süd understands as their responsibility in the areas 'consumer', 'supplier', 'resource-management', 'sequence of operations', 'our employees' and 'implementation'. Here, the compliance with the standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as well as with various conventions of the United Nations such as the declaration on human rights and the convention on the rights of the child is highlighted.

In the category 'supply' there are sub-categories referring to the purchasing policy with regard to the fishing of fish and traceability issues as well as to wood and its sourcing from sustainably managed forests.

In the category 'environment' energy efficient activities are listed. For example, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are stated to be reduced due to a new cooling system in the stores, renewable energy is used in some logistic centres and the logistic is optimised to reduce the usage of fuel.

In the category 'people' the focus is on Aldi Süds' employees. Activities for people not employed at Aldi Süd are not mentioned.

Additional CSR information, though hard to find, is provided under the sub-item of 'quality' which is in turn a sub-item of 'company'. 'Responsible action' relates to the production of the goods offered at Aldi Süd. High product quality together with the implementation of social and ecological standards is promised. The interested reader is informed about Aldi Süd's membership in the International Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI). Members of the BSCI agree to comply with social standards along the production chain worldwide. BSCI principles rely besides others on the standards of the ILO and the declaration on human rights of the United Nations.

Interestingly, there is no specific engagement mentioned regarding the production of cocoa and chocolate.

### *Assessment*

The analysis of the Aldi website reveals that CSR information is primarily provided regarding Aldi's engagement for ecology. Furthermore, it stands out that most of the activities mentioned have not only an effect for the environment but also for the profit of the company as the improvement of logistic not only reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions but also saves money.

The social dimension of Aldi's CSR involvement is mainly given by providing information on the firm's membership in international organisations such as the ILO and international initiatives such as the BSCI. The respective links made available all lead to Anglophone web-pages. Accordingly, the average German consumer might have difficulties to learn more about Aldi's CSR engagement.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The market analysis revealed that at the time of the study no chocolate brand communicated or referred to CSR with a label on the product package. The results of the internet analysis, in contrast, showed that the three considered brands provide information on their CSR activities on their web-pages, which, however, considerably differed in amount, presentation, and CSR areas covered. The high-price brand Lindt & Sprüngli is engaged in various different projects to mitigate social and environmental problems related to cocoa production. The same holds for the medium-price chocolate brand Ritter Sport which is, in addition, engaged in projects related to art. In general both brands provide detailed information on their CSR involvement, which, however, is in the case of Lindt & Sprüngli in English. Only in its annual

report CSR details are also made available in German. The low-price supplier Aldi Süd reports no engagement with respect to cocoa production, though it should be mentioned that there is no specific website for the chocolate brands sold through Aldi Süd, and thus the website analysis was based on the Aldi Süd website. The CSR information provided on this site has a strong focus on CO2 reduction, an issue communicated also by the other two companies.

The results indicate that there seems to be a great awareness regarding the social and environmental problems related to cocoa production at the companies Lindt & Sprüngli and Ritter Sport. Both manufacturers take up the issues of child labour and the problematic living situation of marginalised producers and state that they are involved in improving those issues. Nevertheless, this engagement is not reported via a label on the product itself. In the case of Lindt & Sprüngli the information on CSR is in addition only available in English (only in the annual report also in German language). Thus, the companies' CSR involvement is clearly not used as a differentiation strategy. This leads to the question: why this is not the case. Why do the brands not communicate their activities directly e.g. via a label to consumers? One reason could be that the brand image (enjoyment and pleasure and high quality in the case of Lindt & Sprüngli and easy, cool and hip in the case of Ritter Sport) does not link well to topics such as child labour, poverty, environmental devastation. Further qualitative analysis e.g. focus groups with consumers are needed to gain deeper insights into the feelings consumers have when they are informed about the problems related to the production of cocoa. In addition, expert interviews with managers could help to understand the motivation not to advertise the CSR involvement directly to consumers.

The internet analysis, however, reveals that at least the companies Lindt & Sprüngli and Ritter Sport devote considerable attention to communicate their CSR involvement via their website. Thus, this obviously is considered as an important policy, possibly to address other stakeholder groups, e.g. activists and NGOs. CSR communication in this respect might be primarily seen as reducing pressure from those groups thereby maintaining the 'license to operate'.

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