



## Abstract

Social media have become increasingly important for corporate communication over the last couple of years. Consumers nowadays use social media to get information about companies before they make a purchasing decision. This makes an effective online communication strategy very important for companies. Besides the fact that consumers have moved online for information about companies, they also want more and more information about the companies they are interested in. Without certain information, consumers do not trust companies anymore. This explains why information about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become so important. Companies need to include CSR in their communication strategies if they want to be successful. Now that consumers search online for information, CSR communication has moved from the traditional media to social media as well. This paper examines CSR communication on Facebook by the three biggest energy companies in the Netherlands. Moreover, consumer responses to CSR communication are explored. The research is conducted with the use of quantitative content analysis. The results show that even though CSR communication has moved online, companies are still holding on to the traditional form of CSR communication as PR-messages are the most frequently used type of message for online CSR communication.

**Keywords:** *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), social media, Facebook, quantitative content analysis, corporate communication, consumer response.*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The importance of social media for companies has risen dramatically over the last couple of years. If companies want to keep up with rest of the world, they need to adopt social media into their communication and media strategies. As Constantinides and Fountain (2008) argue: “Web 2.0 is here to stay” (p. 237). Social media “can now significantly impact a firm’s reputation, sales, and even survival” (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011, p.241). Consumers’ needs have changed since the rise of Web 2.0 Facebook, as it are now the users and thus the consumers who are in control (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). Hence, companies need to react by making social media part of their communication strategies. Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms do not only provide new ways to communicate with customers, but they are also useful platforms for advertising and other communication strategies. As Mangold and Faulds (2009) argue: “Social media have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation” (p.358). Social media have become the place for consumers to discuss and express their critical views of companies, since they consider social media a more trustworthy source than the traditional media sources (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Social media do not only have a major influence on the way companies communicate with consumers about products and services, but also on other kinds of corporate communication, as communication about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). According to Capriotti and Moreno (2007), “the Internet has become an essential space through which to diffuse information about corporate responsibility” (p.87). CSR has been on the agendas of both companies and academics for many years. As Jahdi and Acikdili (2009) argue “it is beyond argument that CSR has gained a great deal of prominence” (p.106). CSR has always been a part of companies’ agendas, but the public did not pay as much attention as it does now, which means that the importance of CSR communication has risen (Mögele & Tropp, 2010). Consumers increasingly want more information about corporate policies and efforts to make sure that the company acts according to the norms of CSR (Jahdi & Acikdili, 2009). Moreover, CSR has become more and more important because of some recent scandals; people do not trust companies anymore without any proof of what they are doing and how

they are doing it (Leonard & McAdam, 2003). The need for companies to communicate their CSR strategies has thus increased very fast. Consumers need to know about a company's CSR efforts in order for the company to benefit from investing in these efforts (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Social media provide a new way to communicate CSR efforts, since social media offer companies the opportunity to directly interact with consumers about these efforts and strategies in a way that other media cannot (Jahdi & Acikdili, 2009). Interactivity is considered to be one of the most important characteristics of social media, as will be discussed in **Chapter 2**.

To research the use of social media by companies to communicate their CSR strategies, three companies from the same branch were selected. The choice was made to focus on energy companies, because these types of companies encounter a lot of environmental aspects which is an issue that is part of CSR (Leonard & McAdam, 2003). Moreover, the issue of sustainability has not only risen on the Dutch government's agenda over the last couple years, but also on the general public's agenda (Haanpää, 2007). Promoting the usage and producing of sustainable energy has become energy companies' main focus by now, as becomes clear from their current advertisements. Consumers want to know where their energy comes from and how it was produced. Taking this responsibility belongs to CSR efforts, while using social media to communicate about this is part of companies' CSR strategies. Because maximizing sustainable development is one of the main goals of both CSR and of energy companies, this branch is especially interesting to study.

The three Dutch energy companies which were selected for this research are the three largest energy companies in the Netherlands. They are the largest because they have the highest amounts of profit and the largest amount of customers. The first company to be selected was Eneco. Eneco aims to be the most sustainable energy company of the Netherlands, which means that sustainability is a prominent part of the company's main strategy (Eneco, 2013). This becomes clear from their website; many images and texts about sustainable energy immediately pop up when one visits their website. The company's vision provides a clear description of why they are completely focused on sustainable energy and how they will ensure that the future production of energy will become completely sustainable (Eneco, 2013).

Nuon, the second company which was selected for this research, claims that it has as its mission to become one of the most innovative companies when it comes to the

production of sustainable energy (Nuon, 2013). This company's strategy is thus very similar to Eneco's strategy. However, Nuon does not provide any information about why they have this goal and how they want to achieve it like Eneco does. The last company which was selected for this research is Essent. While Essent does not provide a vision about sustainable energy like the other two companies do, it immediately becomes clear that sustainability is a huge issue on this company's agenda as well. This becomes clear from the fact that so much information about sustainability and sustainable energy can be found on their website as well. Moreover, they are the largest producer of sustainable energy in the Netherlands (Essent, 2013). However, their vision about sustainable energy is thus not communicated on their website, although the other information they provide gives the impression that sustainability is part of Essent's main strategy, just like it is part of the main strategy of the other two selected companies.

Since CSR has been an important issue on businesses' agendas for decades, a lot of academic research regarding CSR has been done already. Although social media is a much more recent phenomenon, many scientific research on the use and effects of social media has been done as well. However, much less research can be found about the use of social media by companies to communicate their CSR efforts. This is probably the case because the need for companies to use social media for CSR communication is a very recent phenomenon. As described above, the need for companies to use social media in their marketing strategies has become increasingly important since the rise of Web 2.0 (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson, & McKenzie, 2008). The need for companies to use social media for their CSR communication is more recent (Jahdi & Acikdili, 2009). This could explain why the amount of academic literature which discusses CSR communication on social media is so limited. However, a lot of research about corporate communication on social media can be found. It is thus specifically research on CSR communication on social media which is still limited. Since there is only a limited amount of literature available which is completely focused on social media as a tool for CSR communication the research done in this paper is very relevant and worth researching. Moreover, since CSR communication on social media becomes increasingly important for companies, it is scientifically important as well. Scientific research could provide more insight in the most effective ways to communicate CSR on social media, which could help companies to improve their CSR and social media strategies.

This research is socially relevant, because it examines companies' communication of CSR. CSR is not only scientifically, but also socially relevant because it connects to many aspects which could have a direct influence on society, as for example transparency of company practices and ethics. The complete research which was conducted in this paper is socially relevant, because social media communication by energy companies about CSR strategies is very significant now that society values information about sustainability more and more, which has made companies gone mainstream with their CSR communication (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). While companies used to publish CSR reports in the form of public relations messages once in a while, CSR messages are now constantly communicated to the mainstream public (Du et al., 2010). The research conducted in this paper will provide more insight into how often CSR is communicated, as the amount of message in a period of ten months was registered. Many energy companies claim that their energy is sustainable and that they are taking action to be as sustainable as possible, but do they really communicate what they are doing to the outside world? This is another reason why the research conducted in this paper is scientifically relevant; there is still a lot to learn about how companies communicate CSR efforts, and how consumers perceive these efforts. Moreover, the way companies use social media as a tool for CSR communication has not yet received much scientific attention, as the main focus in a lot of research is on corporate communication in general. Energy companies are especially interesting to study because they offer products which have a huge influence on the environment. CSR is thus especially important for these kinds of companies.

As the information provided in the previous parts of this introduction has already made clear, this research focuses on Dutch energy companies' usage of social media to communicate their CSR efforts. While in this introduction, some theory together with the selected companies were explored, my research aims to explore how the companies' communication about their CSR efforts on social media is constructed. Because there is not much information about the way (energy) companies use social media to communicate about their CSR strategies, the following research question will be attempted to be answered:

*How do Dutch energy companies use Facebook to communicate their CSR strategies?*

The main focus will be on the different types of messages which are used to communicate CSR, the CSR topics which are communicated, and the approach the companies take to CSR.



Moreover, comments from consumers will be explored. Comments were included, because interactivity is one of the main characteristics of social media and can thus help in explaining how CSR strategies are communicated on social media. Consumer responses are very important for the success of CSR communication as will be discussed in the next chapter. For this reason, the following second question was asked: *How do consumers respond to CSR communication from Dutch energy companies on Facebook?*

The research question and second question were attempted to get answered by a quantitative content analysis. A codebook was designed which included coding categories which focused on corporate CSR communication, and categories in which comments from consumers had to be coded. Hence, both the research question and second question can be answered based on the coding results. The codebook can be found in **Appendix A**. The concepts and variables which were used in the codebook are based on the theoretical framework which is provided in **Chapter 2**.

This paper is divided into five relevant chapters of which the first chapter is this introduction. **Chapter 2** contains a literature review which provides a definition and explanation of CSR. Moreover, CSR strategies and CSR communication will be explored. Because I am also interested in consumer responses to CSR communication, two perspectives are discussed throughout this chapter: the corporate perspective and the consumer perspective. After a thorough discussion of CSR from both perspectives, a discussion of literature on social media will be provided. The last section of **Chapter 2** provides an analysis of literature about CSR communication tools. **Chapter 3** provides an overview of my methodology. First, different reasons to choose quantitative content analysis as my method will be explained with the help of relevant literature. Secondly, the choice for social media and Facebook will be discussed. Thirdly, the data collection which was done with the help of Netvizz will be described. The last part of the chapter explains the different categories and variables which are part of my codebook. **Chapter 4** contains the results of my research, which were analyzed with the help of SPSS. The results will be discussed per company, but the main focus will be on the entire population of messages which were part of this research. **Chapter 5** contains the conclusion in which the answer to my research question and second question will be stated. The last part of this thesis contains a discussion of the results. During the discussion, relevant literature will be applied to the results in order

to discuss the broader theoretical issues. Moreover, the limitations of my research will be discussed and relevant suggestions for future research will be provided.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### *2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility: The corporate perspective and the consumer perspective*

In this chapter, a definition and description of CSR will be provided. Moreover, different principles of CSR will be discussed. A precise description of CSR and its different principles and activities is necessary to get a deeper understanding of why companies are focused on CSR communication and why this is important. The corporate perspective on CSR is separated from the consumer perspective, because companies have a different view on CSR than consumers. Both are important to take into consideration for the research of CSR communication on social media, as social media is very interactive and thus gives consumers a lot of space to express their perspective on the CSR communication of the selected companies. Both the selected companies' perspectives on CSR and consumers' perspectives on CSR are investigated in my research, which makes it necessary to address and discuss literature on both perspectives. I will start with the corporate perspective as this is the main focus of my research.

#### *2.1.1 Description of Corporate Social Responsibility*

Academic literature provides many different definitions to explain CSR. In this paper, CSR is defined as companies' commitment to contribute to the improvement of the well-being of society and the environment (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). This commitment is part of companies' everyday business practices, but also includes other voluntary steps and actions which could be one-time initiatives. According to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the main principles of CSR are: "accountability, transparency, ethical behavior, respect of stakeholder interests, respect for the rule of law, respect for international norms of behavior, and respect for human rights" (ISO 26000, 2010, figure 1). The focus of this paper is on the commitment to contribute to sustainability, as this form of CSR is part of the main strategy of two of the three energy companies which were researched in this paper. However, other forms of CSR were researched as well, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Companies are expected to communicate on social responsibility and to take voluntary action on sustainability (ISO 26000, 2010). ISO states that “When approaching and practicing social responsibility, the overarching goal for an organization is to maximize its contribution to sustainable development” (ISO 26000, 2010). In this paper, CSR will be regarded as the extra steps, so the voluntary initiatives that companies take to contribute to for example social causes or the environment. This means that contributions which are obligatory, for example from government regulations, will not be considered CSR.

CSR is not just a side activity in which companies can partake; it actually influences many different aspects of an organization (Leonard & McAdam, 2003). Leonard and McAdam (2003) list the following activities as the ones on which CSR has the biggest influence: “product manufacturing and integrity, disclosure labeling and packaging, marketing and advertising, selling practices, pricing, and distribution” (p.29-30). Besides influencing the way in which certain business activities are done, CSR also provides advantages for companies engaging in CSR: “reducing and limiting litigation, protecting brand image, improving customer satisfaction, and reducing absenteeism and employee turnover and increasing the ability to retain talented employees” (Leonard & McAdam, 2003, p.30).

### *2.1.2 Adopting CSR strategies: The corporate perspective*

While most consumers used to only care about the price of products, and did not have any direct interests in companies’ actions in favor of the environment, consumers are now likely to switch to another brand if the other brand has better CSR strategies (Du et al., 2010). Companies are considered to have CSR strategies when CSR is part of their main business strategy and when this strategy is designed to satisfy and attract consumers. Especially in the US, scandals have made consumers distrustful of corporate practices, which as a result makes them distrustful of companies in general (Leonard & McAdam, 2003). This increases the need for companies to communicate their CSR strategies and efforts, and forces companies to think of new ways to communicate with their (potential) customers. As Du et al. (2010) state “CSR occupies a prominent place on the global corporate agenda in today’s socially conscious market environment” (p.8). Companies do not necessarily take action because they have the power to make social change happen, but companies mostly invest in CSR efforts for their own benefit (Du et al., 2010).

According to Basu and Palazzo (2008), there are three main reasons and motivations for companies to engage in CSR. The first reason is “stakeholder driven” (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p.122; Mögele & Tropp, 2010). In this case, a company reacts to the demand of an external organization as for example an NGO, so the company is not really taking any CSR action voluntarily (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). The second motivation is “performance driven” (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p.122; Mögele & Tropp, 2010). This motivation is focused on increasing the company’s profit through CSR actions and the effect of these CSR actions on companies’ profitability. The last reason Basu and Palazzo (2008) mention is “motivation driven” (p.122). The main idea behind this motivation is to improve the company’s reputation. Lindgreen and Swaen (2010) argue that improving customer satisfaction and protecting brand image are nowadays the most important reasons for companies to engage in CSR activities, which is similar to the “motivation driven” reason which Basu and Palazzo mention (2008, p.122).

Companies can benefit from adapting CSR strategies for various reasons. (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Adopting CSR strategies can create a competitive advantage and improve or maintain a company’s image which will have a positive influence on its consumers and employees (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010). Du et al. (2010) argue that “by being a good corporate citizen, a company can foster consumer loyalty and turn consumers into company/brand ambassadors and champions who engage in advocacy behaviors” (p.9). According to Lindgreen and Swaen (2010), “companies realize that the development and implementation of CSR programs offers a ‘win–win’ scenario for the organization and its community” (p.3)

When one looks at the advantages of CSR, it seems like CSR is the ultimate way to get a competitive advantage compared to less socially responsible competitors. According to McWilliams and Siegel (2001), “the presumption is that firms that actively support CSR are more reliable and, therefore, their products are of higher quality” (p.119). However, one can ask the question if companies in certain branches which are engaging in CSR still get this competitive advantage now that CSR has become such an important issue on the agenda of most companies. Now that so many companies have adopted CSR strategies, it will become much harder for companies to differentiate themselves from other companies. Their products will no longer be seen as of higher quality, since their competitors engage in CSR as well, and thus offer products of similar quality. This makes this point of view somewhat

outdated. Moreover, the difficulty for companies to differentiate themselves from each other through CSR is important to take into consideration when one is studying how companies use social media for CSR communication, as this could help explain both similarities and differences between the types of CSR communication that the three selected energy companies publish.

### *2.1.3 CSR communication: The corporate perspective*

The content of CSR messages “can pertain largely to a social cause itself or to a company’s specific involvement in a social cause” (Du et al., 2010, p.10). Moreover, consumers will consider CSR messages about a social issue and not about the company or its products suspicious, because there seems to be no advantage for the company itself (Du et al., 2010). However, involvement in a social cause is only one type of CSR. The focus of the research which was conducted in this paper, is on companies’ CSR efforts which contribute to sustainability. Since the involvement in a social cause can be part of this and this is the type of CSR which consumers are the most critical about, it is important to consider this type of CSR communication separately. As already discussed above, consumers are very critical of companies’ motives to engage in CSR, which makes it very important that companies’ CSR communication contains information which is considered trustworthy by consumers. According to Du et al. (2010), “CSR communication typically focuses on a company’s *involvement* in various social causes, rather than on the social causes themselves” (p. 10). This shows that companies’ CSR strategies are mainly designed to benefit the company and not necessarily to cause social change (Du et al., 2010). If their CSR strategies would not be mainly about benefitting the company, the focus of CSR communication would not be as much on the involvement in a social cause, but more about the social cause itself.

Previous research shows that the focus of online CSR communication “was primarily on environmental protection (83%), followed by donations/foundations (40%), by health and safety (19%) as well as by sponsoring, quality control and behavioural codices (18% respectively)” (Mögele & Tropp, 2010, p. 166). Moreover, Mögele and Tropp (2010) found out that the CSR efforts which companies communicated were correlated to the type of organization. The fact that environmental protection is by far the biggest focus in CSR communication can be explained by the fact that many companies are in some way involved with the environment. Even for companies whose products have a very limited influence on

the environment, it is quite easy to argue why they are involved with an environmental non-profit organization and what the benefits are for them. Moreover, environmental protection has become one of the most important CSR issues for many consumers. The fact that environmental protection is the main focus of online CSR communication is relevant, because this is the type of CSR communication which is the focus of the research in this paper.

Du et al. (2010) argue that companies can focus on multiple factors in their CSR communication. The first factor that they mention is “CSR commitment” (Du et al., 2010, p.11). CSR commitment includes communication about a company’s commitment to a social cause (Du et al., 2010). The second factor is “CSR action” which is described as “the societal impact or actual benefits for the target audience of a social cause” (Du et al., 2010, p.11). The third factor is “CSR motives” (Du et al., 2010, p.12). In this kind of CSR communication, companies acknowledge that their CSR motives are beneficial for the social cause, but also for themselves (Du et al., 2010). In this way, stakeholders’ and consumers’ will be less skeptic of the company’s motives (Du et al., 2010). The last important factor which is mentioned is “CSR fit” (Du et al., 2010, p.12). This is the connection between the company and the social cause which the company sponsors; there should be a ‘fit’ between these two in order to convince stakeholders and consumers of both internal and external motives to be involved with this cause (Du et al., 2010). If there is no real connection between a company and the social cause it sponsors, there will likely be more negative reactions from stakeholders (Du et al., 2010). This makes companies very careful about what message they are conveying about their CSR strategies in their CSR communication and advertisements (Mögele & Tropp, 2010).

Besides the issues discussed above, the imagery which is used in CSR communication is very important. As Pomeroy, Johnson, and Noble (2013) argue: “Imagery showing the problem once solved, or neutral imagery, might act to omit the nature of the problem the firm confronted and/or even ‘undersell’ the impacts of firm’s efforts” (p.9). Not only the message itself, but also the imagery which is used is thus highly significant. Designing effective CSR communication which is trusted by its target audience is thus quite hard, as there are many requirements to meet in order to be able to convince the skeptical audience of the message.

Mögele and Tropp (2010) make a similar argument to Du et al. (2010) about the requirements of CSR communication. They argue that “companies’ CSR commitment is or has to be by definition not merely of a philanthropic nature but always also of a commercial business-related nature” (Mögele & Tropp, 2010, p.164). According to Mögele and Tropp (2010), this is the case because “taking responsibility for society (..) is intended to contribute to targeted corporate image building (corporate identity-enhancing) and thus to the achievement of business goals” (p.164). Therefore CSR communication should contain a clear balance between the philanthropic aspects of a CSR effort and the benefits the company gets from engaging in the particular CSR effort. According to Mögele and Tropp (2010), it should be avoided that the message is conveyed that a company is engaging in CSR purely for its own business interests. The same is the case for the idea that a company is only taking CSR efforts because it is pressured by society or its stakeholders (Mögele & Tropp, 2010).

Companies should choose an approach to their CSR strategies which is believable and fits in with their identity if they want their CSR communication to be successful. Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009) list ten marketing approaches for CSR communication:

**Table 1**

*Overview of CSR approaches to CSR communication*

<b><u>Approach</u></b>	<b><u>How carried out</u></b>
Posthumous	CSR applied for damage-limitation purposes.
Pantomime	Superficial; play-acting dressed up as CSR.
Piecemeal	Token gestures at application of CSR.
Public relations	Communicating CSR intentions to stakeholders.
Parsimonious	Frugal application of CSR.
Parrot fashion	Following competition or market leader.
Profit driven	CSR application for economic gains only.
Proactive	Anticipation of need for and possible benefits of CSR
Partnership	Co-operation with customer and/or other firms.
Philanthropic	Attention to welfare of fellow humans in the shape of CSR.



*Note.* Adapted from “Marketing Communications and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Marriage of Convenience or Shotgun Wedding?” by Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 88(1), p. 105.

As already mentioned above, Mögele and Tropp (2010) argue that CSR communication should contain and communicate a clear balance between the philanthropic aspect of CSR and the benefits for the company to engage in that particular effort. They would thus likely argue that a mixture between the ‘profit driven’ and the ‘philanthropic approach’ works best for CSR communication. These marketing approaches are similar to what Du et al. (2010) call CSR motives. Of these ten different approaches, consumers are likely to only perceive the last three approaches as ‘intrinsic motives’ (Du et al., 2010). The other approaches are likely to be perceived as ‘extrinsic motives’ (Dut at al., 2010) which would thus make consumers believe that a company is only engaging in CSR for its own benefits. However, a profit driven approach should be part of CSR communication; if this is not the case, consumers will not trust the CSR information (Mögele & Tropp, 2010) which means that the CSR communication will not succeed.

#### *2.1.4 CSR motives: The corporate perspective*

According to Basu and Palazzo (2008) there are “three dimensions which guide CSR-related activities” (p.122): cognitive, linguistics, and conative (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p.124). They argue that “activities such as CSR are seen as resulting not directly from external demands but, instead, from organizationally embedded cognitive and linguistic processes” (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p.123). These authors thus have a different view than the authors already discussed, as they believe that the choice to engage in CSR is intrinsic and thus comes from within the company instead of extrinsic forces (Basu & Palazzo, 2008) which the other authors also consider a very important motive for companies to engage in CSR (Du et al., 2010; Mögele & Tropp, 2010; Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009; Pomering et al., 2013). However, while these different views on the choice to engage in CSR were taken into account when I was considering how consumers perceive CSR communication, I differentiated between intrinsic and extrinsic motives based on the theory by Du et al. (2010), which thus means that most motives were considered to come from extrinsic forces.

Basu and Palazzo might have a different view because they take a different approach to CSR; they are not interested in the content of CSR activities, but in companies' sense-making processes which makes them engage in CSR (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). The cognitive dimension is described as: "the organization's relationships with its stakeholders and views about the broader world (i.e., the "common good" that goes beyond what's good for business), as well as the rationale for engaging in specific activities that might have an impact on key relationships" (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p.124). Linguistics is considered the explanation of why companies engage in specific activities (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009) mention this dimension as the "justification and transparency" (p.110). The last dimension is the way a company behaves, which is the result of the cognitive dimension (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). All three dimensions are important for the success of CSR communication (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009), which makes it useful to take them into consideration when one is researching CSR communication. These dimensions should be part of or at least underlying CSR communication if a company wants its CSR communication to be successful.

Holbrook (1987) argues that "advertising and written communications are generally considered a mirror that represents or reflects the surrounding world" (1987, as cited in Farache & Perks, 2010, p. 244). Holbrook's argument leads Farache and Perks (2010) to conclude that since "CSR advertising reflects CSR," the criticism which CSR advertising receives is also valid for CSR itself (p.244). Farache and Perks (2010) appear to be much more critical of CSR and CSR communication than for example Du et al. (2010) as they argue that CSR communication reflects "the self-serving nature of CSR" (Farache & Perks, 2010, p.244). Companies can select what aspects of their CSR efforts they want to communicate which could make them appear much more responsible and concerned with CSR than they really are, while ignoring their less responsible actions (Farache & Perks, 2010). However, this is the case for any type of advertisement or form of corporate communication. Companies will always highlight their positive actions and good deeds, while they will try to keep less positive actions or happenings out of the spotlight. This is thus nothing special or specific to CSR communication.

### *2.1.5 CSR motives: The consumer perspective*

While adopting CSR strategies, as described above, can provide companies with many advantages, it is hard for companies to really get these advantages as stakeholders and consumers are often very skeptical about companies' communication about their CSR efforts (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). This is quite contradictory, as on the one hand, consumers demand information about CSR because otherwise they do not trust a company to use fair practices, while on the other hand they are very skeptical about CSR communication (Du et al., 2010). Companies which put too much attention on and spend too much time promoting their CSR efforts are generally distrusted (Du et al., 2010). Companies should thus find some sort of balance in their CSR communication.

As already briefly discussed above, Du et al. (2010) state that consumers have two different views of companies' reasons to engage in CSR. The first view is "extrinsic" (Du et al., 2010). From this point of view, companies only engage in CSR for their own benefits and profits (Du et al., 2010). The second view is that companies engage in CSR from an "intrinsic" motive (Du et al., 2010). From an intrinsic motive, consumers see a company "as acting out of a genuine concern for the focal issue" (Du et al., 2010, p.9). They believe that a company has intrinsic motives to engage in CSR positively influences a company's image and its consumers' loyalty, while the belief that a company's motives are extrinsic can negatively influence a company's image and the behavior of its consumers (Du et al., 2010).

The way consumers perceive companies' motives will be very dependent on companies' CSR communication and the medium which is used to communicate their CSR efforts, which will be discussed in more detail below. Since private consumers are the main target of many companies, CSR communication is especially important, because the success of a CSR effort is not only dependent on the effort itself, but also on the way consumers perceive the effort and the motives behind it. Companies would not want their consumers to perceive an effort as useless, as this will provide much less benefits for the company. This has made CSR become a major topic in companies' advertising (Mögele & Tropp, 2010). Convincing consumers of the result and necessity of a CSR effort is thus key in CSR communication. Du et al. (2010) mention reducing stakeholder skepticism as one of "the key challenges" of CSR communication (p. 9). They, however, also argue that consumers have come to accept a "win-win situation" (Du et al., 2010, p.10), "believing that CSR initiatives can and should serve both the needs of society and the bottom lines of business" (Du et al.,

2010, p.10). Pomeroy, Johnson and Noble (2013) argue that “as responses to firms’ CSR initiatives are information-dependent, the quality of CSR communication is critical” (p.2).

### *2.1.6 Effective CSR communication: The consumer perspective*

While one might expect consumers to be very interested in the ways in which CSR efforts are carried out and not just in the outcome of these efforts, Du et al (2010) argue that “a company can focus on the output side of its CSR endeavor” (p.12). Just communicating the impact which a certain CSR effort has on society instead of communicating the undertaking of that particular CSR effort is seen as “an effective communication strategy” (Du et al., 2010, p.12), since, as Sen et al. argue “CSR communication should be factual and avoid the impression of ‘bragging’” (2009, as cited in Du et al., 2010, p.12). Consumers are thus not that interested in how CSR efforts are executed; they care much more about the results. The social impact of a CSR effort is seen as a parameter for companies’ underlying CSR motives, and whether these motives are intrinsic or extrinsic (Du et al., 2010). The fact that consumers are mainly interested in the results of companies’ CSR efforts is remarkable, since the way in which a certain result or impact on society is reached can also tell a lot about the company.

The effectiveness of CSR communication is dependent and influenced by several different aspects. According to Pomeroy et al. (2013), the main aspects which influence the success of CSR campaigns are: “cognitive associations with other aspects of the firm’s identity; extraneous variables, such as the prevailing attitude to large corporations; individuals’ involvement with the firm’s CSR domain; and general skepticism towards advertising” (p.4). From the different forms of corporate communication, advertising is the most distrusted by consumers (Pomeroy et al., 2013; Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009). Advertisements about companies’ environmental actions are especially distrusted, which leads “to accusations of firms’ green-washing” (Pomeroy et al., 2013, p.4). Moreover, Pomeroy et al. (2013) state that “overly positive claims, which CSR claims inevitably are, face the problem of the ‘self-promoter’s paradox’” (p.4). According to the ‘self-promoter’s paradox,’ promotion of actions like CSR efforts will actually make consumers doubt the action’s legitimacy instead of making them believe that a company is taking positive and legitimate actions (Pomeroy et al., 2013). This makes the content of CSR communication so important for the effectiveness of CSR communication.

In cause-related marketing campaigns “the dominant use of vague quantifiers creates confusion over the firm’s actual donation performance, which is likely to hinder persuasion effects” (Pracejus et al., 2003/2004 in Pomering et al., 2013, p.4). The quantifiers in CSR communication should thus be as clear as possible in order to be effective. Moreover, like Du et al. (2010) and Mögele & Tropp (2010), Pracejus et al. found that there should be certain shared interests or a certain logical relationship between the social cause that a company is supporting and its core business, as a company’s “CSR program might be evaluated by both the magnitude of its achievements in particular social domains and the length of its history of engaging with a domain” (2003/2004, as cited in Pomering et al., 2013, p.4). Logically, a short history means a lot of skepticism, while a long history means less skepticism (Pomering et al., 2013). This makes one expect that CSR communication from energy companies about sustainability will not attract a lot of skepticism from consumers, as this is a domain in which energy companies have a long history.

Besides the relationship between a company and the social domain for which it is taking CSR efforts, the way in which the outcome of a CSR effort is described in the CSR communication is very important and determines its effectiveness (Pomering et al., 2013). Wood differentiates between “the outcome expressed as a policy, the program for putting the policy into operation, or the quantifiable impacts of its policy and programs” (1991, as cited in Pomering et al., 2013, p.4.). Consumers want to know to the outcome of a CSR effort as the outcome is the only thing which can easily be checked and observed (Pomering et al., 2013). Motivations and the processes behind a certain CSR effort are much harder to check or observe, which makes them less interesting to the general public (Pomering et al., 2013). Moreover, Pomering et al. (2013) found that “average scores were higher for the condition in which relatively specific CSR commitment information followed relatively specific social topic” (p.8). They thus found out that the information about the CSR effort and the information about the social cause for which the CSR effort is taken is closely connected in the most successful CSR communication.

Some research has shown that CSR-communication does not always have a positive effect on the success of a company, while other research has proved that it actually can have a very positive effect and win consumers trust (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009). Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009) state that “organizations that highlight their CSR credentials come under increased scrutiny lest they err, while those not doing so are less under the spotlight” (p.105). When

companies decide to make their CSR strategies part of their marketing and communication strategies, they thus take a certain risk. This is what Pomeroy et al. (2013) call 'the self-promoter's paradox' (p.4). Companies engaging in CSR are likely to get more public attention (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009), which on the one hand could work in a company's favor, but on the other hand could work against the company. This is very dependent on how the CSR communication is perceived by consumers, and thus on the way CSR-communication is designed. Pomeroy et al. (2013) argue that "Some firms may be expecting too much of their CSR communications, especially if such positive, pro-social claims out of character with stakeholder perceptions of the firm's identity" (p.10). As already discussed above, there are certain criteria which should be applicable to CSR communication in order to make consumers trust and believe in a CSR effort and the company which is taking the effort. If the CSR effort does not 'fit' with the image the public has of a company, CSR communication will not be successful (Pomeroy et al., 2013). Besides the design of CSR communication, the medium on which CSR is communicated is also very important for its success. There are different tools to communicate CSR. This will be explored in more detail in the next sections of this chapter. Since my research focuses on Facebook, the main focus will be on social media as a CSR communication tool.

## ***2.2 CSR communication and social media***

Since CSR communication on social media is the focus of my research, it is important to explore social media and its specific characteristics. First social media as a marketing tool will be explored, after which the focus will shift to CSR communication tools. Since not much research can be found which focuses specifically on CSR communication on social media, more general corporate communication through social media will be discussed. This is relevant for my research because it shows the effect that social media has on corporate communication which is similar for different types of corporate communication.

### ***2.2.1. Social media and its influence on marketing***

Corporate marketing and communication have changed dramatically over the last couple of years (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009). As Mangold and Faulds (2009) put it: "the tools and strategies for communicating with customers have changed significantly with the emergence of the phenomenon known as social media" (p.357). Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, &

Silvestre (2011) describe social media technologies as “highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, cocreate, discuss, and modify user-generated content” (p.241). Mangold and Faulds (2009) describe social media as “a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, Internet discussion boards and forums, moblogs (sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs), and social networking websites” (p.358). Consumers have lost interest in advertisements on traditional media; they now use social media to gather information about companies and their products (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). While social media are often seen as networking platforms, the term thus includes much more than just those types of websites. However, since the focus of this research is just on social media and not on any other networking platforms, only social media will be considered from here on.

The rise of social media has given consumers more power than they have ever had before, as consumers now have taken over the power from marketing and public relations experts (Kietzmann et al., 2011). As Kietzmann et al. (2011) put it: “customers no longer want to be talked at; instead, customers want firms to listen, appropriately engage, and respond” (p.250). Companies have lost control over communication about their brand, as consumers can now create, share, and read or watch information about brands on which companies have no influence (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Now that consumers cannot only interact with the company, but also with each other, companies only have very limited control “over the content and dissemination of information” (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p.359). Companies have to decide whether they want to participate in social media or simply ignore its existence (Kietzman et al., 2011). Social media have thus forced companies to rethink and reinvent their marketing and communication strategies, not only for their products, but also for their CSR communication.

Like Du et al. (2010) and Jahdi & Acikdili (2009), Thackeray et al. (2008) mention the opportunity to interact directly with consumers as one of the main reasons for social media’s power as a marketing tool. Mickle argues that social media is an important “communication tool to develop brand awareness, image and association” (2009, as cited in Wallace, Wilson, & Miloch, 2011, p.428). It is therefore very important for brand-building and should thus be part of companies’ communication strategies (Wallace et al., 2011). Corporate communication on social media has to be different from communication on other media

platforms, as the opportunity to interact with consumers provides new ways to build customer relations which makes social media very useful as a marketing tool (Wallace et al., 2011). Another reason for social media's usefulness as a marketing tool is the possibility of "viral marketing" (Thackeray et al., 2008, p.340). Viral marketing means that a marketing message goes 'viral;' it is shared very often and many people have heard of it because of this.

While companies are still in control of the CSR messages they publish on social media, they do not have much control over what happens after they have published the information. Consumers can react freely and write whatever they want, especially when they repost messages. If they react directly on the company's Facebook page, the company at least has the opportunity to defend itself. However, if the message is republished elsewhere, this becomes much harder. As already briefly described above, companies need to offer their own corporate social media page(s) if they want to successfully use social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). By offering their own social media pages, companies "can shape discussions in a manner that is consistent with the organization's mission and performance goals" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 361). Companies thus want their consumers to use the company's own social media pages to interact with each other, since they still have some form of control on these platforms (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). If consumers use external social media pages or other networking websites or platforms, companies have much less control as they cannot steer a discussion or comments into a certain direction, nor can they intervene. This is not completely true however, as the company could make a user account on the external website as well. However, companies are often not allowed to have an account on these kinds of websites as consumers should have the opportunity to interact with each other freely, without any intervention from companies. A company could use a shadow account, but an extremely positive user would not that easily be trusted by other users. The easiest way for companies to have some form of control is thus to attract consumers to discuss a company on its own networking platforms. Companies thus need to offer their own social media pages, if they do not want consumers to go discuss their company elsewhere on the Internet.

The change in the way consumers perceive and react to corporate communication could partly explain the skepticism about CSR communication which was discussed in the previous section on CSR communication; consumers now have the opportunity to directly



express their criticism and skepticism to not only the company, but also to each other. Mainstream media do not offer this opportunity, so there is less space for comments and skepticism. Since social media makes it so easy to reach so many other consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), skepticism will be very easily widespread as well. However, on the other hand, this is contradictory to the fact that consumers trust information on social media more since it is less controlled by the company itself (Du et al., 2010). As Foux puts it: “social media is perceived by consumers as a more trustworthy source of information regarding products and services than corporate-sponsored communications transmitted via the traditional elements of the promotion mix” (2006, as cited in Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p.360). This leads to the expectation that consumers will express less skepticism about content which is published on social media.

### 2.2.2 CSR communication tools

Companies use different channels for their CSR communication. They make use of mainstream media channels, like radio, television, and newspapers, but also of less controlled forms of media as for example blogs or forums used by consumers (Du et al., 2010). While companies used to release reports about their CSR strategies once in a while, most companies have now gone mainstream with their CSR communication and constantly communicate their CSR strategies to the general public (Du et al., 2010). Consumers consider CSR communication which is not completely controlled by the company more trustworthy (Du et al., 2010). This makes social media a very useful platform for CSR communication. The company is still in control of what is communicated, but consumers have the freedom to react and interact with each other and the company about what is posted. Moreover, social media engage consumers much more than other media because it offers the opportunity for interaction, which can help companies to get their customers engaged in their CSR efforts (Du et al., 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

In her book *The New Rules of Green Marketing: Strategies, Tools, and Inspiration for Sustainable Branding*, Ottman (2011) lists “20 new rules for green marketing” (p.18). These rules offer multiple reasons for companies to go public with their CSR communication. Ottman argues that consumers nowadays want to know everything about companies’ practices: “Today’s brands become trusted by practicing “radical transparency,” disclosing the good – and the bad” (p.20). Like the authors discussed above, she mentions social media

and websites in general as the most useful way to communicate with consumers: Rule 13, “The brands consumers buy and trust today educate and engage them in meaningful conversation through a variety of media, especially via websites and online social networks. Talking “at” consumers through traditional media and paid advertising can’t build loyalty among empowered consumers in a connected world (Ottman, 2011, p.21). Like Kietzmann et al. (2011), Ottman argues that consumers no longer “want to be talked at” (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p.250); they want to participate in the conversation. Companies need to offer this opportunity for interaction in order to gain a group of loyal customers (Ottman, 2011) and if they want to survive (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This change in consumers’ attitudes makes it necessary for companies to make social media part of their communication strategies and to move away from the use of mainstream media for their CSR communication.

Jahdi and Acikdili (2009) make a similar argument to the argument discussed above which Du et al. (2010) make about the use of mainstream media as a marketing tool for CSR communication. However, they seem slightly more convinced that mainstream media can in fact convey CSR messages. They state that “any and every marketing communications tool is capable of conveying a company's CSR messages and contributing to its corporate image and brand equity” (Jahdi & Acikdili, 2009, p.106). However, like Du et al. (2010) they argue that some media are more useful than others, since the reaction to “marketing communication tools” (p.106) from consumers and other businesses is often not very positive as they do not consider messages from these tools trustworthy (Jahdi & Acikdili, 2009). Jahdi and Acikdili (2009) do not address social media specifically, but they mention the Internet as the most useful tool for CSR communication, since it offers the opportunity to interact and get into conversation with customers. Since interaction is one of the key characteristics of social media, this would make social media an especially useful marketing tool for CSR communication. The interactivity between the corporation and consumers is part of the research conducted in this paper, because this characteristic of social media makes it the most useful tool for CSR communication.

According to Capriotti and Moreno (2007), “corporate responsibility is one of the most prominent themes in the field of public relations” (p.85). Like the other authors discussed above, Capriotti and Moreno (2007) state interactivity as one of the most important features of the Internet. This possibility to directly communicate with consumers is very relevant for public relations (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). Their research focuses on

corporate websites. They reach the conclusion that CSR communication is extremely important for the majority of companies, as they all spend a major and prominent part of their website on CSR communication (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007).

The companies which were part of Capriotti and Moreno's (2007) research all had "very low interactivity levels in connection with issues related to CSR" (p.89). This could be explained by the fact that corporate websites do not offer the same kind of interactivity which social media offer. Social media users can immediately react without having to register on a website, as they are already registered on the social media platform they are on. Another explanation could be that consumers did not consider the CSR information on the websites to be trustworthy. Corporate websites are a marketing tool which is completely controlled by the company itself, which often makes consumers suspicious of the information that is provided (Du et al., 2010). Together with the rather limited opportunity for interaction compared to social media, this could explain why the interaction between the companies and consumers was so limited. The outcome would likely have been different if Capriotti and Moreno (2007) had researched companies' social media pages.

It is important for companies to choose the right medium for their corporate communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2001). This choice depends "on the target group to be reached and the message to be communicated" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2001, p.65). Each type of social media attracts a certain type of consumer (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2001). A study from DEI Worldwide (2008) has shown that

70% of consumers have visited social media sites to get information; 49% of these consumers have made a purchase decision based on the information they found through the social media sites; 60% said they were likely to use social media sites to pass along information to others online; and 45% of those who searched for information via social media sites engaged in word-of-mouth (DEI Worldwide 2008, as cited in Kim & Ko, 2012, p.1481).

If companies do not participate in social media, they will not reach as many consumers as they could reach and they thus miss an important opportunity to attract consumers (Kim & Ko, 2012). The fact that social media has become such an important tool for consumers to gain information before they choose a certain company or before they buy a product could help explain why social media are such an useful tool for CSR communication. If consumers turn to social media for information about a company before they make a purchasing

decision, it is very important that the social media page has information on CSR, as consumers nowadays demand CSR information and do not trust companies who do not provide any CSR communication (Du et al., 2010).

According to Winer (2009), there are four main factors which have caused companies to move from traditional media to social media. One of these factors is particularly applicable to CSR communication: “marketers today are talking of creating “experiences” for their customers in an attempt to differentiate their products and services from competitors” (Winer, 2009, p.108). Since traditional media only offer one-way communication, this is hard to achieve, which causes companies to search for other ways to interact with consumers (Winer, 2009). Moreover, companies want consumers to interact more with them and about them, since interaction makes consumers more engaged with the company which increases the chance that they become loyal customers (Winer, 2009). Since consumers are often skeptical of CSR communication (Du et al., 2010) interaction is likely to help in convincing consumers of a company’s goodwill and commitment to a CSR effort. It is this interactivity which makes social media so relevant for the research which is conducted in this paper, as this influences the type of CSR communication that companies publish. If consumers can directly respond to CSR communication, companies are likely to adjust their messages with this fact in mind.

Companies used to have five types of advertising and marketing in their communication mix: “advertising, (TV, print, radio, outdoor), sales promotion, direct marketing, publicity/public relations, and personal selling” (Winer, 2009, p.109). All these communication forms only offer one-way communication: “from the company through the media to consumers” (Winer, 2009, p.109). This has changed with the up rise of social media which has interactivity as one of its main characteristics (Winer, 2009). This in turn has changed the communication model; corporate communication no longer goes one-way but has moved to two-way communication, as “consumers are now interacting with the company, the media, and, importantly, each other” (Winer, 2009, p.109). According to Xiang and Gretzel (2010), “The contents generated by these social media include a variety of new and emerging sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumers with the intent of educating each other about products, brands, services and issues” (p.180). If consumers use social media for these purposes, it is crucial for companies to include CSR communication, since companies’ CSR strategies play such an important role

in consumers' decisions to choose a certain company or product or to go for its competitor (Du et al., 2010).

McCorkindale's (2010) research of 55 Facebook pages of the Fortune 50 companies shows that the rise of social media does not necessarily mean that companies have adopted social media for their CSR communication, as only 21.8 percent of the companies' Facebook pages which he researched contained some form of CSR communication. However, it should be kept in mind that this research was carried out in 2010 when the use of social media was rising, but not as far up as it is now. Moreover, Pan and Xu (2009) researched 500 Fortune US-based companies and found out that most of the companies "valued social responsibility online not only in terms of social and environmental issues, but also overall contributions to society" (2009, as cited in McCorkindale, 2010, section Corporate Social Responsibility, para. 3), which shows that companies recognize the importance of communicating CSR online. However, it remains unclear how companies use social media for CSR communication and how they interact with consumers, as there is a lack of literature which focuses on this specifically. This can be explained by the fact that corporate use of social media is still quite a recent phenomenon.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter contains a clarification and description of the method I choose for my research. Moreover, my sampling method will be explained, as well as the choices that I made for my codebook.

### *3.1 Method and similar research*

To answer the research question *“How do the selected companies use social media to communicate their CSR strategies?”* and to answer my second question *“How do consumers respond to CSR communication from Dutch energy companies on Facebook?”*, a quantitative content analysis was carried out. This method was chosen because content analysis allows for *“the systematic, objective and quantitative analysis of message characteristics”* (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1). Systematic, objective, and quantitative are the main characteristics of content analysis (Kassarjian, 1977). It are these characteristics which distinguish quantitative content analysis from qualitative content analysis or simply critical reading (White & Marsh, 2006; Kassarjian, 1977). The kind of research as conducted in this paper asks for an objective analysis. An inductive analysis could answer the research question and second question as well, but it would make the results less reliable and less useful for future research, as the outcomes would only apply to the communication of these particular companies. A qualitative analysis is much more open (White & Marsh, 2006), which is why a quantitative rather than a qualitative content analysis was selected. Moreover, a quantitative analysis allows for the systematic analysis of lots of data, while qualitative content analysis is less systematic, making it thus harder to process large amounts of data (White & Marsh, 2006). In order to get objective results on how companies communicate CSR on Facebook, it is necessary to look at large amounts of data, rather than a small sample. When one only analyzes a small sample, the results are harder to generalize. Large amounts of data provide the opportunity, not only to state how the selected companies use Facebook to communicate CSR but to also reach a broader conclusion about Dutch energy companies in general.

When one wants to process large amount of data in an objective and systematic way, it is extremely important *“that the categories of analysis be defined so precisely that different analysts may apply them to the same body of content and secure the same results”*

(Berelson, 1952 as cited in Kassirjian, 1977, p.9). Therefore “each step in the research process must be carried out on the basis of explicitly formulated rules and procedures” (Kassirjian, 1977, p.9). The researcher’s subjective influence should be eliminated as much as possible (Kassirjian, 1977). In short, the rules should be so clear that every researcher who carries out the research should come to the same results and conclusions (Kassirjian, 1977). This is the ultimate test for objectivity (Kassirjian, 1977). For this reason, an inter-coder reliability test has been carried out for my research, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Similar research to the one conducted in this paper, shows that quantitative content analysis is the best method for my study. McCorkindale (2010) carried out a study in which he analyzed “how corporations are using Facebook, what information the company posted on its sites, how it engaged with its publics, and whether it integrated social responsibility activities on its pages” (section Corporate Social Responsibility, para 4). He used quantitative content analysis for his analysis of the selected companies’ Facebook pages. McCorkindale (2010) coded CSR “as the presence of community-based or volunteer activities outside the scope of the corporation itself” (section Social Responsibility, para. 1). If such a presence could be found on the page, it was coded as CSR presence (McCorkindale, 2010). This way of coding CSR presence was taken into consideration while designing my codebook.

For their study of user-generated Facebook pages about the 2008 presidential election, Woolley, Limperos, and Oliver (2010) used quantitative content analysis. They analyzed the content of user-generated Facebook pages which were created for the presidential candidates during the election period in the US (Woolley et al., 2010). They coded content “for the presence or absence of a particular candidate’s name; the presence of any specific type of language and then whether that piece of information was positive, negative, or both” (Woolley et al., 2010, p.642). I partly based my way of coding consumers’ comments on the way these researchers coded information; I coded the comments based on positive, negative or neutral language which will be described in more detail below. Although the topic of this study carried out by Woolley et al. (2010) is different, the type of research is similar to the research which was done in this paper, as this study is also aiming to get an understanding of and to describe the content of Facebook pages. Naaman, Boase, and Lai (2010) have made a “a characterization of the content of messages posted on social awareness streams” (p.189). They ascribed different message categories to the types of

content they found in their sample and coded their data accordingly (Naaman et al., 2010). This way of coding is similar to one of the coding categories which was used in this research. The two studies described above again underline that quantitative content analysis is the most suitable method for the type of research which I carried out.

Wallace, Wilson, and Milloch (2011) examined “the use of social media as a brand-management tool in college athletics” (p.422). They focused on the Facebook pages of the Big 12 university athletic departments in the USA and the pages of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, “to determine how major collegiate sports organizations were using communication, tools, types of brand-management factors, and marketing coverage” (Wallace et al., 2011, p.422). Their codebook existed of five different categories: “form of communication, brand attributes, brand-association factors, and marketing strategy” (Wallace et al., 2011, p. 431). Interactivity between the organizations and sports consumers was part of the research as well (Wallace et al., 2011). They are mostly focused on the differences in the levels of interactivity between the NCAA and the Big 12 pages (Wallace et al., 2011). Wallace et al. (2011) focused on the differences in likes and comments, which they found not to be significantly different. This led me to the decision to only include comments in the part of my research which focuses on interactivity, as I am interested in direct communication between the companies and consumers, while likes are an indirect way of communication.

### *3.2 Social Media: Facebook*

As already explained in the introduction, this research focuses on CSR communication on the Facebook pages of the three largest energy companies in the Netherlands. The choice for social media was made, because it is still quite a recent phenomenon that companies use social media to actively communicate with their customers, and to communicate their strategies. Moreover, social media use by companies becomes increasingly important, even so that companies are forced to change their communication strategies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Because of this change in corporate communication strategies, it is highly likely that the amount of CSR communication on social media by the selected companies has increased over the last couple of years and will keep increasing. This change in corporate communication and the increased attention for CSR makes one expect to find significant amounts of CSR communication on the selected companies’ social media pages. Moreover,



two of the three companies declare sustainability as their main strategy, which makes it even more likely that they would use social media to communicate CSR. Altogether, this justifies why the choice for social media was made. Facebook was chosen over Twitter, because the amount of followers on Twitter is for all companies significantly lower than the amount of people who like the companies' pages on Facebook. On April 27, 2014, Eneco has 8.854 likes on Facebook, compared to 4.900 followers on Twitter. Nuon has 56.081 likes on Facebook, while the company has only 4.288 followers on Twitter. 42.121 people like Essent on Facebook, while Essent only has 5.399 followers on Twitter. Moreover, Facebook allows for more direct interaction and conversation than Twitter, and it provides more room to post comments on companies' pages as it does not have the limit of 140 signs. This gives companies more room to communicate their message. Altogether, this makes Facebook more useful to research how companies communicate their CSR strategies.

A time period of ten months was selected for this research. The choice was made to select the last ten months before the research was carried out, because I am interested in recent CSR communication. This means that Facebook posts from July 2013, August 2013, September 2013, October 2013, November 2013, December 2013, January 2014, February 2014, March 2014, and April 2014 were selected. All messages from the selected companies in the time period were selected, because I am also interested in how many messages of the population from this time period do contain CSR communication. The choice was thus made to select the entire population for this time period instead of sampling and to include messages which do not contain any CSR communication. Moreover, posts which exist of images are included as well, since they all include text and can thus be treated similarly to textual posts. The total population exists of 406 posts. The amount of posts from Eneco during this period is 132. Nuon has posted 118 messages during the selected time period, while Essent has posted 156 messages.

Besides the posts from the selected companies, the comments from consumers were included in my research. The choice was made to draw a selective sample, because of the massive amount of comments during the selected time period. During the data collection, it was established that many comments only exist of a closed answer to a closed question asked by the company. For example, consumers are asked a multiple choice question and they have to choose A, B, C, or D or they have to guess the answer to an open question. Since I do not consider these answers to be comments to the CSR message of the company

and these answers do not contain any openings for interaction about the CSR post, these types of answers were excluded from my research. After these comments were excluded, for each company the first 100 comments to posts which contained CSR communication were selected for my analysis. This means that a total of 300 comments was coded. The total units of analysis which were analyzed is thus 706. The first hundred comments were selected, because I am also interested in interactivity. A random sample would not provide as much insight into interactivity between consumers and the selected companies, because there would only be a very small chance that both the consumer's comment and the company's response would be part of the sample which makes it very hard to measure interactivity.

### *3.3 Data collection*

The data was collected with the use of Netvizz. Netvizz can be described as "a data collection and extraction application that allows researchers to export data in standard file formats from different sections of the Facebook social networking service" (Rieder, 2013, section Abstract, para.1). No other functions than the ability to easily extract and export data into a Word file were used. I have systematically sorted each message based on its date and grouped it with its comments. This provided a clear overview not only of the amount of comments to a company's post, but also of the content of the comments. As already explained in the previous chapter, interactivity is one of the main characteristics of social media (Winer, 2009). The fact that consumers can now directly communicate with companies and each other gives consumers more power than they ever had before (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Ottman, 2011). This makes it very interesting to look at consumers' responses to CSR communication, and explains why the choice was made to not only select the companies' Facebook posts but the comments by consumers as well. The comments were analyzed in relation to the company post which the comments belonged to, which will be described in more detail below. As already explained above, comments which contain a closed answer to a question asked by the company were excluded.

### *3.4 Categories and variables*

Each company's Facebook page was coded separately. As already explained above, the coding units existed of Facebook posts from the three selected energy companies and comments from consumers to these posts. All the companies allow consumers to post a

message on the company's Facebook page. However, these posts by consumers are not very visible on the companies' pages and during data collection it became clear that these posts are mostly complaints or questions about consumers' personal situation. For this reason, these types of posts and comments were excluded from my research. The content of the posts was coded by the following categories: "type of message" (Geerlinks, 2013), post related to CSR, "CSR topic" (Geerlinks, 2013), encouragement of CSR behavior (Geerlinks, 2013), description of outcome of CSR action, and CSR approach. I will explain and justify these categories in more detail below. Type of message, CSR topic, and encouragement of CSR behavior were based on previous research about online CSR communication conducted by Geerlinks (2013). However, the variables belonging to these categories were selected from other research, as will be described below.

The variable interaction was divided into different categories which were coded for number of comments, tone of voice of comments, and direct interaction between the company and consumers. As mentioned above, images were included as well and coded similarly to posts which only contained text. If a post is coded for the category 'post related to CSR' as 'no,' the post does not contain any CSR communication, which means that the post was excluded for further coding, as were the comments to that post. A post was coded as not containing CSR communication when it did not contain any of the CSR topics which were selected for this research. 'Green marketing' is an exception to this rule, which will be explained in more detail below. 'Type of message' was included because it could provide insight in what kinds of messages are the most common for CSR communication on social media. Moreover, the type of message is related to the level of skepticism of consumers; they are more skeptical of advertisements than of any other kind of corporate communication (Pomering et al., 2013). This makes the type of message significant when one is investigating how companies are communicating CSR. The variables were selected based on the types of messages which were found during the data collection.

The variables which were chosen for 'CSR topic' are: sustainability/environment, charity/social issue, green marketing, and none of the above. Green marketing was selected based on Rettie, Burchell, and Riley's (2012) definition: "encouraging consumer adoption of sustainable behaviours, products, and services by positioning them as normal, and discouraging less sustainable ones by positioning them as not normal" (p. 421). The choice was made to include green marketing as a variable of CSR topic, but to also make

'encouragement of CSR behavior' a separate topic, because green marketing can be directly and indirectly communicated. If it is indirectly communicated the topic is different from 'green marketing' but the post can still encourage consumers to adopt CSR behavior. If the post was completely about the encouragement of CSR behavior, it was coded as 'green marketing.' However, if a message was coded as 'green marketing,' it was not necessarily coded as 'Post related to CSR,' as green marketing is a CSR topic, but it does not necessarily tell something about a company's CSR efforts and strategies, which is the focus of this research. 'Green marketing' was only coded together with 'Post related to CSR' when the idea behind the green marketing was clearly expressed in the post, thus when the CSR strategy was made clear. This means that other CSR topics, like sustainability, had to be mentioned.

The variables social issue/charity and sustainability/environment are based on the standards of CSR as described by ISO (ISO 26000, 2010), and Mögele and Tropp's (2010) research of the focus of online CSR communication. 'Charity' was also chosen based on Mögele and Tropp's (2010) research, but also because of other researchers' focus on CSR communication about social causes, as for example Du et al. (2010). The variables social issue and charity, and sustainability and environment were put together, because they are directly related to each other, and because of the limitations of this research; separating the topics would not provide enough data for a reliable statistical analysis as they do not occur often enough since the majority of CSR communication by the selected companies is about sustainability. However, I did consider it necessary to include more categories, to gain more insight into other types of CSR topics which Dutch energy companies communicate. CSR could include even more topics than the ones which are included in my codebook for 'CSR topic'. However, since sustainability and the environment are part of the main strategy of the selected companies, CSR related to these topics are the focus of this research. Moreover, the topics described above were the most outstanding topics which were found during the data collection. If the post contained two topics, the most prominent topic was selected. Since Facebook messages are quite short, it was always very clear which topic was the most prominent.

'Encouragement of CSR behavior' was divided into 'Yes' and 'No' in which 'Yes' is divided into five variables: Yes, encouraging sustainable behavior, Yes, encouraging donations to charity, Yes, encouraging to contribute to social issue, Yes, encouraging to

contribute to the environment, and Yes, other. These variables are linked and based on the variables which belong to 'CSR Topic.' 'Description of outcome of CSR action' exists of the variables 'yes' and 'no.' The category is based on the fact that consumers are mainly interested in the outcome of a CSR effort instead of how the company reached this outcome (Du et al., 2010; Pomering et al., 2013). 'Description of outcome of CSR action' is defined as: a clear description of what results were reached by taking CSR efforts. This could for example be the mentioning of CO2 reduction as a result from the company's CSR efforts. 'CSR approach' was selected because consumers consider underlying motives for CSR communication very important, even so that this could affect the effectiveness of CSR communication (Du et al., 2010; Mögele & Tropp, 2010; Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009; Pomering et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to take a company's marketing approach or motive into consideration when one is investigating how companies communicate their CSR strategies. The variables in this category are taken from Jahdi and Acikdilli's (2009) list of marketing approaches. Since these approaches are connected to the motives mentioned by other authors, I considered them the most useful, as these approaches are more specific than the motives described by other researchers.

Interactivity was first of all measured by simply counting the number of comments to messages for which the comments were included in the research (see above for an explanation which comments are excluded). The second measurement was whether there was any direct interaction between the company and the consumers commenting on a post. The answer is 'yes' if the company directly responds to the comments belonging to a certain post. The last category which focused on the comments was the 'tone of voice of comments.' The possible variables were: positive/ approving, neutral, negative/ disapproving, and non-related. This category was included because I am not only interested in the level of interactivity, but also in consumers' responses to CSR communication on Facebook.

A comment was coded 'positive/approving' if it was approving or supporting the CSR post which was decided based on the use of positive words and a positive tone of voice in the comment. 'Neutral' was coded when a comment did neither have a negative or positive tone of voice. 'Negative/disapproving' was selected when a consumer clearly disapproved of the CSR post which was decided based on the use of negative words and a negative tone of voice in the comment. 'Non-related' was coded when a consumer posted a comment which

was not related to the topic of the CSR post, for example a question about an invoice or other customer-related inquiry. In the analysis and results sections of this thesis, the comments will be considered related to the post they belong with. This choice was made, because this could provide more insight into the way consumers perceive CSR communication, and of which topics they are less skeptical. As discussed in the previous chapter, consumers are often very skeptical of CSR communication which has a significant impact on the way CSR strategies are communicated (Du et al., 2010; Pomeroy et al., 2013). This should be taken into consideration when one is studying how companies communicate their CSR strategies through social media.

The coding was done per company, after which the differences between the three different companies were compared for 'Type of message', 'CSR Topic', 'Post related to CSR', 'Encouragement of CSR behavior,' 'Description of outcome of CSR action,' 'CSR approach,' and for 'Number of comments,' 'Direct interaction between company and commenter' and 'Tone of voice of comments.' Comparing the companies could provide more insight into the way energy companies in general are communicating CSR. While each company was considered separately, the overall results from the population of messages which were analyzed is what provides more insight and a broader sense of how energy companies use social media to communicate their CSR strategies. The coding results were used to answer this question. The next chapter will discuss these results and demonstrates how energy companies use social media to communicate their CSR strategies. Moreover, the results will provide insight into how consumers respond to CSR communication on social media.

### *3.5 Inter-coder reliability*

The inter-coder reliability test was carried out for each variable (see **Table 2** below), with the exception of the variables 'Number of comments' and 'Direct interaction between company and commenter.' These two variables were excluded, because the first one requires simply counting the amount of comments which should be impossible for different coders to disagree on. 'Direct interaction between company and commenter' was excluded, because there is no level of interpretation present for this variable; there either is direct interaction between the company and the commenter or there is no direct interaction. The inter-coder reliability test showed an average agreement of 78.8 percent. Ten percent of my data was coded by two other coders.

**Table 2**  
*Inter-coder Reliability per Variable in Percentages and Krippendorff's Alpha*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Average agreement in percentages</b>	<b>Krippendorff's Alpha</b>
Type of message	75.0%	0.702**
CSR Topic	71.0%	0.547*
Post related to CSR	88.0%	0.732**
Encouragement of CSR behavior	79.0%	0.636*
Description of outcome of CSR action	75.0%	0.288
CSR approach	75.0%	0.667*
Tone of voice of comments	89.0%	0.794**

*Note.* Krippendorff's Alpha agreement levels, \*\* $\alpha > 0.7$ , \* $\alpha > 0.5 < 0.7$

When considering the percentages per variable, it should be taken into consideration that these coders had very limited knowledge of the subject which makes it harder to judge whether a message contains CSR communication or how it is related to CSR. Based on the results of the inter-coder reliability tests, the variables were reconsidered and adjusted. The fact that the CSR topic has the lowest average score, could possibly be explained by the fact that CSR topics are harder to recognize for coders who do only have limited knowledge of the subject CSR. Krippendorff's Alpha coefficient proves that most variables show fair agreement between the different coders, while three variables are proven to have excellent agreement. 'Description of outcome of CSR action' is the only variable which scores very low on the level of agreement, which means that the agreement is largely based on chance. However, since the agreement in percentage is 75.0% conclusions can still be drawn from this variable, although only tentatively.

## Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, my research question “*How do the selected companies use social media to communicate their CSR strategies?*” will be attempted to get answered by analyzing the results from my data analysis. Moreover, my second question “*How do consumers respond to CSR communication on Facebook?*” will get answered. While the results of CSR communication on Facebook per company will be discussed, the main focus will be on the population, which exists of all the data extracted from the three companies’ Facebook pages over a time period of ten months. The non-CSR related content will also be considered as this is relevant for the analysis of the CSR-related content, since a comparison between non-CSR related and CSR-related content could provide more insight into how companies communicate CSR. However, the main focus will thus be on the posts which contain CSR content as these posts are the focus of this research. The results were analyzed based on cross tabulations and Chi-square tests, in order to be able to test the significance of my results for the entire population of CSR communication from energy companies in the Netherlands. Moreover, the results for interactivity will be analyzed. ANOVA tests together with post-hoc tests were performed to test the significance for the results on interactivity in order to be able to answer the question how consumers respond to CSR communication on Facebook. As already explained in the previous chapter, the first hundred consumer comments from each company were selected for analysis. This means that this sample is drawn differently than the sample of the companies’ posts, and will be treated separately in the results.

### ***4.1 CSR communication on Facebook***

In this section, the results for how CSR is communicated on Facebook by the selected companies will be discussed. The results are divided by variable or comparison of variables to provide a clear overview of the results.

#### *4.1.1 Message contains CSR*

The amount of messages which contain CSR communication is very close for Eneco and Nuon, while Essent’s amount of CSR communication is much lower. Eneco posted 132 messages in the period between July 1 2013 and April 30 2014. Out of these 132 messages,



35 messages contained CSR communication, which is 26.5 percent. Nuon posted 118 messages of which 30 messages contained CSR communication, which means that 25.4 percent of their total Facebook communication contained CSR information. The amount of messages containing CSR information is much lower for Essent, even though Essent posted by far the largest amount of messages, namely 156. However, only 16 of these messages contained CSR communication which is 10.3 percent of the company's total Facebook messages.

**Example 1, example of CSR message:**

*“Of the big energy companies Eneco is the most sustainable company, as is proven by research from the Dutch Consumer's Association. Eneco implicitly chooses sustainable energy; we do not invest money in coal- and nuclear plants. Read more on <http://eneco.nl/hetgaathard>.”<sup>1</sup>*

The fact that Eneco and Nuon have a very similar amount of CSR communication, while Essent has a much lower amount could possibly be explained by the fact that Eneco and Nuon state sustainability as their main strategy on their website, while Essent does not state its vision as clearly as the other two companies. The difference with the other two companies is thus that Essent is not stating sustainability as its main strategy. From the total population which I analyzed ( $N=406$ ), 20 percent of the messages contained CSR communication, as is shown in **Table 3**.

**Table 3**  
*Overview of Messages Related to CSR*

Company	Amount of messages related to CSR	Percentage	Total amount of messages posted between July 1 2013 and April 30 2014
Eneco	35	26.5%	132
Essent	16	10.3%	156
Nuon	30	25.4%	118
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>406</b>

#### 4.1.2 Type of message

The types of messages which the three companies posted are very different for each company. While Eneco by far posts the most advertisements (33.3% compared to 16.1% and

<sup>1</sup> Facebook.com/eneconederland, 13-02-2014

12.2% for Nuon and Essent respectively), Essent most frequently appearing type of message are polls (24.4%), while Nuon most frequently posts messages which contain a competition (22.0%). Messages which were coded as advertisements were similar to the following example: *“Toon gives you the direction of your energy usage. Because people who have insight into their energy usage are better in handling it. New and current customers get Toon + installation for free (this usually costs € 195)! Go to our website [www.eneco.nl/Toon](http://www.eneco.nl/Toon) immediately!”*<sup>2</sup> An example of a poll which is Essent’s most frequent type of message is the following: *“Which part makes the meter cupboard complete? A, B, or C?”*<sup>3</sup> These posts were often followed by pictures from which consumers should choose. The most frequent type of message for Nuon is illustrated by the next example: *“Would you, just like Nuon’s Solar Team, like to race with the Nuna7? The World Solar Challenge starts coming Sunday in Australia, but you can already play the Nuon Solar Challenge and get a chance to win an iPad mini with solar charger!”*<sup>4</sup>

The results for the types of messages which most often occurred are completely different when one looks at the type of message which most often contained CSR communication. Eneco most often communicated their CSR strategies through messages about an event (25.7%) or PR-message (25.7%). The fact that posts about an event are so frequently used to communicate CSR can be explained by the fact that Eneco often hosts events which provide insight into their business practices and strategies. They for example invite consumers to visit one of their windmill parks. Within these event messages, they often include CSR information or provide a link to the website of the event which contains CSR information, as is the case in the following example: *“Energy generation: Did you think this was boring? You will be surprised! We provide a onetime opportunity by welcoming you into our bio-energy plant during Snipperdag. Come visit and sign up on our website: <https://www.facebook.com/events/450330658422341/>.”*<sup>5</sup> Nuon most frequently communicates CSR through news messages (30.0%): *“An area as big as a soccer field on a roof covered with solar panels: this is what will happen to the Amsterdam Arena in May. Today the first 4200 (!) panels were installed. As the Arena’s energy partner, we think this is*

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<sup>2</sup> Facebook.com/eneconederland, 24-01-2014

<sup>3</sup> Facebook.com/essent, 07-03-2014

<sup>4</sup> Facebook.com/nuon, 03-10-2013

<sup>5</sup> Facebook.com/eneconederland, 15-01-2014

*great news. Let the sun shine!*”<sup>6</sup> Essent most frequent way to communicate their CSR strategies is through PR-messages (31.25%): “*Today is Sustainability Day. And exactly today we can announce that Essent again is the biggest instigator of sustainable energy in the Netherlands. We are proud, are you?*”<sup>7</sup>

From a closer look at the population of messages which were analyzed, it becomes clear that PR-messages (23.5%) are most frequently used to communicate CSR. PR-messages were posted twenty times in total; nineteen of these messages were related to CSR. Advertisements were the most occurring type of messages, as 82 messages which contained advertisements were posted. However, only nine advertisements (10%) were related to CSR. Tip/suggestion to consumers was the least occurring category for posts which were related to CSR, as only two of this type of post contained CSR communication. A Pearson’s Chi-square test proves that the relationship between the type of message and the message containing CSR is significant. The Cramer’s V test shows that there is a significant strong association between the type of message and the fact whether a message is CSR-related or non-CSR related. The relationship is significant for all variables. An overview of the types of messages which are most often related to CSR is provided in **Table 4** below.

**Table 4**

*Overview of Type of Message Compared to Post Related to CSR (N=406)*

	Post related to CSR: Yes	Amount of CSR messages per type	Post related to CSR: No	Amount of non-related messages per type	Total percentage	Total amount
<b>Type of message</b>						
Advertisement	11.1%	9	22.5%	73	20.2%	82
Poll	6.2%	5	15.1%	49	13.3%	54
Competition	6.2%	5	12.9%	42	11.6%	47
Game	2.5%	2	12.0%	39	10.1%	41
News	19.8%	16	4.0%	13	7.1%	29
Event	18.5%	15	8.6%	28	10.6%	43
PR-message	23.5%	19	0.3%	1	4.9%	20
Question or comment to consumers	9.9%	8	13.8%	45	13.1%	53

<sup>6</sup> Facebook.com/nuon, 26-03-2014

<sup>7</sup> Facebook.com/essent, 10-10-2013

Tip/suggestion to consumers	2.5%	2	10.8%	35	9.1%	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>406</b>

Notes. P-value significance levels: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.005$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .  
 Pearson's Chi-square  $\chi^2(8, N=406) = 121.13, p = <.001^{***}$ , Cramer's  $V = .55$ .

#### 4.1.3 CSR Topic

Unlike the types of messages used to communicate CSR which were quite different for the three companies which are part of this research, the most frequently appearing CSR topics are very similar. The companies thus use different types of messages to communicate CSR and thus communicate CSR in a different form. The CSR topic which they most frequently communicated about, however, is the same for all companies.

Sustainability/environment was by far the most frequently occurring topic in messages which contained CSR communication for all three companies, although Eneco is clearly the front runner when it comes to CSR communication about sustainability/environment (Eneco 85.7%, Nuon 43.8%, and Essent 56.3% of the total messages which contained CSR communication). The topic sustainability can be illustrated by the following example from Eneco's Facebook page: "*HollandseWind is, as the name already suggests, entirely generated in Dutch windmill parks. One of newest windmill parks will soon be located in the ocean: Luchterduinen!*"<sup>8</sup>

Eneco only posted two messages (5.7% of total CSR communication) which contained charity/social issue as its CSR topic. Nuon posted eight messages about charity/social issue (26.7% of total CSR communication). Essent only addressed charity/social issue two times (12.5%) in their total CSR communication. The message in **example 2** is an example of CSR communication with charity/social issue as its main topic.

#### **Example 2: Topic charity/social issue**

*"We again enthusiastically participated today in NLdoet! (e.g. charity event). A group of Nuon employees together with 150 children and their parents from the Southeast*

<sup>8</sup> Facebook.com/eneconederland, 24-10-2013

*of Amsterdam traveled to the Dolphinarium in a train which was specially used for this occasion. What a fantastic day!”<sup>9</sup>*

A Chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to test the frequency distribution for the population. The test shows that the CSR topics are not equally distributed in the population,  $\chi^2(3, N=406) = 482.808, p = <0.001^{***}$ .

Only three (10.0% of total CSR communication) out of Nuon’s eleven posts which addressed green marketing were directly related to CSR. Essent posted nineteen messages which contained green marketing, out of which five messages (31.3% of total CSR communication) were directly related to CSR. Eneco posted fifteen green marketing messages. Two of the messages (8.6% of total CSR communication) in which this topic occurred were related to CSR. This means that the majority of messages which had green marketing as its main topic was not directly related to the communication of the companies’ CSR strategies (75.6% of total messages containing green marketing). It was thus very often the case that green marketing was coded as CSR topic, but not considered to be related to CSR. This can be explained by the fact that the companies often mentioned green marketing without any direct reference to their CSR strategies, which is illustrated by the following example: *“It smells deliciously like spring and it saves energy: do you already let your laundry blow in this nice spring sunshine? ☺.”<sup>10</sup>* This message is clearly stimulating consumers to save energy and thus be more sustainable, but it does not provide any information on Essent’s CSR strategies or efforts.

All messages which were coded for green marketing and which were considered to be directly related to CSR encouraged CSR behavior. This means that the messages which contained green marketing but were not considered as directly related to CSR, promoted the use of green products and sustainable behavior without directly addressing CSR. They did thus not provide any information about their strategies or motives to promote these green products or sustainable behavior. In other words, green marketing was addressed unconsciously and consumers were not directly confronted with the fact that the message contained green marketing; they were confronted with a sustainable alternative without

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<sup>9</sup> Facebook.com/nuon, 22-03-2014

<sup>10</sup> Facebook.com/essent, 10-03-2014

being told why they should choose this alternative or what the motives for the company are to come up with this alternative.

#### 4.1.4 The encouragement of CSR behavior by CSR topic

Essent encouraged CSR behavior in nine out of the sixteen CSR messages they posted between July 1 2013 en April 30 2014, which means they encouraged CSR behavior in 56.3 percent of their messages. Eneco did this in sixteen out of their thirty five CSR messages (45.7%), while Nuon encouraged CSR behavior in eleven out of their thirty CSR posts (36.7%). That means that for this variable the average percentage for the population is 46.23 percent. The encouragement of sustainable behavior was the most frequently occurring form of encouraging CSR behavior (57.1% of the population of messages which encouraged CSR behavior). Eleven out of the thirty five messages (31.4%) which were encouraging CSR behavior had green marketing as CSR topic. That means that the last 11.5 percent of the messages which encouraged CSR behavior had charity/social issue as topic. A Pearson's Chi-square test combined with a Cramer's V test reveals that there is a moderate significant relationship between CSR topic and the encouragement of CSR behavior. This is the case for all variables. This thus means that whether the content of a CSR post is encouraging CSR behavior or not is influenced by the CSR topic.

**Table 5**

*Crosstab of CSR Topic Compared to Encouragement of CSR Behavior (N=81)*

		Encouragement of CSR behavior: Yes	Amount of messages	Encouragement of CSR behavior: No	Amount of messages
<b>CSR Topic</b>	Sustainability/environment	57.1%	20	80.4%	37
	Charity/social issue	11.5%	4	17.4%	8
	Green marketing	31.4%	11	2.2%	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>46</b>

*Note.* Pearson's Chi-square  $\chi^2(2, N=81) = 16.73, p = <.001^{***}$ , Cramer's  $V = .45$

Messages about sustainability do thus by far most often encourage CSR behavior (57.1%). All three energy companies are focused on the production of sustainable energy and are trying to convince consumers of the importance of sustainable energy. Moreover,

they are often promoting 'green' energy. This becomes very clear from the messages which encourage CSR behavior, and explains why sustainability is the most frequently occurring CSR topic when a message encourages consumers to adapt CSR behavior. Moreover, as already described above, sustainable behavior is the most frequently occurring form of behavior which is encouraged. The companies often posted messages in which they provided information about their own CSR strategies and tried to convince consumers to adapt to the company's strategies and adopt sustainable behavior as well, for example by choosing green energy or the even more sustainable option of wind energy.

#### 4.1.5 Description of CSR outcome by type of message and CSR topic

The percentage of messages which described the outcome of a CSR action which the company took is very similar for all three companies; Nuon gave a description in 63.3 percent of their CSR messages, Eneco did this in 54.3 percent of their CSR communication, and Essent in 43.8 percent of all CSR messages. Messages which contained a description of the outcome of a CSR action often described the results of CSR efforts taken by the company in the form of a PR-message (see **Table 6** below). This could for example be the fact that the company finished a certain project in which they invested for CSR reasons, which was the topic of most messages which described the outcome of a CSR action, as is the case in this example: *"2013 was a wind-energetic year for us! Our new windmill park together with lots of wind over the past few months yielded a lot of electricity. Read more about our wind energy through the following link."*<sup>11</sup> A link was provided with information about all Nuon's wind energy projects. The other type of message which often provided a description of the outcome of a CSR action was event (see **Table 6**). The companies either posted messages about an event they had organized for CSR reasons, as for example an event in which they collected money for charity, or messages in which they connected finishing a CSR project to an event to which they invited consumers. The company for example finished building a new windmill park and immediately invite consumers to visit the park. This type of message was especially frequent for Eneco.

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<sup>11</sup> Facebook.com/nuon, 07-01-2014

**Table 6**

*Summary of Type of Message Most Frequently Reporting Outcome of CSR Action(N=45)*

		<i>Description of outcome of CSR action: Yes</i>		<i>Amount of messages</i>	
<b>Type of message</b>	PR-message	33.3%		15	
	Event	26.7%		12	
	Other	40.0%		18	

The outcome of a CSR action is most often described in messages about sustainability/environment (58.6% of all CSR communication on sustainability/environment). Charity/social issue comes second with 58.3 percent of all communication on this topic, while for green marketing the outcome of a CSR action is described in 36.4 percent of all CSR communication on green marketing. A Chi-square test showed that there is no significant relationship between CSR topic and the description of the outcome of a CSR action,  $\chi^2(2, N=81) = 1.899, p = >0.05$ . A description of the outcome of a CSR action is thus equally likely to occur for all CSR topics; there is no significant relationship between both variables.

#### *4.1.6 CSR approach by CSR topic*

For both Eneco and Nuon, public relations was the most frequently used CSR approach for their CSR communication (51.4% and 60.0%). The example provided in the previous section for a public relations message which described the outcome of a CSR action also provides an example for the public relations approach. For Essent the most often occurring approach is proactive (37.5%). A Chi-square goodness-of-fit test was carried out to determine the distribution for the population. The CSR approaches were not equally distributed,  $\chi^2(4, N=81) = 48.321, p = <0.001^{***}$ . Only Nuon and Essent took a philanthropic approach which is the second most often used approach for Nuon (16.7%). An example of the philanthropic approach can be found in the following message from Nuon: *“On behalf of our customer service agents, a check worth € 44.976, 86 was awarded to 3FM Serious Request! They collected the money by selling their days off, by organizing a Christmas market*



and by donating their Christmas gift. Well done colleagues!"<sup>12</sup> This message does not contain any information which explains the benefits for the company, nor are the motives clearly underlying the message which is why this message was coded as philanthropic. The fact that Eneco does not take this approach, could be explained by the fact that consumers often do not trust a philanthropic approach, as they believe that companies only undertake CSR actions if it at least partly benefits themselves and is thus partly profit driven (Du et al., 2010).

The companies mostly seem to have succeeded in only partly having a profit-driven approach, as Eneco is the only company who uses a profit-driven approach multiple time, although it occurs only two times. Nuon used the profit-driven approach in one message of their total CSR communication, while Essent did not use this approach at all. The messages which were coded as profit-driven provided information about sustainability and the company's sustainable strategy. In Eneco's case, these posts were considered profit-driven because of the fact that the messages contained a direct link to Eneco's webpage where consumers can become a customer or switch to another contract with another type of energy. They are thus directly linking sustainability to sales and thus profit, which makes this a profit-driven approach. Many other messages in the population are profit-driven as well, but in these messages, it is not expressed as clearly making it only an underlying approach to a more dominant approach.

**Table 7**

*Crosstab of CSR Approaches within CSR topic in Percentages.*

		<i>Sustainability/e nvironment</i>	<i>Charity/ social issue</i>	<i>Green marketing</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>CSR approach</b>	Public relations	60.3%	25.0%	18.2%	49,4%
	Profit driven	6.9%	0.0%	9.1%	4,3%
	Proactive	19.0%	8.3%	27.3%	18,5%
	Partnership	10.3%	25.0%	45.5%	17.3%
	Philanthropic	3.4%	41.7%	0.0%	8.6%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

Notes.  $\chi^2 = 32.058$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = <.001^{***}$ , Cramer's  $V = .45$ .

Cells in *italics* have expected count less than 5

<sup>12</sup> Facebook.com/nuon, 20-12-2013

A cross tabulation of the complete population for CSR topic and CSR approach (see **Table 7** above) shows that the public relations approach most often occurs with the topic sustainability, namely in thirty five instances (60.3% within CSR topic sustainability) out of the forty instances that public relation is used as an approach (in 43.2% of the messages out of the eighty one messages which are related to CSR). The topic charity/social issue, which as described above occurs twelve times out of the total of eighty-one CSR messages, most frequently occurs with a partnership approach. Proactive is the second most often used approach after public relations (18.5% of all CSR communication). Partnership most often occurs with sustainability (six times out of the fourteen times the approach is used which is 7.4% of all CSR communication). However, partnership is the most often used approach for the topic green marketing. Messages which were considered to be directly related to CSR with green marketing as their main topic had a partnership approach in 45.5 percent of the total green marketing messages. The philanthropic approach only occurred together with the topics charity/social issue ( $N=5$ ) and sustainability/environment ( $N=2$ ), which means that this approach is used in 8.6 percent of the total CSR messages. A Chi-square test followed by a Cramer's  $V$  test proves that there is a moderately significant relationship between the variables CSR approach and CSR topic. However, it should be taken into consideration that nine cells have an expected frequency below five which could influence the results and accuracy of the Chi-square test. As discussed in **Chapter 2**, the approach of a CSR message has a very big influence on the way CSR communication is perceived by consumers. What this means for the results will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. The following section will provide more insight into the way consumers perceive certain CSR approaches, as it will focus on consumer interactivity for CSR messages.

#### ***4.2 Consumer interactivity for CSR messages***

In this section, the results for consumers interactivity and consumer responses to CSR communication are reported in order to be able to answer my second question of how consumers respond to CSR communication

##### ***4.2.1 Amount of comments per variable***

For 354 messages, the amount of comments was counted in order to be able to compare the level of interactivity for messages which were directly related to CSR and

messages which were not considered to be CSR communication. The amount of comments to the other 52 messages were excluded, because the comments were missing and could thus not be included in the sample. As is shown in **Table 8**, the mean for messages which are not related to CSR is much higher than the mean for messages which are related to CSR. A one-way ANOVA test shows that the difference in mean between messages related to CSR and messages not related to CSR is significant. This means that based on comments, Facebook interaction is much higher for messages which are not related to CSR.

**Table 8**

*Mean of Messages Related to CSR*

Message related to CSR	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Yes	18.69	70	39.650
No	64.11	284	140.778

*Note.* One-way ANOVA,  $F(1, 352) = 7.134, p = .008^{**}$

The average amounts of comments per CSR topic are very close to each other for the topics sustainability/environment, and green marketing. The mean for charity/ social issue, however, is much lower than for the other two topics (see **Table 9**). A one-way ANOVA test was performed and showed that the differences in mean between the different topics are significant. However, the performance of a Bonferroni post-hoc test showed no significant differences in mean between the different CSR topics. The mean differences are thus not significant. This could be explained by the fact that the amount of non-CSR related communication is much higher than the amount of CSR-related communication. This means that the mean for 'none of the above' is much higher due the larger amount of messages which were coded for this variable. However, since this higher amount of messages is taken into consideration and put in proportion for the post-hoc comparison to the other topics, the difference is found not to be significant.

Sustainability/environment has the highest mean of the topics which are related to CSR ( $M=21.77$ ). This could be explained by the fact that sustainability/environment is the most frequently occurring CSR topic, but also because sustainability is the most important CSR topic for these three energy companies. As already discussed above, two of the three companies have adopted the improvement and development of sustainability and sustainable techniques into their main strategy, while the other company also has large

statements about its sustainable goals on its website. Moreover, sustainability is an issue that is on the minds of many consumers, which could make this one of the most interesting CSR topics for consumers to interact about.

**Table 9**  
*Mean of Comments per CSR Topic*

CSR Topic	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Sustainability/environment	21.77	48	46.651
Charity/social issue	13.83	12	19.981
Green marketing	19.44	39	26.549
None of the above	68.81	255	147.528
<b>Total</b>	<b>55.13</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>128.545</b>

*Notes.* One-way ANOVA,  $F(3, 350) = 3.529$ ,  $p = .015^*$

Bonferroni post-hoc test showed no significant differences between CSR topics.

For the encouragement of CSR behavior, the average amount of comments is very low, which makes interactivity low as well. The mean for messages encouraging sustainable behavior is 10.90 ( $N=30$ ), while the mean for CSR messages which do not encourage CSR behavior is 24.53 ( $N=40$ ). A one-way ANOVA test shows that the difference in amount of comments between messages which are encouraging CSR behavior and messages which are not encouraging CSR behavior is not significant,  $F(1, 68) = 2.055$ ,  $p = .156$ . Based on the difference in the mean of the amount of comments per category, one would expect the difference between the two types of messages (encouraging and not encouraging CSR behavior) to be significant, but the one-way ANOVA test shows that the two groups do not differ significantly. The encouragement of CSR behavior does thus not cause more interactivity nor do messages which do not contain any encouragement of CSR behavior.

Since the approach to CSR which is taken in CSR communication has a lot of influence on how consumers perceive CSR communication, one would expect big differences in the average amounts of comments between the different approaches. Since consumers are especially skeptical of certain approaches, as for example the philanthropic approach, one would expect either a very low or very high mean for this variable. However, the mean of the philanthropic approach ( $M = 20.29$ ) is very close to the average total mean ( $M = 18.69$ ). The proactive approach has the highest mean, namely 34.35, while profit-driven has the lowest mean with 8.75. This means that messages with a proactive approach had the highest level of interactivity based on the number of comments. It is remarkable and significant that

the most often occurring approach (public relations), which makes up for more than half of the total population of CSR messages, has an average of 10.26 comments, which is much lower than the average for the total population of CSR messages ( $N=70$ ,  $M=18.69$ ). This means that the mean for the total population is highly influenced by peaks in certain variables. However, a one-way ANOVA shows that there is no significant difference in the average amount of comments between the different CSR approaches (see **Table 10**). According to a one-way ANOVA test, the description of a CSR outcome does not significantly influence the average amount of comments either,  $F(1, 68) = 1.659$ ,  $p = .202$ .

**Table 10**  
*Mean of Comments per CSR Approach*

CSR Approach	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Public relations	10.26	34	12.702
Profit driven	8.75	4	5.500
Proactive	34.35	12	59.652
Partnership	28.54	13	66.340
Philanthropic	20.29	7	26.183
<b>Total</b>	18.69	70	39.650

*Note.* One-way ANOVA,  $F(4, 69) = 1.120$ ,  $p = > 0.05$  (.355)

From a closer look at the mean of the number of comments per type of message, it becomes clear that the types of messages where there is an incentive for consumers to respond have the highest mean, as poll ( $M = 125.86$ ,  $SD = 196.791$ ), game ( $M = 118.08$ ,  $SD = 151.699$ ), and tip/suggestion to consumers ( $M = 100.71$ ,  $SD = 284.749$ ) have the highest average amounts of comments. News, event, and PR-message which are the type of messages which most often contain CSR communication have much lower averages,  $M = 14.07$  ( $SD = 14.155$ ),  $M=11.27$  ( $SD = 22.207$ ), and  $M = 14.89$  ( $SD = 15.710$ ) respectively. A one-way ANOVA test shows that the average amount of comments differs significantly across the different types of messages,  $F(8, 345) = 6.44$ ,  $p = <.001$ . A Bonferroni post-hoc test showed that poll differs the most significantly from the other types of messages: Advertisement,  $M_{\text{difference}} = 103.738$ ,  $p <.001^{***}$ ; News,  $M_{\text{difference}} = 111,794$   $p <.005^{**}$ ; Event,  $M_{\text{difference}}=114.596$ ,  $p <.005^{**}$ ; PR-message  $M_{\text{difference}} = 110.974$ ,  $p <.05^{*}$ ; Question or comment to consumers,  $M_{\text{difference}} = 108.220$ ,  $p <.001^{***}$ . The fact that the types of messages which most often contain CSR-related content have the lowest average amount of comments again shows that CSR communication attracts less interactivity than

other forms of online corporate communication. This is confirmed by the fact that poll differs the most significantly from the other types of messages as polls do not often contain CSR communication (6.2% of all CSR communication).

Not only interactivity between consumers is an important characteristic of social media, but also the possibility for companies to directly interact with consumers. Because this research is focused on Facebook posts which contain CSR communication, the interactivity between the three companies and consumers was measured. The following example shows a comment from a consumer as a response to a CSR message which is followed by direct interaction with an employee from Eneco: *Consumer: "And cycling against the wind is extremely good for your health!" Eneco employee: Hi Dick, yes it definitely is! Have a look at the national championships for 'cycling with headwind' sometime: <https://www.facebook.com/NKtegenwindfietsen/>.*<sup>13</sup>

The results show that the company interacted with consumers in 57.5 percent of the total CSR communication ( $N = 81$ ). A comparison between the average amount of comments and interactivity between the companies and consumers shows that the average amount of comments is much higher when there is interaction between the company and consumers ( $M = 27.93$ ,  $SD = 49.561$  compared to  $M = 5.62$ ,  $SD = 7.957$ ). A one-way ANOVA test shows that the relationship between the amount of comments and direct interactivity between companies and consumers is significant,  $F(1, 68) = 5.746$ ,  $p = .019$ . This means that the larger the amount of comments, the higher the chance that there is direct interactivity between the company and consumers. However, the interaction is not always about the CSR message, in some cases the interaction is about an issue which a consumer addressed, as for example a complaint about customer-related inquiries. The importance of interaction between companies and consumers will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

#### 4.2.2 Tone of voice of comments

Besides the interaction between the companies and consumers based on the number of comments, the tone of voice of the comments from consumers to CSR communication was researched. The tone of voice is important, since it tells a lot about how CSR communication is perceived and thus about how it is communicated. A Chi-square goodness-

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<sup>13</sup> Facebook.com/eneconederland, comment 04-11-2013

of-fit test shows the frequency distribution of the observed values is similar to the expected frequency in the population,  $\chi^2(3, N=300) = 3.867, p = <0.05$ . The choice to perform a non-parametric test was made, because the tone of voice of comments was researched based on an independent sample from the other variables. This test can help to provide insight into the significance and normality of the frequencies within this variable. A large amount of comments is not directly related to the CSR message, namely 87 (29%) out of the 300 comments which were investigated for this research. In this non-related comments, consumers often complained about customer service related inquiries or they threatened to leave the company and become a customer somewhere else, as is the case in the following example: *"I am satisfied with Nuon. But the communication with their telephone robots is horrendous, I would just like to speak about a decrease in usage of gas."*<sup>14</sup> There seems to be no reason why consumers choose to spill their complaints underneath a certain message; they seem to just randomly select the most recent company post. These comments are thus not related to CSR communication.

The majority of comments was positive (26.3%) although the differences with neutral (22%) and negative (22.7%) are small. An example of a positive comment is a response in which the consumer encourages the CSR action which is the case in this example: *"Nice, we will light candles tonight and make it a cozy evening. I am already looking forward to it, nice and cozy, together in our house. And together we send a beautiful signal that we are really worried about our globe, our environment, nature, and the animal which are driven into a corner more and more!!!"*<sup>15</sup> A negative comment contains a reaction which discourages the company's CSR action(s): *"Your sustainability makes us the victims, we have to pay high energy rates to pay for your actions, give us back our previous energy rates!!!"*<sup>16</sup> The consumer is clearly against and negative about CSR actions, because he thinks he has to pay more money because the company is investing in CSR. The next quote provides an example of a neutral comment: *"If the Dutch government really wants to help the environment, they should put solar panels on every rooftop in the Netherlands."*<sup>17</sup> This consumer is responding to the CSR message about solar panels which Nuon posted, but he/she is neither positive or

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<sup>14</sup> Facebook.com/nuon, comment 13-03-2014

<sup>15</sup> Facebook.com/eneconederland, comment 29-03-2014

<sup>16</sup> Facebook.com/essent, comment 10-10-2013

<sup>17</sup> Facebook.com/nuon, comment 27-03-2014

negative about it; he/she is just commenting to the message. The significance of how consumers respond to CSR will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.



## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Discussion

This chapter starts with a conclusion to my second question: *How do consumers respond to CSR communication from energy companies on Facebook?* After the answer to his question is provided, my research question: *How do Dutch energy companies use Facebook to communicate their CSR strategies?* will be answered and a conclusion to the overall research will be provided. This will be done by summarizing the results which were analyzed in **Chapter 4** and by connecting them to the energy companies' backgrounds. The last part of this chapter contains a discussion of how the more general findings of my research connect to the broader theoretical issues which were discussed in my theoretical chapter. The discussion part of this chapter is divided based on corporate CSR communication on Facebook and consumer responses to CSR communication. Lastly, the limitations of this study will be discussed, and a recommendation for future research will be provided.

### 5.1 Conclusion

This master's thesis aimed to provide an answer to the question how Dutch energy companies communicate their CSR strategies on Facebook. The three largest energy companies in the Netherlands were researched in order to be able to reach an answer to this question. The companies' Facebook messages from between the period of July 1 2013 and April 30 2014 were examined, together with the first 300 comments from consumers to CSR-related messages.

From the theoretical chapter it became clear that both CSR communication (Du et al., 2010) and corporate communication on social media (Winer, 2013) have become very important for both companies and consumers. The results showed that CSR communication on Facebook has indeed become very important for energy companies, as twenty percent of the population of Facebook messages which were part of this research contained CSR communication. Moreover, the results provided more insight into how companies are communicating their CSR strategies on Facebook, as the different types of messages used for CSR communication, CSR topics, encouragement of CSR behavior, the description of the outcome of a CSR action, and CSR approaches were analyzed. This showed that energy companies are still holding on to more traditional forms of CSR communication even though CSR communication has moved online. Furthermore, the second question of how consumers

respond to CSR communication from energy companies on Facebook was attempted to get answered by analyzing the average amounts of comments, interactivity, and the tone of voice of consumers' comments. These results proved that consumer response to CSR communication is low compared to non-CSR related communication. Lastly, the results about interactivity between the energy companies and consumers showed that energy companies are exploring the interactive level of social media which makes social media such a useful tool for CSR communication (Jahdi & Acikdili, 2009).

Based on the sub conclusions from the previous chapters, it can be concluded that the answer to my second question of how consumers respond to CSR communication from Dutch energy companies is that consumers respond very diverse to CSR communication. It can be tentatively stated that consumers respond positive, as the amount of positive responses is higher than the amount of neutral and negative responses. but the differences in percentages are very small. Moreover, a large amount of the comments which were analyzed were not related to CSR communication even though these comments were posted in response to CSR posts from the energy companies. Based on the average amounts, it can be stated that consumers are not responding very actively to CSR communication on Facebook, as the average amount of comments to CSR-related messages is much lower than the average amount of comments to non-CSR related messages. To come to an overall conclusion to my second question: consumers are responding quite positive to CSR communication on Facebook as the amount of positive comments and neutral comments is much higher than the amount of negative comments, but they are not yet actively engaging in CSR communication on Facebook as the average amount of comments for CSR-related communication is much lower than the average amount of comments to non-CSR related communication.

From all the previous chapters, it can be concluded that CSR communication is part of Dutch energy companies' communication strategies. The answer to my research question: *How do Dutch energy companies communicate their CSR strategies on Facebook?* is that the companies mostly communicate their CSR strategies on Facebook through the traditional form of CSR communication which are PR-messages with a public relations approach in which they do not yet fully make use of the opportunity to interact with consumers. Moreover, the topics which the companies and consumers interact about are often not CSR related, as became clear during the data analysis. The companies are thus not very often

engaging consumers in their CSR strategies by interacting with them. The companies which were part of this research are mainly focused on the CSR topic sustainability/environment, which can be explained by the fact that this is the CSR topic that matches the companies' overall strategies and goals the best as they benefit from sustainability as well. According to previous theory, this would make their CSR communication successful, although there are other factors which would make their CSR communication unsuccessful, as for example the description of the outcome of a CSR action and the CSR approach. The description of the outcome of a CSR action is present in many messages, but not as present as it should be, as it is a necessary characteristic of successful CSR communication according to previous theory (Du et al., 2010). In general, based on previous theory, Dutch energy companies would not be considered to have very successful CSR communication, because the aspects that are necessary for CSR communication to be successful are missing in about half of their CSR messages, as the companies do not always provide consumers with the description of a CSR outcome, they do not always use the right CSR approach, and interactivity is only limited. When it comes to CSR topic, energy companies are mostly focusing on the topic which matches their identity, namely sustainability/environment which is also important for the success of CSR communication.

## ***5.2 Discussion***

### ***5.2.1 Corporate CSR communication on Facebook***

CSR communication on social media has become more and more important (Du et al., 2010). This becomes clear from the fact that twenty percent of all Facebook communication from the population of messages from the energy companies which were part of this research is related to CSR. However, one of the companies has published a much lower amount of CSR communication than the other two companies, which tells something about all CSR communication from energy companies. As already discussed in the previous chapter, Eneco and Nuon state sustainability as part of their main strategy which can be found on their websites. Unlike the other two companies, Essent does not state sustainability as part of their main strategy which could explain why they have published less CSR communication than the other two companies. However, Essent does provide a lot of information about CSR and sustainability on its website. They even provide more

information on CSR on their website than the other two companies. This seems contradictory to the fact that Essent has published such a low amount of CSR communication on Facebook. It could be the case that Essent did not yet adopt Facebook as part of their communication strategy for CSR communication and considers their website a more suitable way to communicate CSR. However, this is only one possible explanation as many explanations can be found. From the population of messages which were analyzed, it becomes clear that Dutch energy companies have made CSR part of their online communication strategies

CSR communication used to be communicated through press releases which were released once in a while (Du et al., 2010). This makes it not very surprising that the most often occurring type of message for CSR communication on Facebook is a PR-message. This shows that even though CSR communication has moved to social media, companies still hold on to old formats of communication. The fact that news is the second most often used form of CSR communication on Facebook is not very surprising either, as this is also a very traditional form of corporate communication. However, since Facebook is designed to post short and compact messages, it is also quite logical that these more traditional forms of corporate communication are transferred to social media, as they allow for links to other websites where more information can be provided. This is often the case for both types of messages. From this fact, it can be tentatively concluded that even though CSR communication has moved to online platforms like social media, the essence of CSR communication is still the same based on the most frequent types of messages.

Based on the results from my research, it seems that the fact stated by Du et al. (2010) that most companies have now gone mainstream with their CSR communication, instead of releasing a report about their CSR strategies once in a while is confirmed. CSR communication is definitely released more often than once in a while, as there are eighty one messages which contain CSR communication from the energy companies over a time period of ten months. According to McWilliams and Siegel (2001), engaging in CSR gives companies a competitive advantage, as it helps in winning consumers' trust of the company. However, since all energy companies are now regularly publishing CSR communication, this competitive advantage seems to be gone. The fact that all three companies have adopted CSR strategies and regularly publish CSR communication shows that CSR is very significant and highly relevant for corporate communication. It seems indeed necessary to inform

consumers about CSR efforts on a regular basis. However, the fact that CSR communication has a lower amount of consumer responses seems to be somewhat contradictory to this fact, which will be discussed in more detail below.

As already discussed in **Chapter 2**, CSR communication is usually focused on the engagement of a company in a social cause, and is not as much about asking for attention for the social cause itself (Du et al., 2010). This is the case because CSR strategies and communication is designed to benefit the company itself, and not to cause real social change. This explains why sustainability/environment is by far the most occurring CSR topic in my results. Adopting sustainable strategies is necessary if we still want to have enough energy in the future. Moreover, consumers value sustainability more and more nowadays (Haanpää, 2007). It thus benefits energy companies to become more sustainable and to adopt sustainable CSR strategies. It is also a believable cause to be involved in as an energy company. The same is the case for green marketing, which is why it will not be considered separately in this discussion.

Consumers are often very skeptical of CSR communication when the benefits of CSR efforts for the company are not clear (Du et al., 2010; Pomeroy et al., 2013). It is quite clear why energy companies would invest in sustainability which decreases the chance that consumers will be skeptical of the companies' CSR efforts. Less skepticism means more successful CSR communication. The fact that Eneco posted by far the most frequently about sustainability/environment can be explained by the fact that sustainability has been part of Eneco's main strategy for longer than the other two companies. Moreover, Eneco is the most sustainable energy supplier of the three selected companies (Consumentenbond.nl, 2013), which is probably the result of their complete focus on sustainability and in turn also explains why they post CSR information about sustainability/environment more frequently than the other two energy companies.

As already discussed in the previous chapter, the amount of CSR communication about charity/social issue is quite low. Based on these results, it can be stated that this is the case because there are less benefits for energy companies to be involved in charity or a social issue than to be involved in sustainability and/or the environment. However, it can still benefit them if they effectively communicate their involvement. It should thus be clear why they are involved in charity or a social cause, otherwise consumers will be very skeptical and the CSR communication will not be effective (Pomeroy et al., 2013). Nuon published by far

the most CSR communication about charity/social issue. For some of their messages, it was very clear why they would be involved, as for example messages in which they tell consumers that they will invest money in dark tunnels to make them more save which would give them constant publicity. They also published messages about being involved into charities for which it was much less clear why they would be involved. However, more research would have to be conducted to be able to say something about how consumers respond to messages for which it is very clear why a company would be involved and for messages where this is not clear, as this goes beyond the scope of this research.

The encouragement of CSR behavior can be considered in relation to the above. In order to be successful, the motives behind CSR communication should be clear if companies want consumers to consider their CSR communication to be trustworthy (Du et al., 2010). Green marketing and the encouragement of CSR behavior could help in convincing consumers of this, as these concepts provide companies with a way to involve consumers into their own CSR strategies. This also explains why encouragement of CSR behavior most often occurs together with the topic sustainability; energy companies want to get consumers involved into their sustainable ideas and strategies.

Du et al. (2010) argue that consumers are mostly interested in the results of a CSR action and not as much in how these results are reached. The outcome of a CSR effort is the only thing consumers can check; checking which steps were taken to reach the result is much harder (Pomering et al., 2013). From the results in the previous chapter, it became clear that the selected companies specifically described the outcome of a CSR action in just over half of their CSR communication. Consumers consider the social impact of a CSR effort one of the best ways to discover companies' underlying motives, which explains why they are so interested in CSR results. Pomering et al. (2013) even argue that the description of the outcome of a CSR action determines its effectiveness, which would mean that only half of the total CSR communication from my population would be effective. However, this cannot be stated based on my results alone and is also not the goal of my research as the effectiveness does not tell anything about *how* energy companies are communicating CSR. Research about consumer response would be necessary in order to be able to conclude whether CSR communication which does not describe any results of CSR efforts is less effective.

The type of message which most often contained a description of the outcome of a CSR action was again the PR-message. This again shows that even though CSR communication has moved to social media and has become more frequent, energy companies are still holding on to old ways to communicate their CSR strategies even though social media are a relatively new platform. The fact that messages about events also often contain descriptions of the outcome of a CSR action shows that energy companies really want to convince consumers of their CSR strategies, as most of these messages were invitations to consumers to come visit a finished CSR project which contributed to sustainability. Moreover, again both types of messages which most often described the outcome of a CSR action contained links to other websites where more CSR information was provided. This shows that even though energy companies have adopted Facebook into their CSR communication strategies, they still need other forms of online media to communicate their CSR strategies.

Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009) argue that the approach companies use for their CSR strategies and communication should be a believable match to their corporate identity if they want their CSR communication to be successful. Since public relations is the most frequently used approach for the energy companies which are part of this research, it can be stated that these companies use an approach which matches their identity as every company has its own public relations strategies. However, consumers perceive this approach as an 'extrinsic' motive (Du et al., 2010), which makes consumers believe that companies are only engaged into CSR for its own benefits. The proactive approach however, is also frequently used which is an approach that based on Du et al's. (2010) description would be considered an 'intrinsic motive,' which is a motive that is supposed to be trusted by consumers. Moreover, five different approaches were used in the total CSR communication, which makes it possible to tentatively state that the companies do consider which approach they take for each CSR message.

The philanthropic approach was one of the least often used approaches. This can be explained by the fact that a mere philanthropic approach is not enough, because it does not make clear the benefits for the company (Mögele & Tropp, 2010). There should be a balance between these two aspects, but the benefits should definitely be clearly communicated. In a philanthropic approach, none of the benefits are communicated which means that consumers will be skeptical of messages with this approach (Pomering et al., 2013; Du et al.,

2010). Moreover, the energy companies are mostly focused on sustainability which often already clearly benefits them, which limits the possibility to use a philanthropic approach. A similar statement can be made about the profit-driven approach for which this goes the other way around; it is too focused on the benefits for the company and not enough on the philanthropic aspects of the CSR effort. The companies have thus mostly succeeded in finding a balance between both aspects, as both the philanthropic and the profit-driven approach are used very limited.

Since public relations is the most frequently used approach, it can again be stated that energy companies still use traditional approaches and communication strategies for their CSR communication even though they have moved to a more modern medium. However, this might be just the case because it is the most suitable approach for this type of the communication and not because the companies cannot let go of their past strategies. PR-messages are not considered to be very trustworthy by consumers, but they are at least considered more trustworthy than advertisements (Pomering et al., 2013), which is the most often occurring type of message for Facebook communication. Consumers now use social media to get information on companies and products (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and PR-messages provide a way to provide them with the information the companies want them to have, whether consumers trust it or not.

### *5.2.2 Consumer interactivity for CSR messages*

It is remarkable that the results show that the average amount of comments is much lower for CSR-related communication than for non-CSR related communication. However, this can be explained by the fact that all three companies very regularly post polls, games, tips/suggestions to consumers, and competitions which are not related to CSR. During the data analysis and from the results, it became very clear that these types of messages get much more responses than other types of messages. It could be stated that a low amount of comments means that consumers are accepting CSR communication without much skepticism. This statement is based on the fact that consumers find social media a very useful platform to discuss companies and/or products (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). When consumers are skeptical, Facebook is an attractive medium to express their skepticism, which they do not do very often for the CSR communication which was part of this research, which will be discussed in more detail below.



The differences in the average amount of comments between the different CSR topics (sustainability/environment, charity/social issue, and green marketing) are too small to be significant to be taken into consideration for this discussion, as are the differences for messages which encourage CSR behavior and messages which do not. The CSR approach is relevant because, as already discussed above, the approach has a lot of influence on how consumers perceive CSR communication. Public relations has one of the lowest average amount of comments which could mean that this is an approach which does not attract many consumer responses, neither positive or negative. The philanthropic approach has a much higher average amount of responses, but the average is still close to the mean for the population. This approach does get more responses than for example the public relations approach which could be the case because consumers are more skeptical of this approach (Du et al., 2010; Pomering et al., 2013). However, one could also argue that a high amount of comments is positive and desirable for companies because this means that consumers are engaging in the companies' messages. Moreover, more comments means more opportunities for interaction with consumers, which can help companies to get consumers more engaged to their CSR efforts and strategies (Du et al., 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This was also proven by my results, which showed that there is direct relation between the average amount of comments and direct interaction. The higher the average amount of comments for CSR-related communication, the higher the chance that there was direct interaction between the company and consumers. Since there was direct interaction for the larger part of all CSR communication, it can be argued that companies did make use of Facebook's interactive function for their CSR communication, but their use is still rather limited.

As already explained in the previous chapter, the tone of voice of comments from consumers is important because consumer responses also say something about how CSR is communicated on Facebook. The fact that almost one-third of the comments included in the sample is not related to the content of the CSR messages shows that consumers do not necessarily use Facebook to discuss a certain message, but that they also see it as a medium to discuss the company in general. The majority of comments to CSR posts was positive, although the difference in percentages with neutral and negative comments is small (see **Chapter 4, paragraph 4.2.2**). From these results it can tentatively be concluded that the energy companies' CSR communication is quite successful. Moreover, it confirms the fact

that consumers value information about companies' CSR strategies more and more (Du et al., 2010), as a positive tone of voice means that consumers are reacting with approval to the CSR communication. The fact that almost half of all responses is neutral or negative shows that consumers can indeed be very skeptical or suspicious of CSR communication. The way consumers respond to CSR communication on Facebook is significant because it impacts the way companies communicate their CSR strategies.

### *5.2.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research*

The limitations of this study can be found in the fact that consumer response is only a small part of this study. Investigating consumer response could help to provide much more insight into how CSR communication on Facebook is perceived and whether consumers think the way the companies are communicating CSR on Facebook is effective and useful, which also tells something about how energy companies are communicating their CSR strategies. Moreover, this could help energy companies develop their CSR communication strategies.

The theoretical approach which was taken for this research concentrated on both the corporate perspective of CSR communication and the consumer perspective of CSR communication. However, as this research was done by coding CSR-related messages from the three selected energy companies and by coding comments from consumers, the results on how consumers respond to CSR communication are limited. Interviews or experiments on how consumers respond to CSR communication would have provided more insight. The results on consumer responses are thus rather limited, and should be extended in order to come to a more solid conclusion.

Another limitation can be found in the sampling for this research. The sample was based on a specific period of time which only contained a limited amount of CSR messages. It would be more useful to select different years, because this can tell something about changes in the ways in which CSR strategies are communicated. Moreover, the sample I took provided me with a very limited amount of CSR communication, even so that the sample had to be extended midway through the research in order to gain enough CSR communication to be able to perform statistical significance tests. The sample thus limited the research because it was a very small period of time with quite a limited amount of CSR communication. A more substantial sample and thus a more substantial research would provide much more insight into how companies are communicating CSR on Facebook. It

could also be useful to only include messages which contain CSR communication, as this gives the opportunity to analyze much more data which contains CSR and thus to be able to find out more about CSR communication.

Based on the limitations of this research as provided above, I would recommend a more substantial research in which both the corporate perspective on CSR communication and the consumer perspective get equal attention. A combined method of quantitative content analysis and an experiment where consumers are confronted with CSR communication on Facebook would likely work very well. The tone of voice of comments on Facebook definitely tell something about how consumers perceive CSR communication, but it does not tell as much as talking to consumers, since one can only guess what the thoughts and ideas behind a comment were. For corporate CSR communication, quantitative content analysis works well, so I would recommend using this method again.

## Chapter 6: References

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## Appendix A

### Coding Handbook: CSR communication on Facebook

This handbook provides coding guidelines for the nine coding categories which are part of the codebook.

#### Category I: Type of Message

In this category, we code the *type of message*. '1. Advertisement' is coded when the message contains information about a company's product or service. The name of the product or service should be explicitly mentioned and/or commercial terms should be used. Commercial terms are considered to be words like "buy," "contract," or "customer." '2. Poll' is selected when consumers are asked to give their opinion about a certain topic, either by selecting one of the multiple choice answers or by stating their opinion. '3. Competition' is coded when consumers are asked to answer a question or guess an answer and there is a prize to win. The question does not ask consumers for their opinion, but for a correct answer. An example of such a question is: what is the most often occurring type of sustainable energy? If such questions are asked, but there is no prize to win, the message is coded as '4. Game.' '5. News' is coded when a message contains information either from the company itself or from an external source about a certain topic. The news should be recent and objective; the company does not get promoted. If the company does get promoted, the message is not coded as '5. News' but as '7. PR-message.' The company is considered to get promoted when the message contains positive information about how the company is functioning. '6. Event' is coded when an event gets promoted in the message. The term "event" or the name of an event should be used in order for a message to be coded as '6. Event.' '7. PR-message' is coded if the message contains a larger amount of information than the average Facebook post (at least five sentences) or a link to a page with a larger amount of information (at least five sentences) in which certain information about the company or developments surrounding the company is given. The link can also contain a video. Moreover, '7. PR-message' is coded when the message consists of promotional information which cannot be coded as '1. Advertisement.' This means that the name of a product of service is not explicitly mentioned nor are there any commercial terms used. '8. Comment or

question to consumers' is selected when the company is making a comment in which it is addressing consumers of when they state a wish for their consumers. They are directly addressing consumers by use of words like "you" combined with a comment about a certain topic or a question on how consumers usually do something. This type of message is usually very short. Examples are messages in which the companies wish consumers a wonderful holiday or a message in which they ask consumers how they do laundry. The last variable in *Category I*, '9. Tip/suggestion to consumers' is coded when the company gives a tip or makes a suggestion about a certain topic. This type of message contains terms like "try" or "we suggest" followed by an adjustment consumers could make, for example to save energy, or any other type of suggestion. If terms like "try" or "suggest" are not present and there neither is a clear suggestion for consumers to do or change something, the message is coded as '8. Comment or question to consumer.'

#### Category II: CSR Topic

In this category, the *CSR topic* is coded. '10. Sustainability/environment' is coded when either one of these topics is directly mentioned or the message contains a clear link to this topic. A message is coded as '10. Sustainability/environment' when the term "sustainability" or an equivalent to this term is used. The same is the case for the term "environment." Moreover, a message is coded as '10.' if terms which are directly related to sustainability are used. Examples are terms related to sustainable energy or sustainable ways to generate energy, as for example "wind energy," "green energy," or "windmill parks." We choose '11. Charity/social issue' when donations from the company to a charity are mentioned or when consumers are encouraged to donate money to charity; when actions which the company undertook for a charity are mentioned or when the company encourages consumers to take action; when the actions a charity undertook are mentioned; when a partnership with a charity is mentioned. The term "charity" or the name of a charity should be directly mentioned. '11. Charity/social issue' is also coded when a message addresses a topic which is important for society which is not related to sustainability or the environment. In this case, the terms "society" or "social issue" should be used. '12. Green marketing' is coded when consumers are directly encouraged to adopt sustainable behavior. The message should thus directly address consumers, which means that the word "you" has to be used for a message to be coded as green marketing. This means that if this is the case, a message is coded as



'12. Green marketing' rather than 10. Sustainability/environment.' 13. None of the above' is selected when a message cannot be coded based on the criteria for the topics described above. This means that the message is considered not to contain any CSR communication.

#### Category III: Post related to CSR

This category is crucial for the coding of the other categories. One codes '14. yes' if option 10, 11, or, 12, was coded in *Category II*. Variable '12. Green marketing' is the only exception; this variable can be coded together with variable '15. No.' We code '12. Green marketing' as '14. Yes' when the CSR motive behind the green marketing is clearly expressed in the post. This is the case when the post also contains the terms "sustainability" and/or "environment." '15. No' when no CSR motive is clearly expressed in the post, so when neither of the terms "sustainability" or "environment" are used. If '13. None of the above' was coded, one selects variable '13. No.' When this variable is coded, the message will be excluded from further coding.

#### Category IV: Encouragement of CSR behavior

In this category, we code whether a post encourages consumers to adopt CSR behavior. '15. Yes' is coded when the post directly stimulates consumers to adopt CSR behavior. The post should contain a link between the message and the readers, which means that consumers are addressed directly by the use of the word "you" or the post contains a question or comment in which consumers are asked or encouraged to take a certain action or adopt a certain behavior. '16. No' is coded when there is no direct encouragement towards consumers to adopt CSR behavior. Consumers should be directly addressed and thus directly encouraged to adopt this kind of behavior, otherwise we code '16. No.' The other variables are selected based on what was coded in *Category II*.

#### Category V: Description of outcome of CSR action

This category is coded as '22. Yes' if a message contains a clear description of what results were reached by taking CSR efforts. This could for example be an action that a charity took because the company donated money or the mentioning of CO2 reduction as a result from the company's CSR efforts. Either the term "result" should be used or the coder should be able to apply the word "result" to the post and the post should be in the past tense, since

this means that a result is already reached. If the term “result” is not mentioned or applicable to a message, the message is coded as ‘23. No.’

#### Category VI: CSR approach

In this category, we code the CSR approach which is underlying the message. We code ‘24. Public relations’ when the company is “communicating its CSR intentions” to consumers (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009, p.105). CSR intentions must either be explicitly mentioned in the post or clearly be underlying the message. ‘25. Profit driven’ is selected when the message contains CSR information which does not mention any benefits for consumers. Products or services should be mentioned in the post itself of the post should contain a link to the company’s website in which products or services are mentioned, for it to be coded as ‘25. Profit driven.’ We code ‘26. Proactive’ when the message is anticipating “need for and possible benefits of CSR” (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009, p.105). This variable is only coded when the need for or the possible benefits of the CSR effort are explicitly described or when certain images are used which show CSR business practices. Terms like “need,” “necessity,” or “benefit” should be used in the post together with a description of one of the company’s CSR actions. This could also be an image, for example an image of a windmill park. ‘27. Partnership’ is coded when a partnership with consumers, charity, or other companies is described or when this is the most prominent part of the message. This means that terms like “partner(ship)” or “together with” should be used or the name of a charity or company should be mentioned. The last variable in this category ‘28. Philanthropic’ is selected if the message pays attention to the welfare of people or the environment. The benefits for the company should not be clear at all; the action or effort described in the message should appear to be completely selfless. A donation or similar kind of action which helps people or the environment should be mentioned.

#### Category VII: Number of comments

In this category, we fill in the number of comments to each message posted by the company.

#### Category VIII: Direct interaction between company and commenter

In this category, we register if there is any direct interaction between the company and consumers. ‘29. Yes’ is coded when the company responds to at least one consumer’s

comment(s) underneath a certain message. If this is not the case, we code '30. No.' This category is only coded for messages which contain CSR communication, which means they were coded as '14. Yes' for *Category III*.

#### Category IX: Tone of voice of comments

In this category, we code the *tone of voice of comments* which are directly related to a post from the company. We code '31. Positive/approving' if the comment is approving or supporting the CSR post. A comment is considered positive when positive words are used and the comment has a positive tone of voice. Examples of positive words are: "good," "support," "approve," "nice," "satisfied," "great" etc. Note that these words are only examples of positive words and more words than these examples can make a post considered to be positive. We code '32. Neutral' when a comment does neither have a negative or positive tone of voice and does not contain any of the type of words which are coded as '32' or '33'. '33. Negative/disapproving' is coded when a consumer clearly disapproves of the CSR post. The consumer uses negative words and a negative tone of voice in his/her comment. Examples of negative words are: "disapprove," "dislike," "waste," "distrust," "stupid" etc. Note that these words are only examples of negative words and more words than these examples can make a post considered to be negative. '34. Non-related' is selected when a consumer posts a comment which is not related to the topic of the CSR post, for example a question about an invoice.

## Codebook: CSR Communication on Facebook

### *Category I. Type of message*

1. Advertisement
2. Poll
3. Competition
4. Game
5. News
6. Event
7. PR-message
8. Question or comment to consumers
9. Tip/suggestion to consumers

### *Category II. CSR Topic*

10. Sustainability/environment
11. Charity/ social issue
12. Green marketing
13. None of the above

### *Category III. Post related to CSR*

14. Yes
15. No

### *Category IV. Encouragement of CSR behavior*

16. No
17. Yes, encouraging sustainable behavior
18. Yes, encouraging donations to charity
19. Yes, encouraging to contribute to social issue
20. Yes, encouraging to contribute to the environment
21. Yes, other

### *Category V. Description of outcome of CSR action*

22. Yes
23. No

### *Category VI. CSR approach*

24. Public relations
25. Profit driven
26. Proactive
27. Partnership
28. Philanthropic

### *Category VII. Number of comments*

### *Category VIII. Direct interaction between company and commenter*

29. Yes
30. No

*Category IX. Tone of voice of comments*

31. Positive/Approving
32. Neutral
33. Negative/Disapproving
34. Non-related