

# Quality reporting of corporate philanthropy

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## Abstract-

### Purpose

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to outline a framework for corporate philanthropy (CP) reporting that could help differentiate between symbolic and substantive reporting; and second, to test whether the reporting practices of large corporate donors are symbolic or substantive.

### Design/methodology/approach

First, to construct a framework for CP reporting, the authors draw from research on corporate social responsibility communication, CP and reputational capital-building. Second, the philanthropy disclosures found in non-financial reports of the largest donors from the list of Fortune 100 corporations were examined using content analysis.

### Findings

The theoretical framework identifies key ingredients of disclosure quality such as goals, causes, support, partners and impacts. The empirical findings show that disclosures regarding CP are more symbolic than meaningful. The largest donors provide descriptive information regarding the CP plan that primarily focuses on projects and causes. However, they fail to provide an explicit account of their decisions and the results of their philanthropic activities.

### Research limitations/implications

The framework could also be applied with small changes to other communication outlets including social media and corporate websites.

### Originality/value

This paper addresses an important gap in non-financial reporting research: the lack of a CP accounting model. To the authors's knowledge, the framework developed in this paper represents the first conceptualization of the

**quality of CP disclosure that may enable scholars to differentiate symbolic from substantive CP and in this way advances the debate on CP communication. This framework can also help companies sincerely engaged in philanthropy to benefit from these activities.**

**Index Terms- Disclosures; Corporate philanthropy; Fortune 100; Quality reporting;**

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