

**Thesis Final Version**

**Student: Alessandro Fantin**

**Supervisor: Dr. Luisa García-Manso**

**Second Reader: Dr. Sergio Baauw**

**Intercultural Communication and Translation: Deconstructing  
Amazon Corporate Communication in Multimodal Advertising and  
Media Channels**



**#deliveringsmiles**

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## **Abstract**

In the run to brand their image and engage stakeholders, international organizations and fast-growing companies have to deal with different cultures and languages daily. Advertising the image of a large corporation is, in fact, a process often carried out globally on intercultural bases; however, the ideology behind the company, the driving forces, the goals, the values and their meanings are also unique. How do corporations maintain unique missions whilst conveying the same universal message to a variety of target audiences? This thesis tackles this question by investigating how Amazon corporate communication employs strategies on different media to achieve their business goals on a global and local level. Stemming from Intercultural Communication theories, this research draws upon a multidisciplinary approach that intertwines organizational and business concepts, semiotic, discourse analysis, translation studies and imagology. This wide range of theories is necessary to investigate multimodal corporate communication from diverse media channels. This consequently sheds light on the changes content undergoes when subject to communication processes between cultures. Due to the recent trend in exploiting sustainability issues in this context, Corporate Social Responsibility (hereinafter CSR) strategies acquired major relevance during the analysis. Among the results, this research detects an array of techniques varying according to the medium and target audience: exertion of power, use of common images and representations, and a strong appeal to emotions. The thesis also touches upon the ethical dimension of employing CSR strategies when these do not reflect actual behavior but only benefit the company image.

## 1. Introduction

Amazon is a global company launched in 1999 by Jeff Bezos as an online marketplace for books. It was one of the first companies to firmly believe in electronic commerce; and soon after its launch, it rapidly started expanding in electronics, furniture, apparel and many other markets. As Belanger (2018) states in "*Fortune Global 500 List 2018: See Who Made It*", it is one of the top internet companies per revenue in the world to date.

As a multinational company, however, Amazon has also been the subject of many controversies. Since 2013 the internet giant has been widely criticized for unethical behavior towards its workers and the environment. The publicity surrounding cases directly linked to Amazon, such as hunger strikes and suicides, led larger media outlets to report on these matters and question the company's ethical role. This negative media attention led Amazon corporate reputation to face many challenges such as strikes around Europe and the United States. During this period, Amazon's image was deeply threatened. As a reaction, Amazon's corporate communication department started addressing the challenges the company was facing in terms of CSR by drawing codes of conduct and implementing the company's website with different sections on sustainability, innovation and human rights. Among the many challenges in spreading an ethical image and regaining trust and credibility in stakeholders, Amazon had to deal with customers of different nationalities, languages and cultures.

Taking this context as a starting point, this thesis attempts to provide an overview of the challenges that organizations face while building their image, engaging different stakeholders and dealing with different cultures and languages through a variety of media. As an outcome, this paper evidently recognizes intercultural communication specialists as a proper fit for corporate communication interventions. Moreover, by analyzing Amazon's corporate communication strategies with relation to CSR, it also tries to provide some guidelines to leapfrog these obstacles when different target audiences come into the organization's sights.

In a more globalized world, however, where lifestyles and interests switch from local to global and vice versa in a post-modern paradigm, the concept of *glocal* cultures – close to intercultural (corporate) communication – is brought to life. This concept originates from Robertson (1992) theory of *glocalization*, a term which looks at global and local phenomena as the opposite faces of the same coin, which builds new, diverse, cultural practices where the two faces intertwine. When considering such a concept, related to communities that share specific practices, interests and values, it is fundamental to consider not only the role of a shared language, but also of shared images and symbols.

## 1.1. State of the art

As one of the largest corporations in the world, Amazon's success has been in the spotlight since its establishment. The reasons for this success are mainly attributed to the company's attitude to integrate innovation (Berinsky et al. 2012) – such as e-commerce (Filson, 2004) –, to its customer service (Kebli & Chen, 2006) and to the relevance of customer reviews on Amazon.com (Hesse, 2004; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Nevertheless, no prior studies examine the role of an efficient corporate communication strategy that comprises CSR initiatives on different media, contexts and languages. Using Amazon as a case study, this paper will shed light on how these strategies brand the images of companies and build their socially responsible reputation in different cultures through different media, thus bridging an existing gap in the current academic discourse.

Previous research has identified CSR as a cornerstone for corporate communication. As Maon & Lindgreen (2014) point out, the understanding of CSR seems to have reached reasonable levels and a thorough review of the concept is provided in the following section. What the authors also recognize, is how important these strategies are and how companies use them to engage stakeholders, manage social expectations and achieve business goals. Specifically, they included cultural aspects on their theoretical framework and focused on Corporate Cultural Responsibility, or “the cultural impacts of corporations, at various levels of their business models, activities, and outcomes on the value systems and enduring beliefs of affected people” (Maon & Lindgreen, 2014: 756). Within this framework, CSR has also been studied in relation to new media in order to show their joint efficiency.

While these communication technologies developed, companies started to expand their markets and audiences by implementing strategies on an international level. Consequently, academics began to investigate the relationship between advertising and translation studies. Studies focused on connecting the two fields (Munday, 2004), on the translation of rhetorical figures in headlines (Smith, 2006) and on micro-textual elements of Source Text and Target Text (Adab, 2001). What has been overlooked, however, is the importance of proper translation and adaptation processes for targeted audiences diverging in lifestyle, interests, and cultures. Considering the exponential growth of communication technologies and networks, this paper investigates how these processes and strategies are used in the abovementioned media. Doorslaer et al. also highlight the importance of integrating an imagological approach within a translation study, because it can offer “the conceptual apparatus to trace the trajectories of images across language and cultures and indicate the shifts stereotypes undergo in crossing language and cultural boundaries” (2015:6). This

thesis benefits thus from an imagological approach in the analysis of how organizations target intercultural audiences in glocalization processes.

In trying to construct a socially responsible identity, engage stakeholders, and *persuade converging specific groups in diverging countries*, organizations must be able to convey the same meaning to different cultures, through different media and strategies. This is true both for fast-growing organizations aiming to ‘go global’ and for corporates with international audiences. Smith’s (2008) recognition of the necessity of ‘cross-cultural expertise’ in the creation and adaptation of global campaigns highlights again the importance of intercultural communicators in today’s organizations.

The first objective of this research is to provide an overview of corporate communication strategies in branding a company. Due to its recent success, particular attention will be given to CSR communication. Other relevant findings such as the transmission of cultural, linguistic and contextual differences will also be discussed. Second, the theoretical framework provides insights into how companies strive to achieve “the link between functional equivalence and intercultural understanding” (House, 2016: 6) and make use of cultural and contextual differences to engage stakeholders and persuade target audiences. This, consequently, will shed light on methods to convey meaning and its connotations to diverse audiences.

## 1.2. Research questions

The following research questions focus on Amazon as a case study in the intercultural challenges of corporate communication. Due to the iterative nature of qualitative research (Dörnyei: 295), shifts of focus and interests were justified until saturation of data was reached.

How does Amazon corporate communication face the challenges of building its global reputation and achieving a socially responsible status?

To properly answer this question, the thesis will also address these sub-questions:

To what extent do media channels affect Amazon corporate communication strategy to improve its reputation and engage its stakeholders?

How does Amazon translate its corporate communication to build the company’s reputation and to engage the target audiences addressing different cultures and languages (English, Italian, Spanish)?



## 2. Theoretical framework

Underpinned by theories of organizational and business communication, meaning, representation, translation and imagology, the present framework aims to provide the right tools to shed light on the existing potential commonalities between corporate communication practices and adaptation processes when organizations brand their image (inter)nationally with campaigns on different (g)local levels. Since intercultural communication is an interdisciplinary field (Hua, 2019), this paper refers to different sides of various disciplines. In the first section, a review of corporate communication as an intercultural practice highlighting the use of CSR initiatives to enhance the company reputation will be discussed. I will then investigate the concept of multimodality and integrate it to discuss how different media affect communication practices. Finally, zooming out and bringing corporate communication on an international level, I will make use of imagology and translation studies to analyze how language and cultural images affects Amazon strategies.

### *2.1 Intercultural Corporate Communication and Social Responsibility*

Corporate communication is defined by Trosborg (2010) as every form of goal-oriented communication whose purpose is making financial profit. As this kind of communication is mostly related to international companies, scholars confirm that corporate communication discourse brings along different cultures and languages (Trosborg, 2010; Scollon & Scollon, 1994; Doorley & Garcia, 2010). The latter assumption is embodied in the phrase ‘*think global, act local*’, often used in international marketing settings to encourage organizations to adapt their message for different communities. Such a phenomenon has been observed in the last decade and raised organizations awareness on the importance of trust, credibility and authenticity in the company’s branding process worldwide. As one of the many consequences, organizations today pay more attention to the rapport with stakeholders by attempting to engage them in several activities through different media outlets. Together with an extensive understanding and knowledge of different cultural audiences, these are the ‘imperatives’ for effective corporate global communication (Doorley & Garcia, 2010).

However, as Doorley and Garcia also put it, it has been “increasingly recognized that global reputation is not measured solely by financial performances but also by companies’ contributions to society” (2010: 250). As a response to the recent ‘green revolution’, CSR has become a crucial and strategic focus for many international corporations. Brunk argues that “uncountable definitions and conceptualizations of CSR have been offered, reflecting the breadth of the CSR domain and its



various viewpoints” (2010: 256). However, since CSR is generally recognized as every activity that entails a pro-active stance of the organization toward society and the environment (Brunk, 2010), this thesis considers aspects such as sustainability, innovation, inclusion and diversity, economic development and contribution to society as part of CSR.

Bringing companies to higher standards of sustainability is a widespread strategy known as ‘*green branding*’ defined by Hartmann et al. as “a specific set of brand attributes and benefits related to the reduced environmental impact of the brand and its perception as being environmentally sound” (2005: 10). This branding process has extensive consequences on the image of companies, and initiatives enhancing the company’s CSR status influence the perception of stakeholders and customers purchasing behavior. As scholars (Usunier, 2005; Brunk, 2010; Post, 2013) argue, constructing this brand image is a crucial marketing activity and is *specifically addressed to a target audience*. Amongst the main strategies for a proper green branding, Hartmann et al. (2005) state that advertising campaigns are often the major driver in the development of brand perception. What also contributes to a positive image, lastly, is a successful engagement of stakeholders, which can also generate favorable attitudes and better support behavior (Adi, 2015).

## 2.2. *The multimodal aspect of Corporate Communication*

A crucial feature of corporate communication is its multimodality, which the World Wide Web technology has deeply shaped in the latest decade. This focus on multimodality of discourses aligns with scholars who “recognize that all communication is constructed across a number of planes (e.g. verbal, nonverbal, and visual), and realized through semiotic resources (*language being only one of them*) drawn upon to create meaning” (Hua, 2016: 270, *emphasis added*). Moreover, taking multimodality on a sociocultural level, Hua (2016) stresses that messages and meanings change according to the cultural context they are produced in and presented to.

In order to provide an overview of corporate communication and the challenges at stake, I follow Trosborg (2010) suggestion to investigate different visual, audial and textual elements. Together with the ongoing digitalization, this does not suggest that researchers should focus on single or conventional methods, but rather to include different channels. To further underpin the choice of multimodality, **Adi (2015) identifies social media as powerful tools for CSR communication which facilitate both global and local exchange of information and allow people to sincerely express their opinions, attitudes and behavior – also toward companies.**

Within this post-modern multimodal frame, advertising constitutes a crucial side of corporate communication. Munday (2004) defines advertising as a complex discourse type that

encompasses different media – such as written or audiovisual – and different semiotic aggregates. This feature of making use of different modalities, which I will focus on, is defined as multimodal advertising and is considered “a revolution for all advertising and media communication” (2004: 213). This makes advertising critical within intercultural research, because it employs different media and modes to convey the same message to different (small or national) cultures.

However, Usunier (2005) specifies that meaning is also conveyed differently according to the medium. While texts and written advertising convey meaning through language, audio-visual advertising makes use of images and representations. On the other hand, advertising types which merge different media, such as brochures, billboards and digital advertising in general, make use of both semiotic and discursive features. The importance of inputs from both approaches in marketing communications is recognized by Usunier, who, to summarize the relationship between the two fields, states that “advertising, which is based on language and communication, is the most culture-bound element of the marketing mix” (2005: 409).

### *2.3. Language & Translation: adapting systems of representation for different cultures*

Different audiences, with specific interests and values, can be identified in national cultures and in their respective markets. However, approaching the term culture from a non-essentialist point of view, these audiences can also be compared to what Holliday defines as *small cultures*, or “social groupings or activities wherever there is cohesive behavior” (1999: 237). The advantage of using such a concept, the author highlights, is to get away from an essentialist perspective – which tries to catch the essence of national cultures – towards a wider and more dynamic range of culture formation. According to this concept, a cabinet crew, a football team, an international classroom or the ‘green’ community can all be considered as small cultures.

According to Hall (1997), culture is in fact constituted by ‘shared meanings’ which are mainly constructed through language. In this sense, language acts as a representational system which makes use of signs and symbols to represent shared concepts, values and ideas. Moreover, when language is seen in its broader social context, culture is not only considered as a set of shared linguistic signs; but also as a set of recurrent practices among members of the same groups. Both elements, signs and practices, are related to the (re)production, consumption and exchange of meaning (Hall, 2013). Representations, by means of language, symbolic or visual signifiers, are essential in culture formation and deeply related to the audience they are disclosed to.

House (2016: 9) defines translation as all the processing and reproducing activities which lead from a source text to a target text. Among these activities, he also recognizes the adaptation for

different audiences and the transposition from a text into another medium. The latter is defined by Parlog (2019) as ‘intersemiotic translation’ and entails the transmission of meaning from a written medium to visual medium or vice versa. A ‘culturally-filtered’ adaptation is thus crucial in the expansion of organizations in new markets and in their branding process; and translation is a primary tool in today’s communication which “lies at the very heart of the global economy” (House, 2016: 4).

Since the adaptation of meaning between cultures might lead to significant changes in the representation process, an imagological approach is also adopted. As scholars agree, imagology is the study of clichés, prejudgments and stereotypes transmitted through literature – or other media – in a specific context (Gnisci et al. 2002; Leerssen, 2002; Leerssen, 2007). It focuses on how individuals and countries – organizations in this case – are represented and represent themselves according to specific features and build what is respectively known as hetero-image and auto-image. This perspective highlights the importance of constructing a positive image of itself: a distorted one that is, nonetheless, one of the most fixed and dominant beliefs that influences our thoughts and drives our categorization of the outside world (Leerssen, 2007). Doorslaer et al. make a plea for the integration of an imagological approach in translation studies. Despite the widespread use of imagology in literature in fact, how such representations “are mediated by translation and its agents in various linguistic and cultural spaces – not only in literary discourses – has as yet remained largely unexplored.” (2015:8)

To sum up, the present frame provided an overview of how corporate communication strives in their attempt to enhance their socially responsible status and brands their image in international environments. Companies often achieve this result by adopting strategies to enhance stakeholders, through different media – such as television, advertising, web, and social platforms – but also in different contexts, cultures and languages. When corporations attempt to build images, construct realities, create interactions, and connect people between cultures, they bring along changes of meanings, connotations, and play with languages and stereotyped images.

### 3. Methodology

The present thesis employs different research strategies. Since I investigate communication practices of a single organization not only on a textual and visual level, but also in their complex extra-textual context, I adopt both a discursive and semiotic approach. Moreover, this paper takes a single company as a starting point, employs both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies and it is thus considered a mixed-method case study. I retrieved basic quantitative data from the software Nvivo and LancsBox.

#### 3.1. The issue of meaning: The Semiotic and Discursive approach

In the investigation of meaning, Hall (1997) points out the similarities and differences in the two potential approaches of semiotics and discourse. Both deal with language and representations, but while the first one is concerned with *how* language and representation construct meaning, the second investigates its *effects and consequences* in a specific context. Visualizing the two approaches on the Basic Model of Communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1963), while semiotic focuses more on the message itself, the discursive approach is more focused on the production and reception that influence meaning. More specifically, the latter deals with how discourse in specific settings (i.e. corporate communication) connects with the *definition of proper practices*, the *construction of identity* and the *regulation of conduct* within a specific context, culture or community.

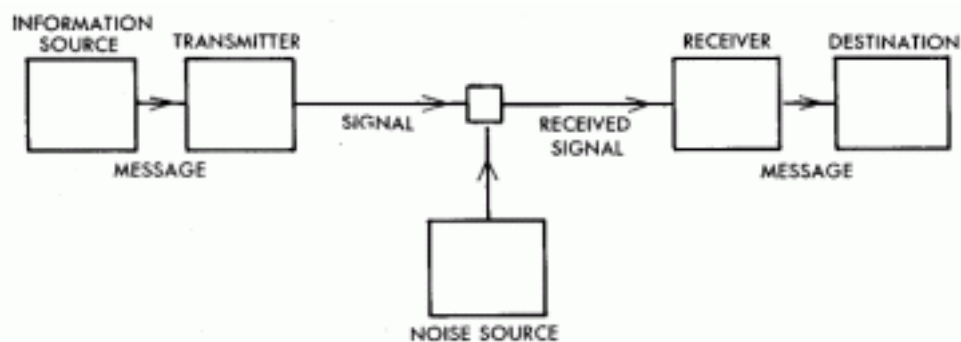


Figure 1: Basic Model of Communication (adapted by Shannon & Weaver, 1963)

In the analysis of (extra)textual elements, on the other hand, semiotics studies signs, significations, and is crucial within this frame because it provides us with the right tools to unveil the signified – the concept itself – from the signifier, namely the written or visual medium with all its connotations (Wurth & Rigney, 2019). Since the present research considers different media channels, both a

semiotic and discursive approach to language and representation are adopted. This choice is also justified because the research deals with both the transmission and interpretation of meaning.

### 3.2. *Three Phases*

Conceptually, the research has three phases. The first analyzes a corpus of 6 written texts retrieved from Amazon's English website<sup>1</sup> that deal with CSR issues, including a Code of Conduct for suppliers, two press releases and three webpages; the second investigates visual and multimodal elements of corporate communication such as social media dataset<sup>2</sup>, commercials and advertising; and in the final phase, the Spanish and Italian counterparts are compared with the findings of the English version. While the first two phases tackle the main research question and the first sub-question, the third one addresses translation and the last sub-question. Since they are all built on different and specific methodologies, the following sections provide a detailed outline of methods.

The first phase consists of a corpus collection of 6 official Amazon documents. I gathered corpora in the three afore-mentioned languages and then carried out a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)<sup>3</sup> only on the English version. I paid particular attention to content covering issues that fall under the umbrella term of CSR. The documents include the Supply Chain Code of Conduct, two press releases (the Climate Pledge; and Amazon's new electric vehicle) and three webpages (Amazon Sustainability: Key Commitments; Sustainable Products; and How Amazon enables Sustainability for Customers).

This part of the analysis employs methodologies and software from both CDA and Corpus Linguistics (CL)<sup>4</sup>. According to Saldahna & O'Brien (2013), the two methods are compatible. In order to identify recurring patterns (e.g. collocations), draw word frequencies and investigate concordances to dig deeper into the context of discursive formations, I carried out the CL analysis with the LancsBox software. Despite Wood & Kroger (2000: 27) warn scholars about the possible downsides of merging the two methods, their combination allowed me to move between quantitative and qualitative data and proved to be a convenient way to triangulate results. The selection of a discursive approach, moreover, which focuses on "how our knowledge about the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aboutamazon.co.uk>

<sup>2</sup> This type of content can be retrieved through Nvivo by downloading a Nvivo extension on Google Chrome known as NCapture. This allows users to capture a webpage and upload it on the software as pdf or as dataset.

<sup>3</sup> CDA is a branch of Discourse Analysis which comprises many theories and practices. It differs from the discursive approach in that it "goes a step further than DA in its understanding of discourse as language in context [...] and sees discourse as social practice" (Saldahna & O'Brien, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> CL is a research paradigm which consists in building a linguistic corpus able to answer a research question. "More recently, CL has been applied to research questions that respond to discursive reflections of social issues rather than originating from concerns with linguistic structure *per se*" (Saldahna & O'Brien, 2013).

social, the embodied individual and shared meanings' comes to be produced in different periods" justifies the corpus selection (Hall, 1997: 43). As both Hall (1997) and Fairclough (2001) emphasize, language should be analyzed as a societal practice used by institutions within a specific context and historical moment. Analyzing Amazon website, press releases and public documents, I investigate the production of this social knowledge as a discursive formation created through authority, power, appeal to emotions and other strategies.

The second phase objective is to examine the role of Amazon CSR communication on different media and consists of a collection of multimodal samples of Amazon corporate communication like posts (i.e. 'tweets'<sup>5</sup> retrieved from their multilingual channels on the social platform Twitter), commercials, and advertising material in different languages. In this context, I focused on how different stakeholders react and contribute to the company's efforts to achieve a 'socially responsible' status.

Since Adi (2015) highlights the importance of social media to communicate CSR efforts to both internal and external stakeholders, I focus on Twitter users which 'retweet' (re-share) posts and users who contribute to the construction of this image by just being active on the platform and using the same hashtags<sup>6</sup>. On Twitter, the shared information is the post itself and the hashtag works as a code that labels it. Since employees are generally recognized as internal stakeholders, I adopted Brown and Dacin definition of CSR participation to investigate the 're-tweet' phenomenon as "the degree by which employees participate in the implementation of CSR strategies or formulation of CSR related strategies" (1997, as cited in Adi 2015:169). In the next step, I collected other multimodal elements of corporate communication by the form of advertisement material and commercials found on the World Wide Web and on YouTube. In the second phase as well, I gathered content in the three languages, but carried out the analysis on the English corpus only.

In the investigation, I adopted a semiotic approach, which as Hall points out "provides a method for analyzing how visual representation convey meaning" (1997: 41). Since House (2016: 25), however, states that discourse analysis and translation studies have already been used to deal with corporate communication discourse, I applied tools from both CDA, semiotic and translation studies. The last choice is justified by the presence of short texts in both advertising and social media content. As I dug deeper in the modalities in which Amazon communication makes use of signs in this context, Parlog's (2019) 'intersemiotic' approach to translation – intended as the transposition of signs from a medium to another (e.g. visual to written or vice versa) – revealed

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<sup>5</sup> 'Tweet' can be understood as the production and sharing of a short text which is often accompanied by visuals (photo or video).

<sup>6</sup> A **#hashtag** can be defined as a label that – academically speaking – codes a certain piece of information.

interesting findings. The result section displays how this concept is applied to social media and commercial strategies to actively engage stakeholders.

In the previous phases, I collected components from all three languages and gathered them together in corpora. First, I analyzed the English corpora, and only in the third phase I compared interesting components (when possible<sup>7</sup>) with their Italian and Spanish translations or adaptations. Since Doorslaer et al. (2015) point out that imagology supports translation studies by drawing patterns of representations across languages, I also analyzed auto-images and stereotypes by integrating an imagological approach.

In this last phase, I employed many methods on corpora made up of different texts. Corpus analysis falls under the umbrella term of Discourse Analysis and is a collection of text genres gathered in order to answer a question (Hua, 2019). I shaped the corpora according to the research questions and investigated the linguistic and discursive items, cultural practices and identities, indexes with the pronouns, identity formations, branding strategies and other features.

The theoretical framework and research questions were shaped following a specific pattern – in the first two phases I investigated Amazon corporate communication in English to understand its main features and strategies. Once I found relevant results, in the last phase I could compare findings with the Italian and Spanish counterparts. The choice to split the research and carry out the main analysis on the English version and not on the whole multimodal and multilingual corpora is justified by the limited time for the research.

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<sup>7</sup> Commercials and advertising strategies are often used for specific ‘cultures’ in specific ‘contexts’ and are not replicated in different languages. This is also one of the reasons why multinational companies are used to delegate advertising campaign to local agencies which are more acquainted with the local culture. Despite the impossibility to compare them with foreign language counterparts, I decided to use them anyway because of their representativeness of Amazon CSR communication strategy.

#### 4. Corpus and Material

Following Saldanha & O’Brien definition, I understand texts not as linguistic but rather as semiotic units which entail any kind of communicative utterance (2013: 55). To visually illustrate this definition of texts, different samples from multimodal corpora can be found in the Appendices. I built corpora following the previous criteria and selected different types of multimodal texts. The same authors, however, point out that “the corpus-driven approach builds up the theory step by step in the presence of the evidence and the observation of certain patterns” (:62). Since multimodal corpora are also widely recognized by scholars as difficult and laborious (Saldanha & O’Brien, 2013; Hua, 2019), these conditions inevitably led the research to be iterative, dynamic and to shift focus as many times as patterns occurred.

	<i>Phase 1</i>	<i>Phase 2</i>	<i>Phase 3</i>
<b>Corpus</b>	- Supply Chain Code of Conduct <sup>8</sup> -Press Releases <sup>9</sup> -Website Pages <sup>10</sup>	-Social Media Dataset -Advertising campaigns <sup>11</sup> -Video Commercials <sup>12</sup>	-All previous elements
<b>Type of media</b>	Written texts	Multimodal texts	All texts
<b>Methodologies</b>	DA and CDA	Semiotic analysis	Comparison of translated and adapted texts
<b>Language</b>	English	English, Portuguese	English, Italian, Spanish

Figure 2: Corpus description

Following another, external, criterion – which “relates the text to the context and mode of production” (Saldanha & O’Brien, 2013) – most of the content was selected because it fell under the umbrella term of CSR and was retrieved from Amazon website, social media and online platforms. The selection was also based on the representativeness, relevance to the topic and easy accessibility. For example, as stated in Amazon’s website, the Supply Chain Code of Conduct

<sup>8</sup> <https://d39w7f4ix9f5s9.cloudfront.net/55/8d/c2fbe48f407b86b50025ef81bb30/amazon-supply-chain-standards-2019.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://amazonuk.gcs-web.com/news-releases>

<sup>10</sup> <https://blog.aboutamazon.co.uk>

<sup>11</sup> <https://sites.wpp.com/wppedcream/2018/public-relations-public-affairs/corporate-and-public-affairs/stories-over-grey/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.welovead.com/en/>



expresses the company's position on CSR and is thus a relevant document to analyze. The 6 documents provided a corpus of about 7.487 words. Bearing in mind many factors, such as the limits of this research in terms of time, resources and the interest in the comparison with the Spanish and Italian corpora, in the first phase I reached data saturation with a relatively small corpus.

All the elements I gathered contributed to the construction of three corpora: English, Spanish and Italian. As shown in Figure 2, each corpus presents elements from different media and most of the content is in the same language; some elements, however, did not fall into any of the language-related corpus. As shown in the Appendices, multimodal elements include written documents, webpages, dataset from Twitter, outdoor<sup>13</sup> or integrated<sup>14</sup> advertising, and commercials. In the first phase, I gathered written data from the company's website in English, Spanish and Italian. In the second phase, I retrieved dataset from Twitter by using the Ncapture function in Nvivo; while for the third phase I found commercials and advertising material on the Youtube accounts<sup>15</sup> of Amazon and in an international advertising database<sup>16</sup>. Worth highlighting is that both the Twitter and Youtube accounts of Amazon are split between national markets (Amazon -UK, -ES and -Italy;) and provide language-specific content. Finally, in the third phase, I compared relevant features found in the English corpus with the Spanish and Italian counterparts.

In the last phase, I started to compare by simultaneously analyzing written texts on LancsBox, investigating different types of translation techniques and trying to identify the reasons of such choices in the decision-making process; then I closely compared Twitter dataset in Nvivo, focusing on different strategies used locally in social media; and lastly I investigated advertising material focusing on how the same strategy was applied – of appealing to emotions, using stereotypes, or exploiting social issues – and how the transmission of meaning was semiotically accomplished in different cultures or languages.

As Ten Thije suggests, contrastive analysis requires to determine some criterion of measurement which can also be referred to as *Tertium Comparationis* and is defined as “the point of reference that is used to account for an adequate and reliable comparison of different cultures” (2016: 10). This research takes 2015 as tertium comparationis because Amazon updated its website with a whole sustainability section in 2019 and I consider that most of the efforts in promoting an

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<sup>13</sup> Outdoor advertising is any form of advertising which appears in an outside environment: hoardings, billboards, signs, building and, in this case, walls.

<sup>14</sup> Integrated advertising refers to any form of advertising which combines different media channels and tools.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/user/amazonuk>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.welovead.com/en/>

inclusive and sustainable organizational culture and image were made in the last quinquennial. For this reason, all the material I retrieved does not precede 2015.

## 5. Results and discussion

### 5.1. Phase I – Analysis of Code of Conduct, Press Releases and Website Pages in English

As stated in section 3, I investigated written texts using different techniques from both CDA and CL approaches. Firstly, a hard copy of the corpus was closely read and scanned. The corpus was then coded by using Nvivo, a software for qualitative analysis. The codes I used are *Sustainability* (sub-coded in *Environment* and *Innovation*) *Ethical Behavior*, *Contribution to Society*, *Power* and *Human Rights*. The latter was specifically split in the sub-codes *Labor Standards*, *Inclusion & Diversity*, *Health & Safety* and *Migrants*. All the codes fall under the umbrella term of CSR and are based on Doorley & Garcia’s statement according to which CSR is “related to human rights, labor standards, environment and anticorruption” (2010: 250). I edited these elements and implemented them to match the case study. After carefully reading the hard copy, I retrieved a word frequency of the selected corpus from Nvivo and started drawing preliminary results:

*Legend: (word, word count)*

Amazon, 152
<b>Suppliers, 140</b>
<b>Workers, 94</b>
Working, 65
<b>Requirements, 54</b>
Products, 47

<b>Must, 47</b>
Including, 37
Use, 36
Vehicles, 35
Rights, 31
Sustainable, 30

By just taking a look at the first five words, I could infer that Amazon discourse on CSR is mainly addressed to external (suppliers) and internal (workers) stakeholders, which have to meet some requirements. Despite this interesting, first insight, scholars (Saldanha & O’Brien, 2013; Brezina et al., 2015) point out that what is really worth to pay attention in CDA are not words, but their connections. These connections between words were investigated by using different tools provided by the software LancsBox. I analyzed the most frequent and prominent words with the KWIC (Key Word in Context) tool which displays concordances (*figure 3*) and collocations (*figure 4*). While the first are defined by Saldanha & O’Brien as “a list of all the occurrences of a specified node with its

immediate context” (2013: 88), the latter are the “characteristic co-occurrence patterns of words in a text” (McEnery and Wilson 1996: 7).

Occurrences 111 (148.26)	Texts 1	▼ Corpus	Corpus 1	▼ Context 7	▼ Display Text
Left		Node		Right	
programs that support continuous improvement for our		suppliers		and workers. Safe workplaces Safe and healthy	
We have global teams who partner with		suppliers		to increase worker awareness of safety issues,	
issues that matter most to them. Our		suppliers		must provide workers with a safe and	
with a safe and healthy work environment;		suppliers		must, at a minimum, comply with applicable	
safety, including adequate machine safeguarding, and ensuring		suppliers		continually identify, evaluate, and control physically demanding	
and (3) sanitation and housing, where if		suppliers		provide residential facilities for their workers, they	
safe accommodations. We conduct on-site audits of		suppliers'		safety conditions throughout our business relationship—often multiple	
facilities, and adequate machine safeguarding. We require		suppliers		to address these issues prior to beginning	
and corrective action plans are implemented with		suppliers		as needed. Freely chosen employment We will	
We are committed to working closely with		suppliers,		business partners, and multistakeholder associations to monitor	
across the globe that work directly with		suppliers		to track and report performance against these	
and report performance against these standards. Our		suppliers		are required to pay legally required compensation	
overtime and benefits) and we encourage our		suppliers		to continuously evaluate whether workers earn enough	
of their family. We require all eligible		suppliers		to enroll in the Better Work program.	
the Better Work program. By working with		suppliers		and training workers on their rights, Better	
the world. We encourage our Private Brands		suppliers		to evaluate their practices using the Coalition's	
adoption of this assessment and helping our		suppliers		understand their environmental impact. The Climate Pledge	
Welfare Policy provides guidance for producers and		suppliers		of animal-derived goods and services during production,	
fundamental dignity of workers. We engage with		suppliers		that are committed to these same principles,	
principles, and we set exacting standards for		suppliers		of goods and services for Amazon and	
Conduct ("Supplier Code"). We also expect all		suppliers		of goods and services to Amazon to	
to these groups and working with our		suppliers		to evaluate and address circumstances that may	
we are committed to working with our		suppliers		to improve protections for their workers and	
ascended throughout our supply chain, we expect		suppliers		to consistently monitor and enforce these standards	
customers as reflected in our Supplier Code.		Suppliers		are required to disclose any subcontractors or	
and practices covered by our Supplier Code.		Suppliers		with subcontracted production are required to work	
of this Supplier Code. We recognize that		suppliers		in deeper tiers of the supply chain	
deeper tiers of the supply chain and		suppliers		in informal sectors may take more time	
standards. We are committed to our policies. While		suppliers		to help them understand our policies. While	
understand our policies. While we expect these		suppliers		to meet all applicable aspects of the	
Code, the size and structure of the		suppliers		, e.g. family farms, smallholders, homeworkers), will be	

Figure 3: concordance table (KWIC) for the node 'suppliers'



Figure 4: most frequent collocations for the node 'suppliers'

As the first scanning and the word count suggested – and the figures confirm – the exertion of power perceived in many parts of the corpus is due to the high ratio of the modal verb *must* (47 counts). Often, stakeholders are also required (42 counts) to adhere to certain codes, rights and practices. According to Hall (1997), power is one of the many key aspects to investigate within a discursive analysis and this extensive use of modal verbs confirms it. Less ‘powerful’ verbs such as (Amazon) *expect* or *encourage* are generally less employed (14 and 12 counts). In the following examples retrieved from the corpus, Amazon explicitly exerts its power:

“We’re done being in the middle of the herd on this issue – we’ve decided to *use our size and scale to make a difference*,” said Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder and CEO. “If a company with *as much physical infrastructure as Amazon*—which delivers more than 10 billion items a year—can meet the Paris Agreement 10 years early, then any company can” (Amazon 2019, October 16)

“Major investments in renewable energy are a critical step to address its carbon footprint *globally*.” (Amazon 2019, October 16)

In the previous statements, Amazon affirms to have the power to lead the change and acts as a driver for a better environment. Worth highlighting is the participation of the CEO, often seen as “an important global voice that can help maintain trust and brand credibility” (Doorley & Garcia, 2010: 248). What also seems a priority in Amazon CSR strategies is the outcome to produce a contribution to society and to its economic development:

“The Right Now Climate Fund will help remove millions of metric tons of carbon [...], and *create economic opportunity for thousands of people*” (Amazon 2019, October 16)

With respect to the concordances of the node ‘suppliers’, worth mentioning is the strategic use of the pronoun *we* and of the possessive adjective *our* – with a frequency of respectively 79 and 74 counts. The massive use of these kinds of grammar features reveals a strategic construction of a common identity which Amazon strives to build with its stakeholders. These constructions also contribute to the ‘auto-image’ (Leerssen, 2007) that Amazon corporate communication builds for the company: the same they want stakeholders to identify themselves with. According to Hall (1997), these discursive formations connect with the ‘definition of proper practices’, the

‘construction of identity’ and the ‘regulation of conduct’ within a specific context, culture or community – the Amazon one.

Another crucial construction was the subtle adoption of a defensive stance – maybe with regard to the many critiques the company faces in terms of labor and safety standards. The corpus tries in fact to build discursive formations which are more related to the code ‘Human Rights’ and less to ‘Sustainability’. This is also confirmed by the words count, in which words pertaining to the first semantic field, such as *rights*, *labor*, *management*, *safety* (with its collocation *standards*) and *health* have major prominence when compared to words belonging to the second such as *land*, *minerals*, *emissions*, and *environment* itself.

However, internal stakeholders are not the only ones targeted by Amazon CSR communication strategies; and due to the variety of texts I retrieved in order to provide a complete overview of the strategy, divergences came up. The webpage ‘*Sustainable products for customers*’ for example – which differs in audience and purpose from i.e. the Code of Conduct – has a friendlier tone of voice. As Adi (2015) points out hence, not only companies benefit internally of CSR strategies in term of company culture and image; but as I will show in the next section, they also reach financial goals from external stakeholders such as customers, suppliers and business partners.

## 5.2. Phase 2

Scholars generally recognize that CSR activities can generate better attitudes between stakeholders, build a firm corporate image and actively engage social media users (Adi et al., 2015; Doorley & Garcia, 2013; Trosborg, 2010). When these strategies are effective, stakeholders turn into organizational advocates, both live and on platforms, that can unleash the power of constructing a socially responsible auto-image of the organization which they can relate to. As mentioned in section 3.2. this involvement is known as CSR participation (Brown & Dacin, 1997). The first part of this section focuses on how Amazon builds the company's image on Twitter and how users actively participate in the construction and implementation of this identity and image.

### 5.2.1. Phase 2 – Social media

I previously defined hashtags as labels attached to chunk of information which in Twitter are known as 'tweets' – or posts. In Amazon CSR communication, the strategic use of hashtags is a crucial practice in the company identity construction and reputation enhancement. The charts in figure 3 represent respectively the most used hashtags from the Twitter account for the EU, and the UK. Despite both channels communicating in English language, they still address different audiences; which allows a comparison of different strategies and levels of engagement.

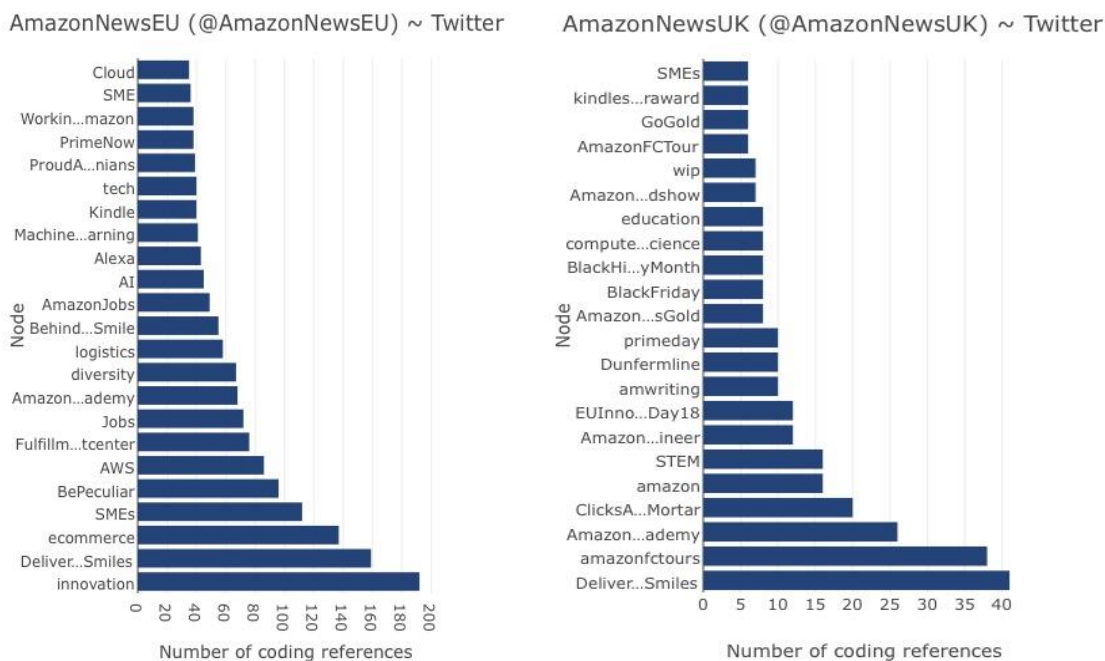


Figure 5: hashtag charts retrieved from EU and UK Twitter account dataset on Nvivo

A first manifest pattern I identify is the use of the hashtag **#deliveringsmiles** in both charts: a clear reference to Amazon logo, made up of a smile-shaped arrow. Amazon logo can always be found on packages customers receive at their address, so that the hashtag combines both Amazon service (deliveries) and logo (smile), conveying the company's mission. As Parlog (2019) defines it, this is an example of intersemiotic translation: a specific type known as 'ekphrasis' which entails the transposition or transmutation of a non-verbal code (logo and service offered) into a literary text (**#deliveringsmiles**).

Another evident fact is the extensive use of the hashtag **#amazonfctours** in the British dataset. Amazon FC (Fulfillment Center) Tours is an initiative launched in 2018 which allows customers and non-workers to visit Amazon local warehouses. With the aim to enhance local engagement, the fact that the hashtag is massively used in the British account and not present at all in the European one, confirms Doorley & Garcia assumption that "during a crisis, an organization usually attempts to *handle the media locally* because crises are circumscribed" (2010: 247 *emphasis added*). With regard to the critiques Amazon faced toward worker conditions especially in the UK, this is a clear example of how to locally handle the issue. Amazon FC Tours are currently available in 8 locations across the UK. To further confirm the previous assumption, I observed the same pattern in the Spanish and Italian dataset as well.

However, Amazon EU does not make use of the previous hashtag at all and, as inferable from the most common hashtag **#innovation**, their strategy is more focused on *sustainability*. Based on the premises of section 2.2. thus, on a supranational level Amazon employs an online community of young Europeans – a small culture which pay particular attention to innovation and environmental issues – as audience. In modern jargon, this cultural formation is referred to as 'green generation' (from green revolution) and the decision to use it as a target is part of the green branding strategy previously discussed. Since every kind of sign, such as the hashtag **#innovation**, is able to convey meaning, "all those who share the same [**#innovation**] code will interpret the signs in roughly the same way" (Hall 1997: 38). Because people belonging to this small culture share the same code, they are targeted as an audience sharing the same decoding conceptual map.

What also looks prominent in Amazon CSR strategy is the focus on the engagement of stakeholders on different levels: employees, managers, customers, suppliers, associations, (g)local communities, governmental and non-governmental organization are all stimulated and pushed to contribute to Amazon CSR communication. As Adi (2015) highlights, the advantages of including social media within the company's communication strategy include the achievement of a two-way communication with different stakeholders and, consequently, a higher engagement.



In order to find cases of successful two-way communication, I run a hierarchy chart for the specific hashtag **#amazonfctour** – classified in Nvivo as a node – on all cases (active British Twitter users) which re-tweeted Amazon posts. By doing so, somehow, they contributed to Amazon CSR communication. The importance of effective two-way communication is widely acknowledged in the academic context and scholars highlight that proactive engagement in the company culture enhances productivity and efficiency (Miller, 2015; Mishra et al. 2014). Again, I identified *CSR participation* in “the degree by which employees participate in the implementation of CSR strategies” (Adi, 2015: 169). Between the internal stakeholders’ category, active accounts who reshared AmazonNewsUK tweets were employees of all sort of hierarchical levels:

- @JeffBezos,	CEO & Founder
- @ScottWharton22,	Amazon LTN1 General Manager
- @Neil_e_william,	Amazon Public Relations Manager
- @GeorgeFleming2,	Employee



**Jeff Bezos** ✓ @JeffBezos · Nov 20, 2018  
 Excited to announce the first annual grants from the Bezos Day 1 Families Fund. \$97.5 million to 24 organizations doing needle-moving work on family homelessness. Congrats to the recipients – we know you'll spend the money wisely and with heart. [bezosdayonefund.org/day1familiesfu...](https://bezosdayonefund.org/day1familiesfu...)



1K 1.1K 7.8K

Even the CEO – whose voice, as already stated above, is crucial in building trust and credibility – expressed his concern with regard to social issues and acted as an advocate for the company image. On the external level, I also identified the most engaged stakeholders in companies closely related to Amazon, organizations that deal with

social issues or NGOs. Among the most active users, I observed **@magic\_breakfast** and **@wherewomenwork**, which respectively reflect Amazon will to contribute to society and its efforts in creating a more inclusive and diverse workplace. Following, the description of the above-mentioned accounts:

**@magic\_breakfast:** *National child nutrition charity delivering healthy breakfasts to schoolchildren who would otherwise be too hungry to learn*

**@wherewomenwork:** *Looking for exciting work? We celebrate the work of women while shining a spotlight on the employers supporting them*

**#PrimeEmployersforWomen**

### 5.2.2. Phase 2 – Advertising and commercials

This phase takes a look at how Amazon implements CSR strategies in different media such as social platforms, television – in the form of commercials – and advertising. I refer to advertising as a range of multimodal practices aimed at branding products, services or companies. As stated in section 2.2., scholars (Usunier, 2005; Brunk, 2010; Post, 2013) argue that the construction of a brand image is a crucial marketing activity and is specifically addressed to target audiences. In this section I want to demonstrate how Amazon makes use of different signs, values, concepts and consequently cultures, in order to brand its image and enhance its ‘socially responsible’ company status while still achieving financial goals.

An advertising campaign ran off in 2018 in the capital of São Paulo, Brazil. After the city mayor decided to paint gray all graffiti on walls, Amazon decided to exploit the situation to its favor. Few days later, the company projected famous quotes from literature on walls and, following the mayor’s harsh reaction, decided to use the mediatic attention to freely offer an e-book to all citizens.

*“Os melhores livros, compreendeu, são aqueles que dizem o que você já sabe.”*

(Quote in Portuguese)

*“The best books, understood, are those that tell you what you know already.”*

(Original English quote, George Orwell, 1984)

As shown in figure 6, the outcomes were extraordinary. Free downloads boosted to over 1 million, with an enhancement of 70% of Kindle App downloads and monthly device sales which raised by 12% in just 3 days. As the campaign demonstrates, between the many advantages of proper corporate communication, “by engaging in CSR activities, companies can also generate [...] better purchase behavior” (Adi, 2015: 167).



Figure 6: infographic of the "Stories Over Gray" campaign and its outcomes

But what, specifically, contributed to the success of the campaign? First of all, the ‘multimodality of advertising’ (Munday, 2004) contributed to the instant transmission and sharing of the same message and meaning to the city of São Paulo. By combining outdoor strategies (projections on grey walls) with online strategies (posting the video on social media) the campaign went *viral*, that is creating a powerful online reaction chain – which was then redirected to Amazon website. Secondly, Amazon wisely exploited a hot-trending topic and stood up against the mayor on a social issue. The city of São Paulo is well-known for its wonderful street art pieces; and when the mayor devised the idea of painting them gray, Amazon Kindle, the e-book branch, decided to tackle the issue in this original way. The campaign was addressed to the city’s artistic community, to readers and aimed at increasing awareness and Amazon brand perception as a socially responsible company. Moreover, in order to boost the campaign efficiency, external stakeholders were also targeted, and many Amazon-associated NGOs in Brazil received Kindle<sup>17</sup> devices as a gift.

On a more abstract level, what is also interesting is the use of the ‘freedom’ concept, stressed in both the freedom of expression of the artistic community and in the e-book freely offered by Amazon. *1984* by George Orwell is in fact based on a dystopian world where freedom of expression is denied. However, since not everything is always business-related, to sum up on a positive note many journals summarized the campaign by stating that “the readers are the real winners” (WPPed Cream Awards, 2018).

Let us now take a look at how, on the other side, commercials can be more widely used for different audiences. Thanks to their dynamic nature, commercials can either be standardized for wide public or specific for target audiences. When the commercial is created for international audiences, some of the features might go through a standardization process. This is the case of the commercial *Morning Ritual* (2019, September 2)<sup>18</sup>, retrieved from Amazon YouTube channel but

<sup>17</sup> Kindles are Amazon’s digital devices which allow users to intuitively read e-books.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHsO-rXrLLo>

originally broadcast on television, in which I identified a complete decontextualization of the set. Since no language- or culture-related cues are present, the commercial “avoids the need for adaptation by neutralizing the context of the advertising in terms of landscape features and ethnicity of actors” (Smith, 2008: 47). As the author points out, this type of international campaign retains visual material (landscape) and only acts on the written or spoken text for the new audience (dubbed/translated version).

What is also surprising is the dynamicity of this commercial, standardized for an international audience but still able to target a specific small culture. Amazon devices can in fact help blind people in conducting a more independent and easier life (e.g. by asking what the weather is like or the time). By showing these kinds of benefits, not only Amazon addresses people with limited mobility as its target, but also aims at a small culture made up of parents, people and institutions in daily contact with blind people that understand and share their conceptual map of meaning interpretation (e.g. think about the emotions of a father with a blind child who sees the commercial and is stimulated to buy the device).

The next example is an ad from Amazon Prime Video: *Thursday Night Football – Eagles vs. Panthers*. (2017, September 1)<sup>19</sup>. The commercial displays a couple of researchers with a telescope in the Amazon. They both look at the trees and see eagles and panthers about to approach a fight (Figure 7): “Wow!” one of them exclaim, “the Eagles and the Panthers are about to go head to head right here in the Amazon”. The camera zooms out and shows them half-plunged in a streaming river (Figure 8). One of the researchers grabs the audio recorder and says: “Thursday, October 12. The Panthers and the Eagles are facing off in the Amazon... on some kind of stream”.

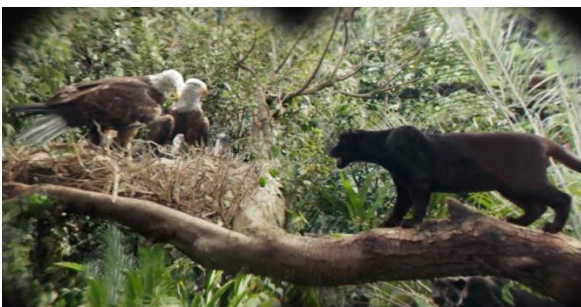


Figure 7: frame from the commercial showing eagles and panthers about to fight



Figure 8: researchers in the stream recording the word play

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<sup>19</sup> [https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/film/amazon\\_prime\\_video\\_thursday\\_night\\_football\\_eagles\\_vs\\_panthers](https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/film/amazon_prime_video_thursday_night_football_eagles_vs_panthers)

In this example as well, Amazon strategy entails a use of intersemiotic translation (Parlog, 2019), which permeate the commercial and allows to create engaging wordplays only meaningful for a specific audience. Carolina Panthers and Philadelphia Eagles are in fact about to face off on Thursday Night Football – a big tradition reserved for the most interesting game of the week in American culture – and Amazon decides to stream the game live to promote its Prime Video platform (Figure 9). What is also worth highlighting is the intertwine between the national American culture and the “small” sport culture of American Football in the US, which once again reflects the glocal paradigm.



Figure 9: Thursday Night Football: a big event for American Football fans

### 5.3 Phase 3: Comparison of Multimodal Texts in Different Languages

In the third phase of the analysis, I compared the corpora, made up of multimodal texts, in all three languages. By using LyncBox, which “supports split-screen comparisons that allow displaying two separate analyses” (Brezina et al, 2018: 12), I started scanning and comparing the written English version with the Spanish one, and then with the Italian. This choice was forced by the software, which only allows split-screen analysis with two corpora.

From the scan I could infer that translations are mainly covert, a choice which implies the non-awareness of the audience of the translation process. From the translator perspective, this text-processing is also known as foreignization (House, 2013). After scanning the documents, I focused on the findings of section 5.1 in order to provide a reasonable comparison. Following, the outcomes of such a process on excerpts from texts:

“We’re done being *in the middle of the herd* on this issue – we’ve decided to use our size and scale to make a difference” (Amazon 2019, October 16)

“Estar *en medio de la manada* en este asunto ha llegado a su fin. Hemos decidido usar nuestro tamaño y escala para marcar la diferencia” (Amazon 2019, October 16)

“Abbiamo smesso di stare *nel gregge* su questo tema: abbiamo deciso di utilizzare le nostre dimensioni e scala per fare la differenza” (Amazon 2019, October 16)

The English idiomatic phrase *in the middle of the herd* is translated as: *en medio de la manada* and *nel gregge*. The Spanish version is a literal translation, which could have been better translated in terms of style and meaning with the idiomatic phrase *ir con el rebaño*. The Italian one *nel gregge*, is also a literal translation but is able to carry the same connotations of the English version – or the inability to take a stance on the issue. This connotation is stressed in the next sentence of the above example.

Apart from other stylistic and grammar-constrained choices, such as the verb “*ha llegado – has arrived*” at the end of the sentence in the Spanish version, translators were more or less precise “in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (House, 2016: 9). In this case they were able to find the equivalent literal meaning – being stuck and follow the ‘herd’ – but not always to convey the same connotations.

In other terms, for a translation to be completely equivalent, the process must entail the application of a *cultural filter* (House, 1977), which captures differences in the source linguaculture and adapt them to the norms and conventions of the new target linguaculture. The following example shows an example of the results of cultural filtering:

“Inclusivity: our standards apply to all workers regardless of race, color, *national origins*, gender [...]” (Amazon Supply Chain Standards, 2019)

“Inclusividad: nuestros estándares se aplican a todos los trabajadores, independientemente de su raza, color, *pais de origen*, género [...]” (Amazon Supply Chain Standards, 2019)

“Inclusività: I nostri standard si applicano a tutti i lavoratori, senza alcuna distinzione di etnia, colore, *origine nazionale*, genere [...]” (Amazon Supply Chain Standards, 2019)

Both the English and the Italian version state that standards are applied regardless of the *national origin* and *origine nazionale* (its Italian equivalent). In the Spanish version however, the term *nation* is avoided and replaced with *pais de origen* (country of origin); a choice maybe caused by the widespread presence of separatist sentiment in several Spanish regions, such as the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia. This context might have led the translator to carefully consider the sensitivity of the issue for many Spanish-speakers, to apply a cultural filter, and to opt for a neutral option. This kind of linguistic and cultural knowledge can seriously impact translations and potentially provoke – or prevent – negative outcomes. An Amazon separatist customer who read the word ‘nation’ in the website could in fact take offence just because of its presence. This type of long-term rational thinking usually characterizes good translators.

This example shows another difference that caught my eye:

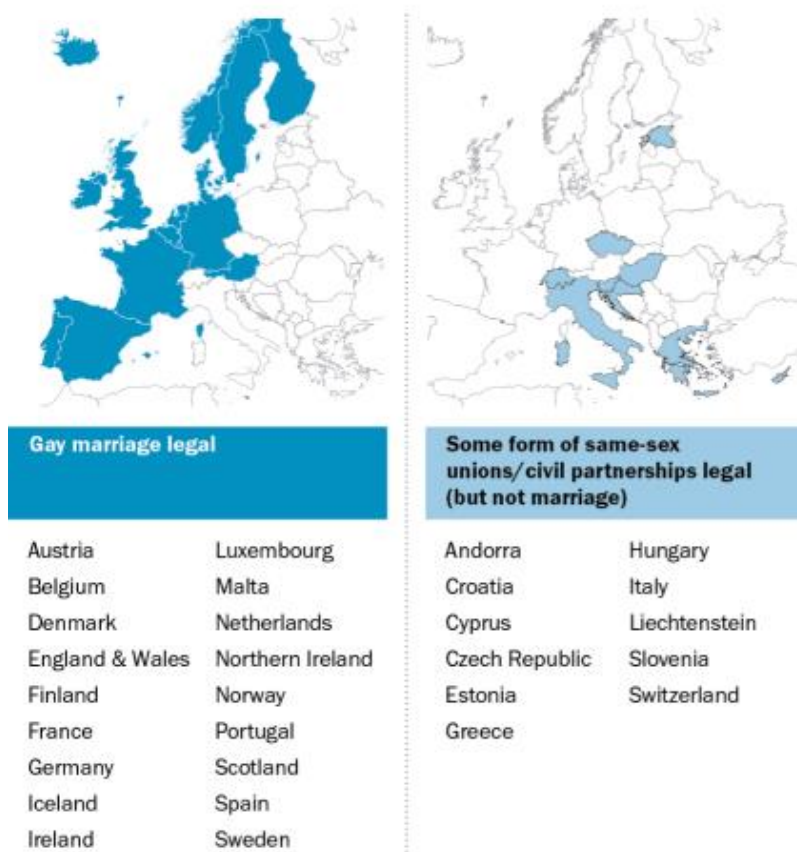
“We recognize these groups might be disproportionately impacted by issues [...]”  
(Amazon Supply Chain Standards, 2019)

“Somos conscientes de que estos grupos pueden verse afectados de forma desproporcionada [...]” (Amazon Supply Chain Standards, 2019)

“Riconosciamo che questi gruppi potrebbero essere influenzati in modo diverso [...]” (Amazon Supply Chain Standards, 2019)

While in the English and Spanish versions minorities are said to be impacted respectively *disproportionally* and *de forma desproporcionada*, the adverb in the Italian version is softened. Instead of using the equivalent *sproporzionato*, the author opts in fact for the softer adjective *diverso* (translatable as diverse, different). This choice – implicitly made or not – softens the impact of the challenges which minority groups face.

This also confirms a pattern I identified during the analysis of the Twitter dataset, where the hashtag #LGTBQ+ was commonly used in the English and Spanish version, but completely absent



Note: As of October 2019.  
Source: Pew Research Center original reporting and analysis.

Figure 10: Same sex marriage in European Countries

I could not find advertising material in the strict sense – outdoor, billboards or inserts – which was thought for a specific audience and then translated or adapted for a different culture. This is mainly caused by advertising being often bound to cultures and their embedded knowledge (Usunier, 2005). In order to research how language affects content, I investigated the original text and subtitles of a video uploaded in the YouTube account Amazon News – which I consider advertising in a wider sense. The clip title is *Better packaging is better for the environment*<sup>20</sup> (Amazon News,

in the Italian dataset. This might reflect a wider cultural open-mindedness towards minority groups in UK and Spain (where homosexual marriages are legal since 2013 and 2005) or a stronger influence of the Roman Catholic Church on Italian culture – where only some sort of legal partnership is recognized (Lipka & Masci, 2019). The previous assumption could be further explored by deepening the research on the issue; but it is not within the scope of this research to do so.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbValMHcKSM>



2018 July 31) and it shows how Amazon reduces waste by collaborating with Hasbro in the creation of sustainable ‘frustration-free packaging’. To convert the text and translations I used [dvdvideosoft.com](http://dvdvideosoft.com), a website where users are able to retrieve subtitles text format from the YouTube video. I then uploaded texts on LanCSBox and separately compared the English-Spanish pair first, and the English-Italian second. These are the most remarkable differences:

“When Amazon first approached Hasbro about frustration-free packaging [...]”  
(Amazon News 2018, July 31)

“Cuando Amazon se puso en contacto con Hasbro por primera vez para hablar del paquete abrefácil [...]”  
(Amazon News 2018, July 31)

“La prima volta che Amazon ha contattato Hasbro circa l'imballaggio senza frustrazioni [...]”  
(Amazon News 2018, July 31)

The first finding is the word formation block in the Italian version of *frustration-free packaging*. While linguistically Spanish permits the same type of compounds (frustration-free = abrefácil), Italian language does not allow this word formation and the result is “senza frustrazioni” (without frustration). While these lexical constraints still allow the transmission of meaning, they block the translation process in terms of style and thus do not reach stylistic equivalence (House, 2016).

The next example shows again the result of cultural filtering when successfully applied in translation processes. When referring to the waste of time involved in opening the usual packaging, an English employee says he feels like “on a journey”. The Spanish version does not present any difference and is translated as “en un viaje” (literal translation); but the Italian translator opts for a cultural adaptation whose result is “in un Odissea” (an Odyssey). By doing so, he gets closer to the Roman-Greek related Italian culture, transmits the connotation of the difficulty in achieving that result and provides a culturally filtered translation.

In the investigation of such processes, I found very interesting how the standardization (in terms of internationalization / globalization) and adaptation (in terms of localization) of content intertwined on different media according to the objective and reflected the *glocal* paradigm. As House points out thus, a proper translation today appears as a fundamental tool “to meet the needs of local markets everywhere in processes of glocalization” (2016: 4).

## 6. Conclusion

In this final chapter I settle accounts and answer the research question and sub-questions by connecting and interpreting previous findings. Through the main research question, I investigated *how Amazon corporate communication faces the challenges of building its global reputation and achieves a socially responsible status*; in the two sub-questions I focused on how media, languages and cultures affect these approaches and shape content. The next paragraph summarizes Amazon strategies to achieve these goals.

Amazon strives to create a positive auto-image by building a strong social brand that overcomes the definition of a classic corporation implementing CSR strategies whenever possible. In this context, they actively claim to take a leading stance toward labor standards, climate change and sustainability issues. Through written text such as the Code of Conduct, they often try to impose certain values. In addressing suppliers, this is often achieved through an imposition of power on stakeholders as inferable from the official document. On the other side, customers are directly addressed on webpages and blog articles with a friendlier tone of voice. In order to achieve branding and financial goals, Amazon is in fact able to appeal to a vast range of emotions belonging to different cultures. While in the “Morning Ritual” commercial, emotions are connected to the company devices (and thus image), in the “Stories over Gray” campaign, they are linked to a social issue, which also leads to financial achievements. In my opinion, the most interesting way Amazon engages stakeholders in different media is with the play on words they create. I refer to both the intersemiotic translation of Amazon services in the hashtag [#deliveringsmiles](#), and to the strategy of using specific culture-related concepts in commercials. Finally, imagology confirmed that stereotypes are still related to national cultures and often used in and spread through various media.

Turning our focus on the first sub-question, results show that media has a major impact on strategies: *Stories over gray*, for example, is an outdoor and integrated advertising campaign and it is localized because it is specifically related to a target audience and culture. The same campaign in a different context would not have produced the same results. Online advertising<sup>21</sup> on the other hand, tends to be standardized when it appears on national or international media – like commercials on television or YouTube – and localized when it deals with more circumscribed audiences such as the Twitter audiences. For example, local audiences are targeted in the strategy to invite visitors to the local warehouses in different countries.

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<sup>21</sup> By online advertising I mean any kind of branding content displayed on a digital platform.

However, the fact that commercials originally thought for television land on the web and vice versa, reveals the importance of intercultural competences in the shift between standardization – in terms of globalization – and customization – in terms of localization – of content for different national and small cultures. These skills comprise the flexibility to easily switch mindset – essential to provide a proper translation – to not get stuck in stereotypes (but on the contrary to challenge them) and the sagacity to take decisions on cross-cultural facts and not biases. Summing up the findings of the analysis and comparison of texts, Twitter datasets, commercials, advertising and content in three languages, the need for intercultural expertise and translation processes in corporate communication is widely demonstrated. What is thus required in this dynamic environment is the “ability to deeply understand and *contextualize, also in cultural terms, the knowledge embedded in the best practice* and to create something different and therefore new.” (Maimone, 2019: 144, *emphasis added*).

I carried this research within a time-lapse of 10 weeks. This time frame represents the first limitation of this paper, which led the analysis and discussion to be based on a limited number of examples. The integration of more quantitative data would also have benefitted the results and outcomes; but the scarcity of quantitative skills, together with the inability to contact Amazon stakeholders (workers or customers) for a potential survey represented another obstacle. However, the innovative approach of integrating theories from various disciplines helped me through the investigation of multimodal texts in different media channels. Academics, hence, could implement interdisciplinary approaches and quantitative data to investigate the extent to which corporate communication strategies are shaped by media. **Castellò et al. (2013) for example, also stress the impact of social media on such strategies and make a plea for the integration of these aspects in future research.**

Lastly, I would like to stress the ethical dimension of this thesis, in which I analyzed Amazons’ efforts in building a positive image of the company but disagreed with their general strategy of green branding. The ambiguity of the company with regard to ethical and environmental issues remains indeed widely criticized as of today. Despite CSR strategies being employed to grow a positive image of a company, they should also reflect an honest and attentive attitude toward the environment and the people who are part of the company. Raising awareness towards green impacts and approaches rather than sugar-coating their controversial practices that promote a positive auto-image and brand could represent a more ethical and legitimate method that enables change.

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## 8. Appendices

These appendices show multimodal text samples I retrieved from the corpus.

### **Amazon sustainability: key commitments**

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We evaluate our supply chain to identify the industries, countries, and issues where we have the greatest opportunities to identify and address risks and have a positive impact on workers. To do so, we leverage internal and external data, and guidance from industry experts, civil society groups, and non-governmental organizations. In the event we identify an issue in our supply chain, we act fast and prioritize solutions from the workers' point of view. We work with industry partners to prevent systemic issues and implement programs that support continuous improvement for our suppliers and workers.

#### *Safe workplaces*

Safe and healthy workplaces are a top priority for Amazon. We have global teams who partner with suppliers to increase worker awareness of safety issues, promote worker participation in their facility's safety culture, and promote initiatives focused on the well-being of workers on issues that matter most to them.

Our suppliers must provide workers with a safe and healthy work environment; suppliers must, at a minimum, comply with applicable laws regarding working conditions. Additionally, we are committed to driving improvement in these key priority areas: (1) occupational safety, including adequate machine safeguarding, and ensuring suppliers continually identify, evaluate, and control physically demanding tasks to ensure that worker health and safety is not jeopardized; (2) emergency preparedness and response planning; and (3) sanitation and housing, where if suppliers provide residential facilities for their workers, they must provide clean and safe accommodations.

We conduct on-site audits of suppliers' safety conditions throughout our business relationship—often multiple times a year. This includes assessments of protections such as adequate fire safety systems, sanitary dormitories and facilities, and adequate machine safeguarding.

*Appendix 1: webpage<sup>1</sup> captured with the NCapture tool on Nvivo*

<a href="#">AmazonNewsEU</a>	What did people do before Alexa? We worked with @TheEllenShow and @portiaferossi to help us see what we did #BeforeAlexa For more stories on Amazon Devices: <a href="https://t.co/up9J7PonKr">https://t.co/up9J7PonKr</a> <a href="https://t.co/8yovpb03b2">https://t.co/8yovpb03b2</a>	13 Feb 2020 at 15:35:11	Retweet	<a href="#">AmazonNewsEU</a>	15	<a href="#">BeforeAlexa</a>
<a href="#">AmazonNewsEU</a>	Teamwork for a good cause: Amazon Volunteers helped @BerlinerTafel charity in Germany by collecting fresh fruits and vegetables. More on how we support local communities across Europe: <a href="https://t.co/ObZTFNO6X7">https://t.co/ObZTFNO6X7</a> <a href="https://t.co/HfRmb0ufMK">https://t.co/HfRmb0ufMK</a>	13 Feb 2020 at 13:33:21	Tweet		0	
<a href="#">AmazonNewsEU</a>	"Many people questioned whether Spaniards like spicy food, but we found success," explains Juan Vicente, CEO of Espicy. What we got to know about the #Espicy sauce were some of the ingredients: <a href="https://t.co/BJXt21863j">https://t.co/BJXt21863j</a>	13 Feb 2020 at 08:44:23	Tweet		0	<a href="#">Espicy</a>
<a href="#">AmazonNewsEU</a>	Amazon Original #StarTrekPicard streaming now on <a href="https://t.co/h08oZkmKgy">https://t.co/h08oZkmKgy</a> : This week, protagonist Jean-Luc and his newly assembled crew take off in their first mission. Are you aboard? <a href="https://t.co/CskJ6W6ATJ">https://t.co/CskJ6W6ATJ</a>	12 Feb 2020 at 17:06:14	Tweet		1	<a href="#">StarTrekPicard</a>
<a href="#">AmazonNewsEU</a>	Job creation in Italy : We've just announced the opening of two new fulfillment centers in Italy this year, creating 1.400 permanent jobs in three years with competitive pay and comprehensive benefits from day one. Check the article for more: <a href="https://t.co/UIYQ3en96X">https://t.co/UIYQ3en96X</a>	12 Feb 2020 at 13:23:26	Tweet		6	
<a href="#">AmazonNewsEU</a>	CPR training in the UK : We're offering free #CPR training to <a href="#">CPR</a>	February 20 at 15:35:11	Retweet	<a href="#">AmazonNewsEU</a>	4	<a href="#">CPR</a>

Appendix 2: Twitter dataset as shown in the Nvivo software

Amazon's global fleet and products: "It also needs to be the most functional, the highest performing, the safest."

Amazon's transportation team spent 18 months evaluating a variety of electric vehicle options to reduce its carbon footprint. To move quickly, Rachev's team realised the best way forward was to chart their own path and create a new, custom electric vehicle to meet Amazon's needs now and in the future.

The vehicles will reduce carbon emissions, raise the bar for driver safety, and optimise technology and design elements to create a best-in-class driver experience. Manufactured at Rivian's plant in Normal, Illinois, they'll come in three size variants and support multiple battery sizes so they can be optimised for specific delivery routes.

"We're focused on driving efficiency into every aspect of the vehicle design—everything from cabin heating to driver ergonomics to drivetrain design has been optimised for time and energy," said R.J. Scaringe, CEO of Rivian. "And then the echo effect of this, of causing other logistics players in this space to also look at how they drive up efficiency within their fleet, will have a very large impact."

Dave Clark, Amazon's senior vice president of worldwide operations, looks forward to the vehicle program's ripple effect.

"We created The Climate Pledge and are investing in 100,000 Rivian electric delivery vans to demonstrate that there is a large and growing market for green technologies," he said. "It's important that large companies like Amazon stimulate investment in the development of low-carbon products and services that will be required to help companies of all sizes decarbonise their operations and support a thriving, low-carbon economy."

Drivers who currently deliver Amazon packages informed the vehicle's design and functionality—from how the seat feels to the ease of getting in and out of the vehicles, package loading and unloading, and visibility.

**Environment**  
**Innovation**  
**Sustainability**

Coding Density

Appendix 3: press release as shown in the Nvivo software

amazon kindle

# Stories over gray


Literature took over São Paulo's gray walls.

**\_CHALLENGE**  
 In a country where 44% of its people don't have reading habits and 30% of them never ever bought a book<sup>1</sup>, Kindle needed an impactful campaign to generate Kindle app downloads and stimulate e-books reading.  
\*IBOPE research.

**\_IDEA**  
 We projected famous quotes of Literature over the infamous gray walls, creating giant billboards in one of the most important avenues in São Paulo.

**\_CONTEXT**  
 São Paulo's Mayor was a successful businessman and reality TV celebrity (Brazil's version of "The Apprentice"), and a savvy media promoter. Among his first acts was "Pretty City", a beautification project that painted over the largest graffiti mural in Latin America.

**\_IDEA**  
 We knew that the Mayor and his followers would be quick and harsh in responding to any criticism of "Pretty City", which played right into our strategy. The back and forth news cycle had people waiting to see the next move, and we had a big one: a free ebook to every person in São Paulo.



In only 7 days

**+1MM** downloaded e-books

**+12%** monthly device sales

**+70%** Kindle app downloads

REUTERS PHOTO | G1 | EPOCA | THE WASHINGTON POST | EXAME | FORTUNE | UOL | INFO MONEY | ISTOÉ | GQ | BUZZFEED | VEJA | REUTERS | IDG NOW!

Appendix 4: infographic of the 'Stories over gray' advertising campaign



Appendix 5: frame from the commercial 'Thursday Night Football'

<sup>1</sup> <https://sustainability.aboutamazon.com/key-commitments>