Corporate Social Responsibility of Brands in the Age of Strategic Sovereignty: An Integrative Approach through the STAR Index

Philippe Jourdan, HEC, associate professor, IAE Paris-Est

Jean-Claude Pacitto, assistant professor, IUT, Université Paris-Est Créteil

Valérie Jourdan, CEO, Promise Consulting | Panel On The Web

Résumé :
Cet article propose une grille intégrée d'analyse de la performance territoriale des marques autour de quatre dimensions clés : Souveraineté, Transition écologique, Autonomie sociale et Résilience organisationnelle (acronyme STAR). L'indicateur STAR vise à objectiver des concepts jusque-là peu opérationnalisés, afin de faciliter leur intégration dans le pilotage stratégique des entreprises. Sur le plan académique, il articule des champs souvent disjoints – stratégie, RSE, développement durable et territorialisation. Sur le plan managérial, il constitue un outil d'autoévaluation structurant pour engager les marques dans des trajectoires plus durables et souveraines.

Summary:
This article proposes an integrated framework for analyzing the territorial performance of brands, structured around four key dimensions: Sovereignty, Ecological Transition, Social Autonomy, and Organizational Resilience (acronym: STAR). The STAR indicator aims to operationalize concepts that have so far remained unoperationalized, primarily to facilitate their integration into companies' strategic management processes. From an academic perspective, it bridges the traditionally separate fields of strategy, CSR, sustainable development, and territorial anchoring. From a managerial standpoint, it provides a structured self-assessment tool to help brands navigate more sustainable and sovereign trajectories.

Mots clés : souveraineté ; transition écologique ; résilience ; autonomie ; marque ; marketing ; RSE ; développement durable ; indice ; stratégie ; gouvernance.

Keywords: sovereignty; ecological transition; resilience; autonomy; brand; marketing; CSR; sustainable development; index; strategy; governance.

Corporate Social Responsibility of Brands in the Age of Strategic Sovereignty: An Integrative Approach through the STAR Index

INTRODUCTION

The reconciliation between economic sovereignty and social concerns is often perceived as complex (Jourdan & Pacitto, 2023). In a context of systemic crises—health-related, geopolitical, and environmental—we propose to reconceptualize the societal responsibility of brands through an integrative approach structured around four fundamental dimensions: economic sovereignty, ecological transition, social autonomy, and organizational resilience. These four pillars, grouped under the acronym STAR, aim to provide a composite indicator of territorial brand performance, combining theoretical rigor with managerial applicability.

-S- FOR ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY

We argue that corporate societal commitments, however virtuous they may be, cannot be sustained without genuine strategic autonomy. A company that is structurally dependent on external resources, decisions, or technologies is inherently constrained in its ability to uphold its commitments to sustainable development. A brand lacking control over its value chain, or unable to reconfigure it, is thus exposed to potential threats to its long-term viability—risks that have become increasingly salient to consumers in light of recent shortages of masks, medicines, energy, as well as persistent inflation (Jourdan & Pacitto, 2023). In this context, some firms may be compelled to reconsider their CSR commitments, particularly those related to sustainability (Lins et al., 2017).

Economic sovereignty is thus defined as a company's ability to exercise its strategic choices freely, enabled by its control over critical resources—those that are rare, value-creating, inimitable, and without equivalent substitutes (Barney, 1991). To assess this dimension, we propose three metrics: (1) the proportion of suppliers located in close proximity; (2) the share of raw materials sourced locally; and (3) the capacity to secure resources by establishing alternative supply options to mitigate dependency risks (see Appendix 1).

-T- FOR ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION

We define ecological transition as a systemic transformation process that reconfigures the technological, economic, ecological, and institutional dimensions of firms, in line with Bourg and Papaux's (2015) definition. We also draw on the theory of sociotechnical regimes (Geels, 2002) to conceptualize this process as a dynamic of sectoral reconfiguration. Ecological transition is far from a mere marginal adjustment; it seeks, through a systemic regime shift, to align productive models with planetary boundaries.

Although ecological transition unfolds within an uncertain temporal horizon—characteristic of any phase of instability between two regimes—the urgency of the climate crisis has acted as a powerful catalyst, heightening awareness among state actors, economic agents, and civil society (Bush & Doyon, 2025; Mazon et al., 2022; Laigle, 2019). It can thus be understood as a systemic action process relying on multiple levers and intervention mechanisms.

Among its guiding principles, the concept of "compatibility with planetary boundaries," proposed by Bourg and Papaux (2015), plays a central role. This principle underpins two main axes of action: first, the sustainable management of non-renewable resources, involving their recycling or substitution with renewable alternatives; and second, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, in line with the imperatives of combating climate change.

In order to capture the complexity inherent in the diversity of investments associated with ecological transition, while ensuring the development of a reliable and objective index of corporate commitment, we focus on indicators centered on tangible transformations. These include: (1) the rate of green investments; (2) measurable reductions in environmental footprint (notably through waste valorization); and (3) the proportion of revenue generated from eco-designed offerings. These dimensions reflect an organization's capacity to reorient its technological choices, production processes, and commercial offerings toward models aligned with planetary boundaries and societal expectations (see Appendix 1).

-A- FOR SOCIAL AUTONOMY

Social autonomy constitutes the third component of our index. Its definition draws on the works of Castoriadis (1975), Badie (1995), and Habermas (1981), conceptualizing autonomy as a reflexive, participatory, and distributed capacity. At first glance, the notion of social autonomy may appear redundant with that of sovereignty and resilience. However, these three concepts refer to distinct realities. Social autonomy functions as a prerequisite for sovereignty—it is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for it. Resilience, by contrast, is defined as the capacity to anticipate, absorb, and adapt over time to disruptive or adverse events. Thus, social autonomy, sovereignty, and resilience are dynamically interrelated but cannot be conflated.

Social autonomy refers to the capacity of social actors, broadly understood but always within a defined territory, to collectively establish their own norms, institutions, and purposes, independently of structural dependence on actors external to that territory. It entails the ability of these actors to deliberate, decide, and act according to their own interests, thereby ensuring control over their material, symbolic, and political conditions of existence: "An autonomous society is a society that explicitly institutes itself through the ongoing questioning of its laws, norms, and values" (Castoriadis, 1975). The concept of social autonomy is thus distinct both from individual autonomy, which centers on personal freedom, and from political sovereignty, which focuses on the exercise of state power.

We define social autonomy, as applied to business, as a process through which companies integrate their sustainable development efforts within a dynamic of territorial co-development. This approach simultaneously relies on strengthening local resilience capacities, fostering and developing endogenous skills, and adopting a form of cooperative frugality, understood as the rationalization of resources through mutualization and collaboration among territorial actors. More concretely, social autonomy is expressed through the development of local skills, the creation of stable employment in strategic sectors, and investment in local projects with social impact. These dimensions reflect companies' involvement in the co-development of territories and their ability to withstand heteronomous dynamics induced by globalization or external standards (Dinerstein, 2015; Polanyi, 1944), thereby aligning with empirical research conducted by South American scholars on indigenous community development, such as Canto Chac in Yucatan (Canto Chac, 2008) or Manuel Chiriboga in Ecuador (Chiriboga, 2008).

To assess this dimension, three primary indicators are retained: (1) the development of local skills, measured by the percentage of employees trained in strategic occupations linked to economic sovereignty; (2) the share of stable jobs created locally (notably permanent contracts); and (3) investments in high-impact local social projects, assessed by the ratio of revenue allocated to local initiatives with significant social impact. The significant social impact of these actions is further evaluated according to three criteria: the geographical anchoring of the projects, the scale of anticipated social benefits, and the temporal sustainability of the investments made. Defined in this way, the dimension of social autonomy highlights the capacity of firms to contribute to the social sustainability of the territories in which they operate (see Appendix 1).

-R- FOR ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

Finally, organizational resilience, as defined by ISO 22316:2017, refers to a company's ability to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to systemic disruptions. It goes beyond the logic of business continuity by integrating strategic agility, risk culture, and organizational learning. Indeed, while organizational resilience and business continuity share the objective of maintaining operations, they stem from distinct logics (Portail I.E., 2023). Business continuity is limited to the temporary maintenance of critical functions in a degraded mode during a crisis, whereas resilience adopts a more comprehensive approach, encompassing the capacity to absorb shocks, continuously adapt to environmental dynamics, and, where necessary, undertake structural and procedural transformation—particularly through the strategic management of human resources (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). It thus reflects a higher level of maturity, grounded in agility, strategic coherence, and organizational learning.

Organizational resilience entails the implementation of novel organizational processes in the face of uncertainty. It involves strengthening resilience capacities through a strategic, collaborative, and forward-looking structuring approach. Leitner (2023) underscores the importance of participatory structures and multi-agent models in resilience governance and crisis management, emphasizing the need for a decentralized, responsive, and inclusive organization capable of

mobilizing collective intelligence in the face of uncertainty. Kancs (2022) highlights several key levers for the survival of productive systems exposed to systemic shocks: the diversification of supply sources, the strategic trade-off between immediate efficiency and long-term redundancy, the use of centralized and coordinated governance, and the internalization of externalities linked to sectoral interdependencies. Collectively, these mechanisms ultimately aim to reduce the structural vulnerability of value chains and stabilize the flows essential to economic continuity, within a framework of sustainable partnership (Schweitzer et al., 2020).

Among the various dimensions constituting our index, resilience proves to be the most challenging to quantify. It relies on robust organizational structuring, the presence of a risk management plan, and the implementation of proactive strategies in both industrial policy and supply management. To address this complexity, we employ three indicators: (1) The capacity to absorb economic shocks, measured by the net financial debt-to-EBITDA ratio. The lower this ratio, the greater the firm's ability to withstand a temporary decline in activity without jeopardizing its debt servicing capacity; (2) The existence of a Strategic Continuity Plan (SCP), assessed in terms of its formalization, regular updating, and operational team adoption; (3) The rate of long-term contractual coverage, defined as the proportion of strategic resources secured through agreements of at least three to five years. A high ratio—around 70% or more—indicates strong supply predictability and an enhanced capacity to absorb economic shocks (see Appendix 1).

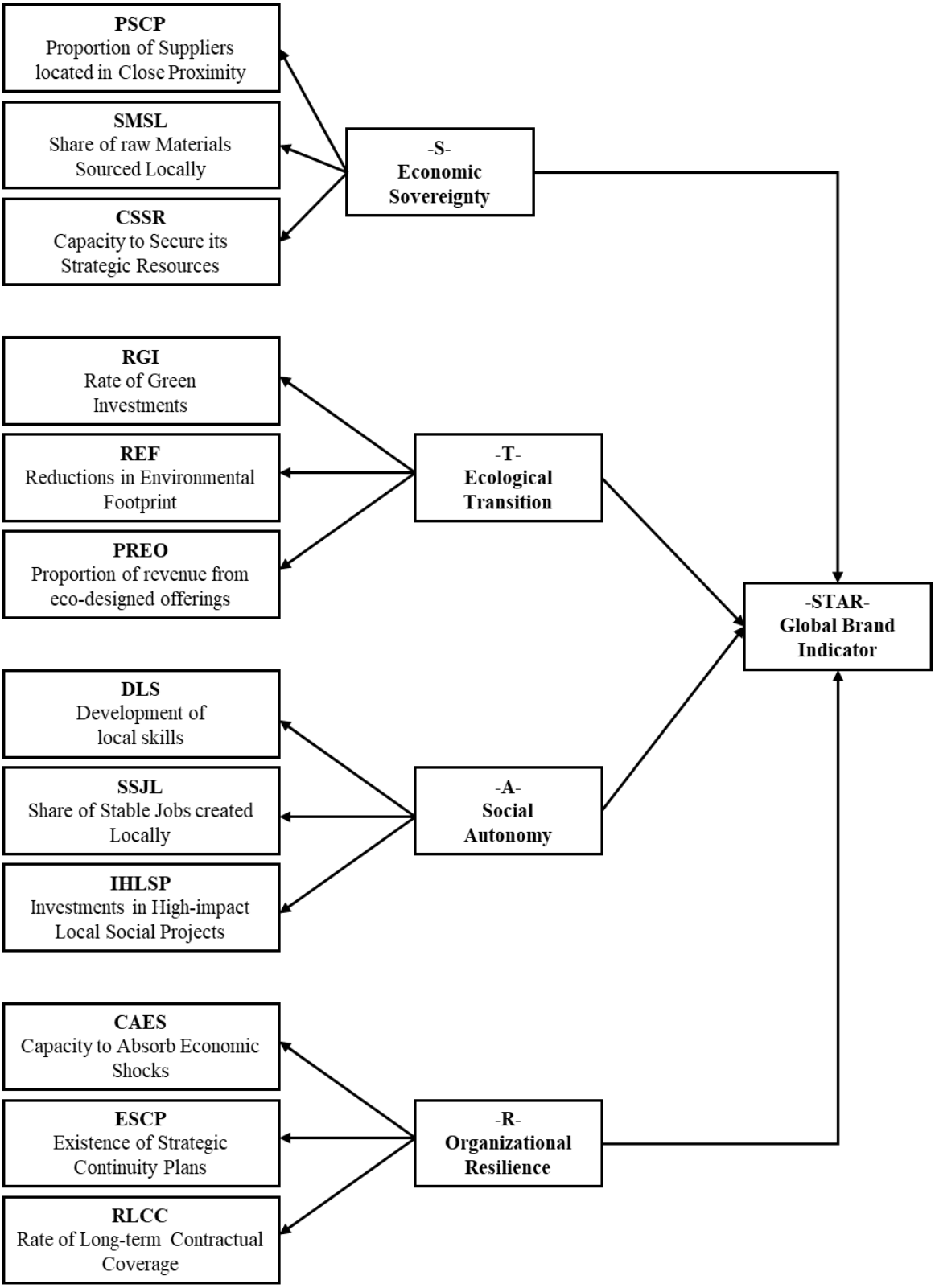
CONCLUSION

From an academic perspective, our article contributes to the structuring of a cross-cutting and multidimensional analytical framework for examining the territorial embeddedness of corporate responsibility in the context of sustainable development. It bridges traditionally disparate research domains—corporate strategy, social responsibility, territorial development, and sustainability—by proposing a coherent and systematic formalization of the indicators associated with these dimensions.

From a managerial perspective, our proposed STAR index provides an integrated and operational model of sustainable performance, structured around four interdependent dimensions: economic sovereignty, ecological transition, social autonomy, and organizational resilience. For each dimension, we have developed operational assessment frameworks combining: (i) explicit calculation formulas; (ii) reference thresholds; (iii) analytical interpretation guidelines; and (iv) managerial implications. This framework aims to objectify concepts frequently discussed in the literature but rarely translated into quantitative indicators that are directly actionable for strategic management. Designed as both a strategic decision-support tool and a self-assessment mechanism, the STAR index enables the prioritization of vulnerabilities and the orientation of sovereign sustainability trajectories.

Nonetheless, several avenues for extending our research are necessary: empirical validation on a large sample, the construction of a weighted composite index to facilitate inter-firm benchmarking, and, beyond that, potential applications in evaluating public policies and territorial performance. These extensions, drawing on field surveys, statistical analyses, and multi-criteria modeling, aim to strengthen the robustness and applicability of this tool.

APPENDIX 1 – MODELING OF THE STAR INDICATOR



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Badie, B. (1995). *La fin des territoires: Essai sur le désordre international et l'utilité sociale du respect.* Paris: Fayard. Collection l'Espace du politique. 278 p. https://bit.ly/3ZKc50Z

Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management, 17*(1), 99–120. https://bit.ly/4k5NkVb

Bourg, D., & Papaux, A. (Eds.). (2015). *Dictionnaire de la pensée écologique.* Paris: Presses universitaires de France (PUF). Entry: Transition, p. 1007. 1120 p. https://bit.ly/3ZC7kXj

Bush, J., & Doyon, A. (2025). Climate emergency declarations by local governments – what comes next? *npj Climate Action, 4*(44), May 07. https://bit.ly/463eec1

Canto Chac, M. (2008). Gobernanza y participación ciudadana en las políticas públicas frente al reto del desarrollo. *Política y Cultura, 30,* 9–37. https://bit.ly/44u3C4M

Castoriadis, C. (1975). *L'institution imaginaire de la société.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil. 530 p. https://bit.ly/44hApsJ

Chiriboga, M. V. (2008). 30 años después: una reflexión sobre los estudios rurales y agrarios en Ecuador. *Repositorio FLACSO.* http://bit.ly/4olFsBu

Dinerstein, A. C. (2015). *The politics of autonomy in Latin America: The art of organizing hope.* London: Springer. Non-Governmental Public Action Series. 282 p. https://bit.ly/3ZKfE7n

Geels, F. W. (2002). Technological transitions as evolutionary reconfiguration processes: A multi-level perspective and a case study. *Research Policy, 31*(8–9), 1257–1274. https://bit.ly/4nebBKG

Habermas, J. (1981). *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel: Rationalité de l'agir et rationalisation de la société* (Vol. 1). Paris: Fayard. Collection Espace du politique. 450 p. https://bit.ly/4kSvEN2

International Organization for Standardization (ISO). (2017). *ISO 22316:2017 – Security and resilience – Organizational resilience – Principles and attributes.* Edition 1. https://bit.ly/3ZENrPc

Jourdan, P., & Pacitto, J.-C. (2023). *La RSE impactée par la souveraineté économique: Enjeux et perspectives.* Paris: Éditions Vérone. 140 p. https://bit.ly/4d6tMfY

Kancs, D. (2022). Enhancing resilience: Model-based simulations. *EERI Research Paper Series, 10/2022.* Economics and Econometrics Research Institute (EERI), Brussels. https://bit.ly/44WbInB

Laigle, L. (2019). Justice climatique et mobilisations environnementales. *VertigO, la revue électronique en sciences de l'environnement, 19*(1), 1–30. https://bit.ly/4egEgLc

Leitner, S. (2023). Designing organizations for bottom-up task allocation: The role of incentives. *arXiv.org,* abs/2301.00410. https://bit.ly/43ycnZP

Lengnick-Hall, C. A., Beck, T. E., & Lengnick-Hall, M. L. (2011). Developing a capacity for organizational resilience through strategic human resource management. *Human Resource Management Review, 21*(3), 243–255. https://bit.ly/4dC2ejC

Lins, K. V., Servaes, H., & Tamayo, A. (2017). Social capital, trust, and firm performance: The value of corporate social responsibility during the financial crisis. *The Journal of Finance, 72*(4), 1785–1824. https://bit.ly/4mmgdOo

Mazon, J., Pino, D., & Vinyoles, M. (2022). Is declaring a climate emergency enough to stop global warming? Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Climate, 4*. https://bit.ly/3Gbvpxs

Polanyi, K. (1944/1983). *La grande transformation: Aux origines politiques et économiques de notre temps.* Paris: Gallimard. 476 p. https://bit.ly/4kSw4D6

Portail I.E. (2023). Résilience et continuité d'activité: Un choix stratégique de l'entreprise face au risque cyber. *protail-ie.fr.* https://bit.ly/44QTsMi

Schweitzer, F., Casiraghi, G., Tomasello, M. V., & Garcia, D. (2020). Fragile, yet resilient: Adaptive decline in a collaboration network of firms. *arXiv.org,* Paper 2011.13369. http://bit.ly/4mynHhd