



EXPLORING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INITIATIVES AND FIRM BEHAVIOURAL SCOPE

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Abstract

This is literature review paper intended to highlight the categories of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and the respective organizational scope of behavior when conducting the CSR activities. The importance of CSR cannot be under-estimated in this century and the years to come since consumers are continually becoming aware of possible dangerous products and organizational activities. The world, in general, and natural resources in particular are fast succumbing to human activities leaving the future uncertain. More and more organizations are becoming conscious of the impact of their business activities thus making frantic attempts to eliminate or reduce their impact, and respectively giving back to the society and the environment. This paper looks at different CSR initiatives that firms can engage in under different behavioral dimensions or scope in order to attain a better consumer or societal appeal. Since the paper used a desktop research approach, the paper becomes a conceptual article based on literature using previously conducted researches, books and articles. The most important finding of this paper is that many firms are practicing CSR in its various forms across the globe regardless of size, nature or origin. The conclusion is that the CSR concept is here to stay as important and fundamental to us,

both humans and the corporates world, into the next unforeseeable future. Currently, CSR is also becoming an important marketing and consumer appeal tool that is in the stages of taking its toll in the business world.

Keywords: CSR, Corporate social responsibility, Corporate social responsibility initiatives, Corporate social responsibility scope

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to CSR initiatives and scope

Having identified CSR as one modern way of enhancing corporate reputation and image, Pivato, Misani and Tencati (2006) assert that corporates need to focus on gaining trust and building reputation for long term survival. Kotler and Keller (2015) provide an understanding that CSR can be practised in various initiatives or activities, voluntary or involuntary, which includes cause-related marketing, philanthropy, sponsorship and environmentalism while on the other hand Butt (2016) believes CSR covers corporate citizenship, corporate governance, workplace management and even consumer protectionism. Chan (2014) provides seven CSR dimensions which stakeholders expect successful corporates to take a lead on which are governance, workplace welfare or management, financial performance, citizenship, products or services, leadership and innovation. In a study by Chan (2014), nearly half of the respondents indicated that the three most important dimensions of CSR are citizenship, governance and workplace.

Problem statement

With this backdrop, it opens avenues to many activities that firms can engage into as CSR initiatives thus giving room to much exploration on what can be considered as CSR initiatives. This section briefly outlines and explains some CSR initiatives that corporates can engage in and the list herein contained is not exhaustive but provides insights into what firms can engage in as CSR activities. What follows in this section are the dimensions or scope of behaviour within which various CSR initiatives falls under. The paper provides a guideline into dimensions of CSR and initiatives which the corporate should appreciate and further on develop own innovative CSR initiatives with regard to their societies, circumstances, era and so forth.

THE CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CONCEPT

Chan (2014) concurred with Brammer, Jackson and Matten (2012) that even though the field of CSR has been fluidal in its definition and practice, CSR has been variedly defined with a

common goal as those actions by corporates that are aimed at furthering the social good which goes beyond the corporate's interests and that which is also required by law. Carroll (2008) expresses CSR as the accountability regarding ethical, environmental, social, human rights and consumer concerns into business operations and core strategy. CSR calls for the working together of corporates with various stakeholders in maximising shared values; identifying, preventing and mitigating potential negatives (Tarus, 2015). The word stakeholder became popular after Freeman's landmark book entitled 'Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach' in 1984, and it is in this book that a stakeholder was defined as any individual, institution or group affected or can affect operations and achievement of corporate objectives. With that foundation Carroll and Buchholtz (2006) developed the 'Stakeholder theory' giving an explicit span of stakeholders ranging from shareholders, suppliers, employees, local communities and the consumers, also regarding the environment and the general society as elements to be considered in corporate strategy. It is towards these various stakeholders, especially the community and the environment, that firms develop CSR activities to solve numerous issues.

Corporate social responsibility initiatives

This section outlines possible CSR initiatives that firms engage into in an attempt to improve the community, the environment or following legislative requirements. Initiatives, in this context, can be referred to as CSR activities, performances or undertakings by firms using their own resources which includes finances, time, human resources and so forth.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship is a corporate strategic asset or investment that can be in the form of cash or kind (Lii, Wu & Ding, 2013). An organisation can sponsor an individual, a group, a company or institution, an event or program (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Lachowetz, Clark and Irwin (2002) say that sponsorship has been a critical and most prominent method of CSR and marketing campaigns since time immemorial. Kotler and Keller (2015) stress that sponsorship produces more positive consumer and community behaviour compared to all media advertisements put together. Gwinner and Bennett (2008) believe that a lot of research has been carried out with respect to sponsorship, brand awareness and brand image, but still suggests that there is need to study sponsorship with respect to consumer attitude, purchase intention and buying behaviour. Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006) agree with Carrillat, Lafferty and Harris (2005) that sponsorship effectively instil positive society or consumer attitude toward a firm.

Cause-related Marketing (CrM)

Nan and Heo (2007) declare that CrM entails firms promising to give a certain amount or percentage of their price or money to a social cause or non-profit organisations. Kotler and Keller (2015) argue that CrM manifests itself in many forms such as giving, community support, corporate responsiveness, donations and so forth towards noble causes. Consumers believe that firms should contribute to charitable or societal causes (Ellen, Webb & Mohr, 2000). Customers are willing to shift to support a brand that has a social reason embedded in it or in its selling and distribution (Webb & Mohr, 1998). Ellen et al., (2000) pronounce that CrM generates positive consumer perception. Kotler (2000) believes that CrM is a strategy for a corporates to communicate CSR in clear terms to influence consumer evaluations and preferences. Dahl and Lavack (1995) consider CrM as a firm visible hand, easy to notice and shows that a company has compassion for the society.

Philanthropy

Philanthropy are acts of giving money or kind to any cause, with no expectation of any benefit tied with the giving (Lii et al., 2013). The concept represents a corporate which simply wants to be regarded as a good citizen or having a good heart or spirit (Smith & Ward, 2006). Chan (2014) says that corporate citizenship has a close association with corporate philanthropy, where corporate philanthropy simply emerges as direct aid in cash grants, donations or kind while corporate citizenship is a firm, as a legal person, demonstrating that it is a good 'person' through any acts. Organisations have exercised their corporate citizenship through philanthropic acts such as donating money, services or products to not-for-profit organisations, charities, communities, partnering with organisations raising various forms of public awareness, giving scholarships, providing technical expertise, knowledge, skills and so forth (Kotler & Lee, 2005). Microsoft together with the Managing Director of Global Corporate Affairs and Tim Cook believe that philanthropy touches the heart of people, creates good reputation, changes consumer attitude and liking (Vascellaro, 2011). Craig (2013) argues that corporate philanthropy has been seen to be exploitative in some instances, even if it may generate favorable emotions or feelings.

Corporate citizenship

A corporate is considered 'good corporate citizen' as soon as it aids for good reasons and safeguards the environment (CSRRepTrack100, 2013). Good corporate citizenship can be evidenced by a firm's engagement in matters that are occurring in the country or community, and the world around (Chan, 2014). The burden of massive global issues which include water shortages, climatic change, terrorism, infectious diseases, education, providing access to food

(extreme poverty), corruption, failed states, relief and disaster response tend to be a given to multinational corporations which have a global scope of operations (Schwab, 2008). Becoming a good corporate resident or citizen also means conserving the environment, eliminating the corporate's detrimental impact in its operations or supply chain (Krystallis, Chrysochoidis & Scholderer, 2007) and this was termed corporate sustainability - covering the corporate's green policies or practices (Lajoux & Soltis-Martel, 2013). Organisations are becoming sensitive to issues that affect the society and the environment, and therefore are engaging in programs committed to alleviate environmental and climatic problems (Kotler & Keller, 2015). Lajoux and Soltis-Martel (2013) state that the conscious, educated consumer responds negatively to a firm which has shown indications of being a bad citizen.

Corporate governance

The CSRRepTrack100 (2013) defines governance as a corporate that is run responsibly, which means the corporate is behaving ethically, professionally or the corporate is transparent and open in business dealings. An ethical company should do so to the public and behind the scenes - an ethical internal climate should be consistent with what is portrayed in the public. Crane, McWilliams, Matten, Moon and Siegel (2008) outline key practices of governance and these are generating a favourable link with the public, conducting fair-transparent business and placing value to the stakeholders' interests in making business resolutions. The key to doing well governed business is creating a culture within the workforce, as Crane et al., (2008) noted, that helps to chart proper governance path for an organisation. To embed CSR in corporate climate there should be a culture stemming from principles inside the firm implanted in codes of ethics, mission statement, broad vision and values (Eccles, Ioannou & Serafeim, 2012). Governance issues are becoming major aspects affecting consumer and investor confidence and behaviour (Wisdom, Lawrence, Akindele & Muideen, 2018).

Workplace management

Workplace management means an ideal, appealing place of work in the context of how employees are treated, recognised and rewarded at the workplace (Lucas, Kang & Li, 2013). Organisations that have high level employee welfare tend to achieve high employee satisfaction and morale, low labour turn over, lure more talent and have excellent work relations (McElhaney, 2008). Corporate Responsibility Magazine (2014) considers employee privacy, diversity, job satisfaction, health or wellness, security, job safety and so on as part of what is termed internal CSR. On CSR's 100 Best Corporate Citizens rankings published in Corporate Responsibility Magazine (2014) Intel was globally ranked best on employee relations using

standards of employee relations, promotions, process changes, employee active involvement, employee and manager commitment, workplace safety and teamwork. According to Helm (2011) there is a link between customer satisfaction and loyalty, which accrues to an organisation because the organisation pays attention to employees and their well-being, thus, managing to retain staff members who are more enthusiastic on taking risks, being helpful, happy, creative and innovative. Similarly there is a link between a happy employee and customer satisfaction (Butt, 2016).

Environmentalism

According to Kauffeld et al., (2009) in a National Economic Survey, 80 percent and above of the Americans choose working or buying from a corporation that has a concern over the environment. Responsible corporates improve the wellbeing of the environment and community by attending to their operations, production processes and distributions systems (Bendapudi, 2003). According to Hernandez (2013) Microsoft is greatly accredited for making frantic efforts in eliminating dangers to the environment whereas some corporates have neglected the environment and excessively exploited natural resources. The Environmental Protection Agency, society and consumers highly emulate the environmental sustainability efforts by Microsoft, thus, Microsoft was conferred the Green Power Partner of the year Award (Hernandez, 2013). Top environmentally friendly corporates have been named the Green Eleven, while top environmental enemy corporates were labelled as the Toxic Ten (Detrick, 2008), giving a spectrum from which consumers chose a firm they want to be associated with or which they can support.

The discussed CSR initiatives or activities fall in the firm CSR scope of behaviour as illustrated in the following section.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) scope of behaviour

According to Kotler and Keller (2015) CSR is motivated by different aspects such as volunteering, legal framework, societal ethics, professionalism and value creation. Firms conducting CSR may behave or act in one or more than one variant of these aspects, meaning a certain CSR activity can overlap two or more CSR scopes or dimensions of firm behaviour. This section will explain the CSR scope of behavior of firms as follows;

Voluntary acts

Chan (2014) articulates that CSR refers to voluntary actions that firms take to improve living conditions i.e. economic, environmental, social status of local communities or to assist in

reducing negative effects of company operations. Voluntary acts are those that go beyond requirements of contracts, obligations and license agreement (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Legal requirements across the globe are naturally leading towards increased regulation of CSR (Kotler & Lee, 2005; Schwab, 2008). Muirhead (1999) criticises the absence of any enforcement or punitive mechanism for firms to meet extra-judicial obligations. The absence of an enforcement and punitive mechanism is a shortcoming underlying CSR theory, CSR practice, corporate citizenship and CSR voluntary initiatives (Valentine & Fleischman, 2007).

Legal acts

There is an overlap of CSR and corporate governance issues, when it comes to CSR practice, regulation and legislation (Watson Group, 2015). Corporate governance are systems and procedures through which firms are operated, guided and controlled through regulations, legislation and codes of conduct (Brammer et al., 2012). Carroll (2006) discusses CSR as voluntary initiatives where no legislation has been enacted, though the Triple Bottom Line approach affirm that CSR can be guided by legislation concerned with social matters and the environment. Environment and social matters are now being embedded in the Companies Act, and in countries like the UK such legislation includes Race Relations Act (Statutory Duties) Order 2001, Working Time (Amendment) Regulations 2001, Maternity and Parental Leave (amendment) Regulations 2001, Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005, Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Employment Act 2002 among many other. The Accounts Modernisation Directive calls for big PLC companies to have reports published on environmental issues (Toal & Broomes, 2006; 2017). Kotler and Keller (2015) argue that consumers easily support corporates that follow the legal framework requirements, from the level of product standards to all business operations or activities.

Ethical/ moral acts

Papoutsy (2000) states that ethical business behaviour is fast becoming a global issue, challenge and a daunting task for many firms. Davies, Lee and Ahonkhai (2012) adds that ethical dimensions and concepts have emerged and been modified in various contexts of societies and business operations following the fact that ethical principles stems from complex different societal values though they are some universal principles. Firms succeed by being ethical and observing CSR practices (Kotler & Keller, 2015). Gaumnitz and Lere (2002) uphold that the complexity of ethics is as a results of the fact that ethical standards emanate or are embedded in systems, values, procedures, religion, rituals, e.t.c. of societies which could be different across societies. The greatest challenge is to differentiate business and societal living

standards, where a business in a certain society naturally adopts that society's living standards into formal business practices (Isaacs-Morell 2013). In extremist societies, the harm a firm can do involves encroaching or offending a societal or cultural principle (Valentine & Fleischman, 2007). Some corporates have developed codes of conduct or practice in order to set standards for conducting fair or correct business while some corporates who live in generous or collective societies adopted giving a lot to the community as part of their ethical values or strategy (Butt, 2016).

Professional conduct

Valentine and Fleischman (2007) state that professional standards enhance a firm's CSR activities and ethical behaviour. Professional conduct is seen in the mannerism, way of doing work or handling oneself at workplace or in business which demonstrate commendable or acceptable behavioural standards. A society's cultural framework also affects the formation of occupational or organisational standards. The standards set regulate what can be considered professional or unprofessional conduct (Boynton, 2002). According to Gaumnitz and Lere (2002) professionalism has been defined as the public purpose, intellectual tradition and fiduciary relationships that are involved in an occupation or job setting. The type or level of professionalism forms the basis of norms, values and defines the guides in which practitioners organise and perform work, tasks and conduct (Chin, Hambrick & Trevino, 2013). Management should readily accept CSR as society expects companies, professions and staff to abide by professional standards. Valentine and Fleischman (2007) explain that employees should be instilled with high professional, ethical standards that should direct them to high ethics and social responsibility. Groening, Swaminathan and Mittal (2015) argue that professional standards raise commitment to ethical behavioral norms within a job and in business.

Value creation

Kotler and Armstrong (2010) are of the opinion that the main goal of corporate activities in the US for decades has been the creation of shareholder value. This approach is termed value based management and is viewed in various ways and these include the way firms compete, formulate strategies, implement strategies, organisational structure, management systems, activity measurement and managerial performance (Kotler & Keller, 2015). Clarkson (1995) argue that delivering value should be the main goal of a firm for all stakeholders, but not necessarily for shareholders only. Freeman (1984) adds that various stakeholders' interests also range from product and packaging quality, environment and societal preservation,

government revenue and employee welfare. In observing such interests, the corporates indirectly achieve CSR for the general society (Fernandez-Guadano & Sarria-Pedroza, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

As shown in Fig 1, the traditional CSR initiatives that firms can engage in falls under mainly philanthropy, environmentalism, workplace management, corporate governance, corporate citizenship, cause-related marketing and sponsorship activities; and these activities fall under ethical, value creation, legal, professionalism and voluntary firm behaviour dimensions. It is important to note that any CSR activity adopted by a firm may span more than one behavioral scope or dimension, that is, a CSR activity can be ethical at the same time creating value or a CSR activity can both be legal and ethical. What is crucial is that firms develop CSR activities for various reasons and more importantly to develop consumer or societal appeal and competitive stamina.

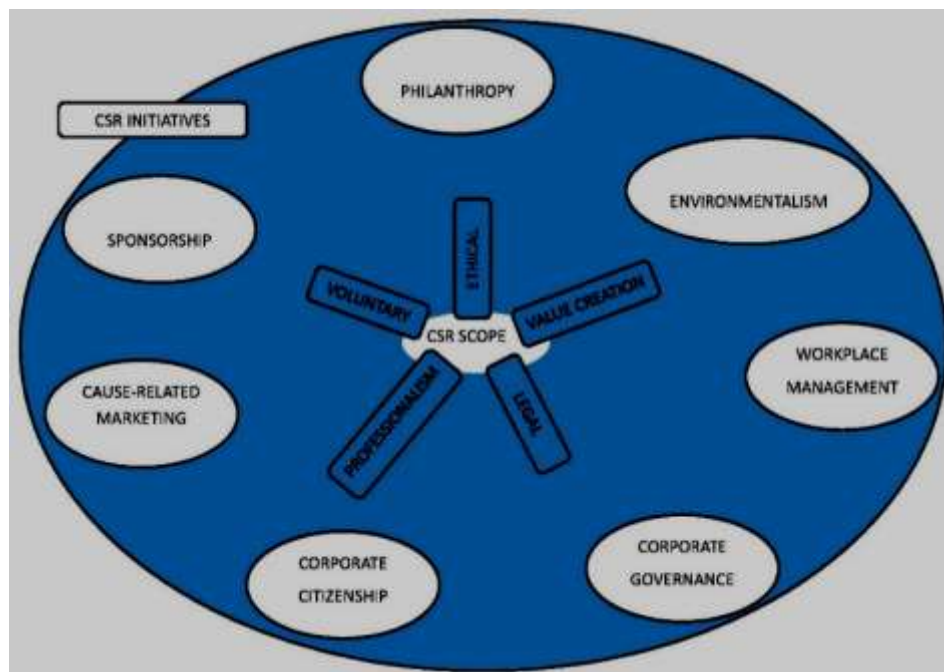


Figure 1. The CSR Initiatives and Scope

Source: Literature review

This literature-based paper suggests further empirical or evidence-based research in the areas of (1) the current common CSR initiatives different firms are engaging into - this type of investigation will be interesting if comparisons can be done across countries or societies, then across different types of firms in terms of nature or orientation, size, origin, and so forth, (2) the

motives or intentions by corporates in coming up with various CSR initiatives and (3) an exploration of societal or consumer-based causes, needs and expectations that are critical to be considered by firms in coming up with relevant CSR initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This literature-based paper basically identified five areas or scope of firm behaviour, spanning from voluntary, ethical, value creation, legal and professionalism. Corporates in whatever form, size, nature or origin can look at and engage in any CSR activities falling within these parameters. The corporate world is encouraged to be innovative in finding CSR activities that falls within or outside the given scope since the area of CSR is still developing, fluidal which is called the conitnued 'modernisation of CSR', giving room to entrance of new CSR topical issues.

In coming up with new innovative ways, the corporate world is encouraged to look at the societal causes or needs within which they can develop CSR activities in order to remain relevant and be quickly remembered or identified by various stakeholders. Severally, the purpose of conducting CSR has been grossly seen as a critical marketing strategy therefore stakeholders, especially the society, need to become the bedrock of developing CSR activities in order to attain positive appeal and support.

Firms need to use CSR as a critical competitive tool, especially if the CSR activity stems from societal causes or needs then the society or consumers can resonate well with the company, what is known as the 'consumer-company identity'. The consumer-company identity emerges when society or consumers feels they can relate, want to be associated or identified with a company which has similar values with them or which has addressed important issues on behalf of the society or consumers.

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