Corporate Social Responsibility Behavior Norms and its Management Issues Research

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Abstract

This paper takes the consumer demands and corporate group competition as the orientation, treating CSR as a social public product. It also focuses on the core problem about how to output the CSR behavior, combining with social norm, dramaturgical and social comparison theory, based on the related literature review, from three ways including CSR behavior orientation, communication tactics and the influence on brand performance, putting up with the urgent need to study and solve problems about CSR. The research conclusions will not only enrich the theory related CSR, but also provide the guidelines for the output of CSR front-stage behavior.

Keywords

Corporate Social Responsibility; Social Norm; Social Comparison; Dramaturgical Theory

Introduction

The outline of China’s Eleventh and Twelfth Five-year Plan pointed out: As a facilitator important part of the society system, corporate social responsibility (CSR) plays a vital role for the construction and development of harmonious society. After the 2008 “Wenchuan” earthquake, snow disaster and melamine incident, although all sectors of society, especially the business, strengthened investment and improved CSR significantly. However, according to “China CSR Report” released by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in November 2012 showed: In the surveyed state-owned, private and foreign business, the vast majority of CSR information disclosure is not comprehensive, accurate and timely, CSR behavior lacks of systematic prior management. In the case of a maximum of 100 points, China CSR average score is 23.1 points, while the average score is only 13.2 points for foreign business.

Obviously, CSR greater investment and improved schedule do not win good brand performance and competitive advantage. The main reason lies in the lack of scientific and system theory guiding about the CSR behavior output. This point can be confirmed by the literature review: First, previous studies on CSR behavior mostly stayed in the Pyramid Level Model, while lacked sufficient attention for the CSR behavior norms from consumers’ view. Second, most of past scholars have focused on what is the right thing (the definition and connotation of CSR), and less on how to do the right thing smartly (Smith and Craig, 2003), in other words, how to communicate and display through the different CSR front-stage operation model. Finally, most previous studies on CSR are concentrated on the individual level (Longinos et al., 2009), few studied how to gain competitive advantage by CSR behavior comparison from the group level.

In the three ways, social norm, dramaturgical and social comparison theory precisely can help us make a good interpretation and response. Because social norm theory can help companies deeply understand and grasp consumers’ demand for CSR behavior from individual role, group interaction and social expectation. On this basis, we should furtherly strengthen CSR front-stage behavior communication and display ability by the dramaturgical theory. What’s more, through assimilation and contrast effects from social comparison to gain competitive advantage. In view of this, unlike previous studies, this paper will follow the logic of the market-oriented, take CSR behavior as a social product, treat consumer demand and groups competition as the orientation, combining the above three aspects theory, comb and reviewing the previous relevant literature, and further proposing the urgent need to study and solve problems in CSR field.

Literature Review and Comments

About the relevant literature review, this paper follows the idea to sort out and evaluate. Firstly, we will evaluate and analyze CSR behavior orientation, including competition and consumer demands. Secondly, we will make exploratory discussion about CSR behavior norms, including individual role, group
interaction and social expectation. Then based on CSR behavior communication strategies, it interprets CSR behavior front-stage operation model. Finally, we will review the CSR behavior by contrastive study, specifically including assimilation and contrast effects between the sender and receiver business.

**CSR Behavior Orientation**

About CSR behavior orientation, the past scholars studied from three ways: resource-based, stakeholders and social problems. Resource-based orientation look at the resource input of CSR behavior from enterprise inside. They mainly studied the relationship between resource belonged to enterprise and CSR strategic choice (Krisha, 2008). The stakeholder and social problems orientation focused on CSR behavior output from enterprise outside. The former mainly studied how to balance the benefits among shareholders, employees, customers and suppliers through CSR behavior output. The latter mainly studied how to solve the problems through CSR behavior output (Archie, 1979). Then, some scholars will pairwise combination from the three ways, exploring the CSR demands of different groups, or how do enterprises choice and solve social problems according to self-owned resource while outputting CSR (Xu Zhengliang and Liu Na, 2008).

It was not hard to see that the research about CSR behavior orientation was no more the match between CSR output and input; however, it ignored comply with behavior norms during CSR output process from consumers’ perspective. And less attention has ever been paid to CSR behavior interaction and competition from corporate group level. In fact, CSR has become a way of competition among enterprises, but most companies understood CSR connotation basically from the Pyramid Level Model. Therefore, CSR behavior seemed to more homogenization, it was difficult to produce the difference and generate competitive advantage. Therefore, as a social product, the output of CSR behavior needed to follow consumer demands and group competition orientation (Narver et al., 1990). The former referred to enterprises provide continuous ultra-desirable CSR behavior to meet consumers’ demands. The latter mainly referred to compare with competitors, companies should provide differentiated and targeted CSR behavior to meet consumers’ demands.

**CSR Behavior and Social Norms**

The classical economic school thought that the only social responsibility for corporate was to maximize profits. Stakeholders believed that enterprises should bear on the social responsibility about employees, consumers, communities and the environment, while they created profits (Brown and Daccin, 1997). From prosocial behavior and social performance perspective, the obligation of management was not only to protect and improve the interests of enterprises, but also include the welfare of society as a whole (Davis and Blomstrom, 1975). Based on this, Carroll (1991) proposed Pyramid Hierarchical Model: economic, legal, ethical, moral and philanthropic responsibility. Then most scholars began to study the five areas of social responsibility, but it ignored CSR behavior based on the social norms. This already reflected in the two prerequisite (social contract and moral agency) about CSR. Social contract thought that CSR behavior must be considered under the guidance of social norms, which was one of the legitimacy sources for the enterprise identity to obtain. While moral agent identity also stressed CSR behavior must be consistent with social value norms (Donaldson, 1983). Thus it can be seen that it is very essential to research CSR behavior and its management from social norm perspective. While precisely, these are the deficiencies and limitations of previous studies.

In fact, some scholars have already suggested the demands of CSR behavior norms for consumers from the individual roles, group interaction and social expectations. For example, Aaker et al (2004) suggested that CSR individual role existed differences through researching the mistakes of pure and excitement brands. Huang Minxue et al (2008) verified the existence of CSR group behavior norms by expectation comparison. Huang Jing et al (2010) reflected the CSR behavior norms from the whole social level through dividing and defining violate-feeling and violate-law behavior of entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, few scholars have launched the depth and systematic study. In addition, the study showed that people often deviated from their behavior norms in the above three levels, because existed differences in individual moral ideology or social situation and other factors. Up/down far beyond/below a certain level of behavior norms, namely over/under-conformity behavior (Heckert and Heckert, 2002). And compared to conformity behavior, the media and the public were more incline to focus on the deviate behavior (Rindova et al., 2006). Combined with the research contents of this paper, in the above three levels, the output of CSR behavior also existed deviations, namely CSR over/under-conformity behavior.
CSR Behavior Communication Strategy and Drama Theory

Previous research on CSR behavior communication strategy and nothing more than CSR itself, CSR information and the CSR behavior of different levels were looked as the independent variables to study the process and mechanisms of the effects on consumer perception evaluation. The results was found that the company’s reputation, the reputation of cognitive and affective (Li Haiqin and Zhang Zigang, 2010), the consumer-company identity (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001), consumer satisfaction (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006) and other variables played a significant mediation role. While consumer ethics and role commitment (Reed et al., 2007), the fit between CSR behavior and corporate business field, the timing of CSR behavior initiated, CSR motivations (Karen et al., 2006), CSR’s ability and other variables played a significant moderation role. Most of these results could focus on the effects doing the right thing (CSR behavior) on consumers, ignoring how to work cleverly and how to use CSR front-stage behavior to influence on consumer perception.

While drama theory precisely can guide companies to make up for the deficiencies and limitations, because in market practice corporate fully influenced on consumers’ perception and evaluation through social responsibility front-stage behavior communication and display. Although studies showed that compared to donors in advertisement, when the victim pictures appeared on the screen, people would donate more money and fulfill more prosocial behavior (Mohr et al., 2005). When it appeared inconsistent words and deeds during the process of fulfilling CSR, it would enhance consumer hypocrisy perception on corporate (Wagner et al., 2009). However, as this research involved CSR front-stage behavior is extremely limited, they are not systematic. CSR front-stage behavior mainly refers that corporates initiatively spread them CSR behavior by media power. While CSR front-staging behavior mainly refers that under the passive situation, the media will exposure CSR behavior from the background to foreground (Huang Jing et al., 2011). Therefore, from the perspective of drama theory, researching CSR front-stage(ing) behavior operation models will fill the deficiencies and limitations of existing research on CSR communication strategy.

CSR Spillover Effects and Social Comparison

There are two views: the inside of brand system and intra-brand competition. For the former, Lei et al. (2006) thought that spillover effects not only considered the association strength between the brands, but also considered the association direction between the brands. Regarding the latter, Roehm and Tybout (2006) found if a brand can spillover the whole product category when it occurred negative events, depending on whether the brand can be representative, as well as whether the product attributes exposure had stronger connection with the whole product categories. While Fei Xianzheng et al. (2010) rose spillover effect to social responsibility reputation, researched the similarity between the sender/receiver enterprises, the involve degree of public on issues, as well as how the receiver company to clarify strategy to influence on spillover direction and strength. Finally, Zhou Zucheng and Zhang Yijie (2007) raised spillover effect to industry level; they found that CSR behavior different in the industry significantly influenced on consumer purchase intention.

Thus it can be seen, during the comparative study of CSR behavior, most scholars have focused on the CSR negative events, little involved CSR positive behavior. While this is precisely the important reason of CSR group behavior suppress for the current marketing practice. Because of related theory absent to guide enterprises how to gain competitive advantage through the output of social responsibility behavior, the evaluations of consumers’ perception on CSR behavior are obtained through comparing among the enterprise groups (Gibbons et al., 1999). Including the up/down (with the company ability strength/weak) comparison, due to the impacts of social background, often appear two opposite effects: assimilation and contrast effects (Xing Shufen and Yu Guoliang, 2006). The former/latter mainly refers to CSR behavior across corporate boundaries, produced similar/opposite effects on other related and similar/but different subjects (Sarah et al., 2006). On this basis, the assimilation effect mainly refers that consumers will increase/decrease the evaluations of receiver corporate, when they faced the up/down comparison information. The contrast effect mainly refers that consumers will decrease/increase the evaluations of sender corporate, when they faced the up/down comparison information. Then, during the up/down comparison process, due to the presence of assimilation/contrast effects, if CSR behavior follows what goes around comes around? It will need to further study.

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Problems that need to be Researched and Solved

Combined marketing practice and theory research, this paper focuses on the core problem about how the companies should output CSR behavior, in order to obtain a good brand performance and competitive advantage. We proposed the specific problems to research and solve the effect ed CSR behavioral on brand performance respectively.

First, from strategic level, what is the normative system from consumers’ view about CSR behavior output? For CSR strategy choice, should companies be consistent with the behavior norms from legitimacy perspective? Or should companies deviate (over /under) behavior norms from differentiate perspective? In CSR group behavior competition process, how will the receiver companies react when they meet the sender companies’ positive/negative CSR behavior?

Secondly , from tactical level, at the business individual role, group interaction and social expectations of consumers’ eye, what are the specific behavior norms about CSR output? During the process of CSR behavior output, should be under, conform and exceed all the levels of behavior norms? Which factors will affect the results of front-stage communication and display? In addition, how to use these factors to influence the consumers’ perception? When faced to the sender companies positive and negative CSR behavior, how to use assimilation/contrast thinking model for the receiver corporates, in order to increase/decrease the sender companies’ CSR positive/negative spillover effects?

Finally, from the impacts of CSR behavior on brand performance, when CSR behavior under, meet or exceed the above behavioral norms of three levels, how will they influence on brand performance respectively? What are the process and mechanism of the different CSR front-stage behavior influenced on brand performance? And during the CSR group behavior competition process, how do the sender/receiver companies affect each other?

Conclusions

According to the foregoing evaluation and analysis, the problems, which are CSR behavior norms and management urgently, need to be solved in marketing practice, because it plays an important role for the development and building of harmonious society. This paper focuses on how to gain a good brand performance and competitive advantage through outputting CSR behavior, which has important theoretical value and practical significance.

From the view of theory, taking CSR behavior as a social product, consumer demands for CSR behavior and its norms and CSR group behavior competition as the guidance, from the strategic level to make up for the shortcomings and limitations of the existing literature on CSR behavior orientation research. Secondly, based on social norms theory, from the individual roles, group interaction and social expectations, respectively explore the impacts of CSR behavior norm system and CSR behavior deviation on brand performance. This deepens the existing literature. Then, we research the effects different CSR front-stage behavior operation model on brand performance by the introduction of dramaturgical theory. From the perspective of impressive management enriched and improved the CSR behavior output related theory. Finally, with the help of social comparison theory, from the assimilation/contrast effects, analysis CSR behavior interaction and competition between the sender/receiver corporate, we enhanced the research object hierarchy from the individual level to the enterprise group level.

From the view of practice, consumer demands for CSR behavior and its norms and CSR group behavior competition as the guidance. This indicates the direction for CSR behavior and helps corporate more smoothly integrate CSR into marketing strategy. Secondly, the research about enterprise individual role, group interaction and social expectations made the output of CSR behavior more targeted. While drama theory would make CSR behavior front-stage communication and display become more maneuverability and effectiveness. In addition, the application and analysis of assimilation and contrast effects would make CSR behavior output become more strategically. Finally, from the CSR effective results, the research of system and scientific about strategic and tactical levels will not only help to improve business performance, but also will promote the construction and development of harmonious society.

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