

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ACTIVITIES AS A WAY OF CREATING VALUE FOR CONSUMERS

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to find out to what extent consumers perceive selected Corporate Social Responsibility (hereafter referred to as CSR) activities as valuable within the consumer electronics market, representing a competitive market environment. The importance of testing a set of CSR activities is supported by consumers' tendency to reflect perceived value into their purchasing decisions. An online questionnaire survey was used to collect quantitative data (n = 2,000; quota sampling with respect to age groups was applied); data were subsequently analysed with regard to respondents' gender and age through Pearson Chi-square test of independence. Our results show that consumers' value perception is dependent on the case of CSR activities. This paper is a reaction to emphasize a need to understand consumer perception of CSR activities properly because it has the potential to influence the future company's profitability.

Key words: CSR activities, value for consumers, value perception, value-creating, consumer electronics market.

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Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility, hereafter referred to as CSR, is usually understood as a liability of organizations for the impact of their behaviour, in connection with economic attitudes, particularly towards the environment and society (Bergman et al., 2019). However, several recent studies indicate the inexistence of any clear CSR definition (e.g., Gatti et al., 2018; Gonzales et al., 2021; Glonti et al., 2020; Iershova et al., 2022). As a clear specification of CSR is missing, it causes companies may arbitrarily choose activities and present them as CSR activities.

This paper is a reaction to the study by Kim et al. (2020), who emphasize a need to understand consumer perception of CSR activities properly because it has the

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potential to influence the future company's profitability, Consumers are those who assess the valuableness of a company's CSR activities through their purchases. In the fiercely competitive environment, CSR activities are used to differentiate (Li et al., 2019), and achieve a competitive advantage (Mai et al., 2021). The positive effect of CSR activities on competitiveness is mentioned also by Kim et al. (2020). This paper is also an empirical study, helping to identify value benefits to consumers which are considered one of the research priorities by the Marketing Science Institute (n.d.).

For purposes of this paper, the terms consumers and customers are understood as synonyms, although the word "consumers" is more preferred here because the empirical research presented here was based on a questionnaire survey designed for physical persons, i.e., consumers.

Literature Review

As for CSR activities of companies, an ambiguous CSR definition goes hand in hand with the different concepts of CSR models, description of CSR dimensions, and selection of specific CSR activities (Jankalova, 2016). However, basic literature distinguishes three globally known CSR models:

- (i.) Carroll's pyramid model is considered the oldest and most respected CSR model, and it contains four dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic (Ramlugun and Raboute, 2015).
- (ii.) On the contrary, the most used model is the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), published by Elkington (Cox et al., 2010). In other words, it is a 3 P model (people, planet, profit) transformed into three dimensions: social, environmental, and economic (Shim et al., 2021).
- (iii.) The third CSR model, called "Stakeholder theory" and published by Dahlsrud in the 21st century, shows five dimensions - social, environmental, economic, stakeholder and voluntariness (Madsen and Rodgers, 2015).

Especially today, implementing CSR is a real challenge for organizations. Each organization can form relationships with its stakeholders individually. Thus, the question is how to choose the appropriate CSR model. According to Jankalova (2016), especially the following facts should be taken into account when choosing the most suitable CSR model: for whom and for what purpose the CSR model is intended and what subject is evaluated.

However, the above-mentioned CSR models are becoming insufficient for today. Therefore, it occurs quite often that scientific papers eventually modify a CSR model or, conversely, they strive to present a new CSR framework (Claydon, 2011). Some authors remind the existence of responsible consumers and circular economy principles; in this context, they mention CSR 2.0 (e.g., Matova et al., 2019).

However, despite many CSR approaches, in reality, they all express a similar conclusion: the balance of all chosen CSR dimensions should lead to sustainable development (Viererbl and Koch, 2022). Finally, for purposes of this paper, the

Triple Bottom Line (with three-dimension: social, environmental, and economic) is chosen to examine selected CSR activities insomuch as TBL is widely accepted by the current literature and organizations.

Creating greater perceived value for consumers belongs to the main challenges of marketing decisions (Kovanoviene et al., 2021; Lis and Szczepanska-Woszczyna, 2015). According to Kotler et al. (2021), marketing is described as an effort “to create value for customers in order to capture value from customers in return.” It means companies need to create something valuable to become profitable, i.e., monetizing the created value.

To ensure the successful creation of value for consumers, companies need to understand what consumers really perceive as valuable and how the value arises (Khalifa, 2004). Thinking about value creation and reflecting on it when designing market offerings is crucial for business success (Khalifa, 2004). Kasabov (2021) explains that value cannot be created in isolation, but rather it arises cumulatively in multiple contexts. Simultaneously, perceived value is a matter of subjectivity; it means it depends on consumers’ judgments whether and to what extent they perceive the offered value by companies.

A rather simple explanation of perceived value is by Rehman (2021), who describes it as a consumer’s complete assessment of the product’s usefulness, comparing the received benefits and spent costs. In general, perceived value can be viewed and described from many perspectives: e.g., Saygili and Yalcintekin (2021) speak about utilitarian values (i.e. perceived utility as a result of comparing product/service quality and money spent on it) and hedonic values (connected with consumers’ perceived excitement, pleasure, entertainment, and joy during product usage or consumption), whereas Varshneya and Das (2017) distinguish cognitive values (measured in terms of service quality, time, convenience, effort), hedonic values (representing by pleasure and enjoyment), social values (emphasizing status, social approval, and esteem), and ethical values (based on privacy and trust (Oláh et al., 2021).

As this paper deals with the consumer electronics market, it is reasonable to describe a multidimensional model according to Sweeney and Soutar (2001), related to consumer durable goods, which consists of four dimensions: emotional value (i.e., value generated by feelings derived from the product), social value (i.e., value derived from the chance to improve the social self-concept thanks to the product), performance with respect to quality (i.e. value derived from the expected product quality and performance), and value with respect to price (i.e., value derived from the expected costs reductions thanks to using the product). However, the model by Sweeney and Soutar (2001) is utilizable for the complex description of the product with all its levels, including the core customer value, actual product, and augmented product (Grewal and Levy, 2017). Nevertheless, this paper deals purely with CSR activities as a way of creating value that can be understood as a means of enhancing the brand’s image (Othman and Hemdi, 2014) – i.e., associations connected with a

brand name are considered to be a part of the actual product as it is described in the basic marketing literature (Grewal and Levy, 2017).

Therefore, the classification of perceived value, used by Curras-Perez et al. (2018), will be adopted for this paper: they distinguish utilitarian, emotional, and social value. Curras-Perez et al. (2018) describe in detail these kinds of perceived value in the CSR context: (i.) utilitarian (or functional) value is connected with better-perceived quality, resp. quality-price ratio; (ii.) emotional (or hedonic) value is associated with doing good, e.g., donating or punishing irresponsible companies; and (iii.) social value is related to self-expression and presenting a world view and scale of values. For instance, this may be expressed as a commitment to the environment. When considering the above presented theoretical background, the leading hypotheses, statistically formulated as null hypotheses, arise as follows:

- First hypothesis Hi: “There is no link between consumers’ perception and various types of CSR activities.”
If there is a statistically significant link (i.e., if consumers will tend to perceive the various CSR activities differently), it makes sense to conduct deeper analysis, distinguish individual CSR activities, and test the following hypotheses Hii and Hiii.
- Second hypothesis Hii: “There is no link between consumers’ perception of CSR activities and age.”
- Third hypothesis Hiii: “There is no link between consumers’ perception of CSR activities and gender.”

Research Aim and Methods

With regard to the Marketing Science Institute’s priorities, suggesting identifying ways to provide benefits to consumers who will appreciate these benefits through their willingness to pay for them (Marketing Science Institute, n.d.), this paper aims to find out to what extent consumers perceive selected CSR activities as valuable. Our research focuses on the consumer electronics market because there is a competitive environment in this sector, and consumers have many options for what brand to prefer. Specifically, our research works with an assumption that perceived value leads consumers in decisions on what brand to prefer and choose.

For the purposes of the research, the diagnostic survey method was applied with the use of the CAWI survey technique. This method is characterized by the statistical collection of facts and information (data) on structural and functional phenomena as well as the dynamics of their development. This in turn makes it possible to evaluate their causes and effects and, as a result, to design a different (new) solution. The method of a diagnostic survey enables a statistical description and helps to explain certain mass phenomena as well as more important processes occurring in large sets on the basis of also representative statistical samples.

The online questionnaire was designed for respondents who were at least 18 years old, i.e., adults. Data collection took place in the Czech Republic from March to

April 2019. The created sample was $n = 2,000$; its representativeness was ensured with respect to age groups (18-20, 21-23, 24-26, 27-29, 30-32, 33-35, 36-38, 39-41, 42-44); i.e., quota sampling was applied here which is extensively used in research studies these days and tries to attempt to get a relatively representative sample (trying to imitate real distribution of the population at the age of 18-44 in the Czech Republic; there were 220 respondents in each age group, except the age group 21-23 with 240 respondents). Respondents were invited to the online survey via our personal contacts. Our special attention to age was based on the fact that the very people aged 18-44 do online shopping most often and account for 82% of online purchases (Redakce, 2019). Hence, when focusing on the consumer electronics market in our research, such age narrowing seems logical because electronics belong to the goods purchased online in the Czech Republic most frequently (Klanova, 2021). In terms of gender, the sample $n = 2,000$ consists of 877 men (44%) and 1,123 women (56%).

A set of items describing selected CSR activities that can be realized by companies in real business practice was presented to the respondents in the questionnaire. There is a list of them in the second column in Table 1.

To measure the respondents' perceived level of valuableness, they were asked the question, "If the BRAND will declare the following activities, to what extent will it please you?". Respondents were supposed to replace the word "BRAND" with their own most favourite brand of consumer electronics, and then to mark one of the offered answers: "It will not please me at all" / "Somewhat, it will not please me" / "Somewhat, it will please me" / "I am sure it will please me" / "It will not matter" / "I will take it for granted". By working with the respondent's most favourite brand, each respondent was positively stimulated to fill in the questionnaire thanks to a particular degree of survey personalization. As brands are more recognizable in the consumers' daily lives, a brand was here a placeholder term for a company/organization.

The set of formulated hypotheses is presented in the last paragraph of the section "Theoretical framework". As for the hypothesis Hii, age groups (18-20, 21-23, 24-26, 27-29, 30-32, 33-35, 36-38, 39-41, 42-44) were distinguished. As for the hypothesis Hiii, men and women were distinguished. All hypotheses were statistically formulated as null hypotheses H_0 , where alternative hypotheses H_a were constructed as non H_0 . For purposes of statistical analysis, contingency tables were created, then Pearson Chi-square test of independence was used for analysis and for interpretation, a 95% level of confidence was used in all cases. Furthermore, chosen identification demographic data about consumers were used in an attempt to uncover meaningful connections; specifically, age and gender were chosen as demographic variables which are popular in current research studies.

Research Results and Discussion

Before conducting a deeper analysis, an auxiliary correlation matrix needed to be created to determine whether some of the individual CSR activities were related to

each other (it was suspected it could happen). However, no meaningful linear connections were found out. Hence, it was subsequently worked with all individual CSR activities.

Testing the hypothesis H_i was based on the Pearson Chi-square test of independence and we have confirmed a particular link between consumers' perception and types of CSR activities (Chi-square = 2301.961; $df = 20$; $p\text{-value} = 0$). Therefore, it is reasonable to analyse every selected CSR activity individually because consumers' perception significantly depends on the type of CSR activity. This dependence is also observed by Ogbemudia et al. (2022) who describe that economic CSR activities may not have any positive influence on consumer perception whereas social, legal, and ethical should have a positive influence.

Figure 1 presents an overall basic view of all analysed CSR activities in a graphical form. Consumers mostly tend to be highly pleased with the items “#1 Creating additional jobs in the region”, and “#7 Reducing waste production” - this result is in accordance with Jensen et al. (2018), who claim that perceived value is enhanced through product-related CSR activities which aim at the environment or employees. The next highly appreciated item is also “#10 Supporting non-profit and charitable institutions”. Interestingly, respondents took for granted the item “#11 Top quality of offered products” most often (34%), whereas they did not care about the item “#4 Achieving profit in the last year” noticeably (46% of respondents stated it would not matter).

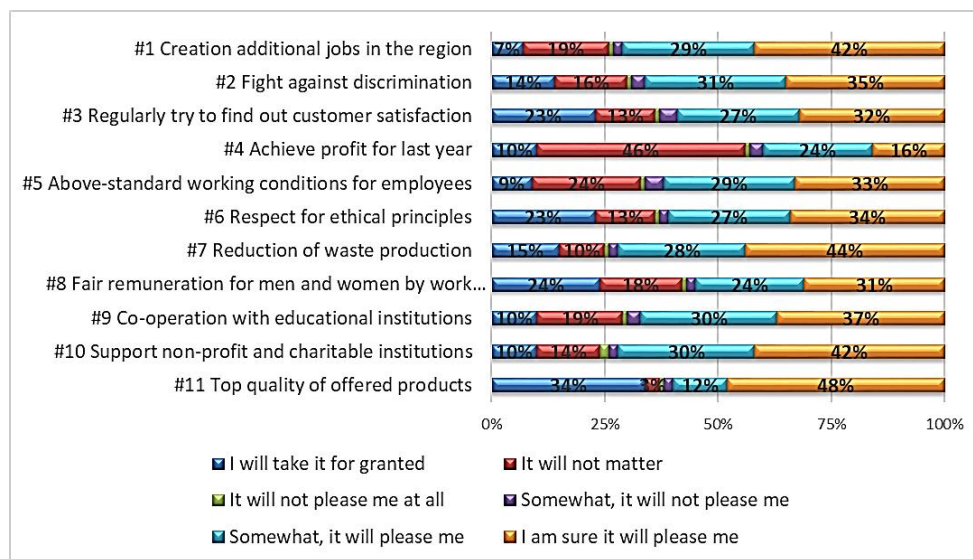


Figure 1. Consumers' perception of selected CSR activities

Source: Own processing

Note: Percentage shares of the answers “It will not please me at all” and “Somewhat, it will not please me” are insignificant, so the exact values are not stated in this Figure.

Table 1 presents results of testing hypotheses Hii and Hiii – the subsequent interpretation respects 95% confidence level (when necessary, Yates' correction was employed). Furthermore, Table 1 distinguishes CSR dimensions and value dimensions of each of the analysed CSR activities.

Table 1. Testing links between the consumers' perception of selected CSR activities and chosen identification data about respondents (links measured by means of p-values)

#	CSR activity	Age (Hii)	Gender (Hiii)	CSR dimension	Value dimension (determined according to Curras-Perez et al. 2018)
#1	Creating additional jobs in the region	.141	.008	Economic	Emotional
#2	Fighting against discrimination	.163	<.001	Social	Emotional
#3	Regularly trying to find out customer satisfaction	.114	.008	Economic	Utilitarian
#4	Achieving profit in the last year	.018	.034	Economic	Utilitarian
#5	Above-standard working conditions for employees	.033	<.001	Social	Emotional
#6	Respect for ethical principles	.123	<.001	Social	Social
#7	Reducing waste production	.122	<.001	Environmental	Social
#8	Fair remuneration for men and women by work performance	.662	<.001	Social	Emotional
#9	Co-operation with educational institutions	.120	.003	Social and economic	Emotional
#10	Supporting non-profit and charitable institutions	.932	<.001	Social	Emotional
#11	Top-quality of offered products	.081	.009	Social, environmental and economic	Utilitarian

The hypothesis Hii deals with potential links between the consumers' perception of selected CSR activities and respondents' age. Only in two cases (#4 and #5), were links statistically confirmed – specifically, it seems consumers at the age 21-23 and 33-35 tend to be less pleased than the other age groups. However, it cannot be

interpreted unequivocally in this study although other studies suggest that age is a meaningful demographic variable when testing consumers' perception of CSR activities.

As for gender (Hiii), statistically meaningful links were found in all of the tested cases – we can conclude that women are in all analysed cases more often delighted by each of the analysed CSR activities than men, whereas men do not care about these activities so much. Hur et al. (2016) reach a similar result confirming that women have a higher perception of CSR activities than men, while Agyei et al. (2021) claim gender has a moderating effect on perception only of economic and environmental CSR dimensions, not on social dimension.

Determinants of gender differences overlap with factors resulting from the changing cultural context. According to Joshi et al. (2019), it would be a big mistake of modern marketing to ignore the specificity of roles played by women and men in society and similarly ignore that these roles are currently changing.

Conclusion

Our results show that consumers are pleased by companies creating additional jobs in the region, reducing waste production, and supporting non-profit and charitable institutions. On the other hand, consumers take the top quality of offered products for granted, whereas they do not take care if the companies have achieved profit in the last year.

As for demographic variables gender and age, women tend to be more often delighted by each of the tested CSR activities than men. On the other hand, men do not care about these activities so much. Age as another identification variable indicates only rare connections with consumer perception of CSR activities; therefore, it is rather an ambiguous result that cannot be interpreted unequivocally.

As for theoretical contributions and managerial implications, this paper is a reaction to the Marketing Science Institute's priorities, suggesting identifying ways to provide benefits to consumers who will appreciate these benefits through their willingness to pay for them (Marketing Science Institute, n.d.).

Findings related to revealing what brings consumers perceived value in CSR are helpful for business entities and non-profit organizations when preparing their CSR strategies. In terms of marketing, this paper offers some important insights into implications for a range of crucial areas, including (but not limited to):

- A. Segmentation,
- B. Branding,
- C. Product policy,
- D. Marketing communication,
- E. Pricing policy,
- F. Consumer purchasing behavior,
- G. Relationships with consumers,
- H. Human resources marketing.

Ad A.) Principles of demographic segmentation were taken into account because gender and age were applied as independent variables in this paper. Demographic variables are quite popular for defining a segment because they are easy to identify (Grewal and Levy, 2017). Also, our results indicate gender is a meaningful variable. Ad B.) CSR activities help to build the brand's positive image (Ramesh et al., 2019). Therefore, our results bring meaningful findings for branding because e.g. Ramesh et al. (2019) claim that consumers who notice that a particular brand is involved in CSR activities tend to perceive this brand as more valuable.

Ad C.) Van Doom et al. (2020) confirm the moderating role of CSR: product quality concerns are minimized when a particular brand is highly engaged in CSR. Last but not least, according to Kim et al. (2020), products and services, fulfilling consumers' expectations, can be understood as a part of economic CSR activities.

Ad D.) Furthermore, it seems reasonable to formulate e.g. claims for marketing communication separately for men and separately for women because women tend to be more delighted by CSR activities than men do. Joshi et al. (2019) emphasize that the biological determinants of gender differences overlap with factors resulting from the changing cultural context, i.e. different shaping of the hierarchy of values of women and men. Therefore, communicated values in marketing messages should be prepared with all the professional care to address consumers effectively.

Ad E.) Our results also indicate CSR activities are crucial inputs for company pricing policy, because Kotler et al. (2021, p. 297) claim that "good pricing starts with customers and their perceptions of value". When consumers perceive value, this may be reflected in their willingness to pay higher prices for company's offerings. Based on the presented results, CSR activities may have the potential to enhance the brand value in the eyes of consumers, especially women.

Ad F.) Consumer purchasing behaviour and buying decisions are usually influenced by previous experience with a particular brand – CSR activities may enhance the brand's image (e.g., Othman and Hemdi, 2014), which positively influences the consumer purchase intention.

Ad G.) Moreover, according to Kovanoviene et al. (2021), creating value for consumers means preparing conditions for establishing future customer loyalty and building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with consumers. The evidence by Kim et al. (2020; Wang et al., 2021) clearly indicates that CSR activities are able to support long-term customer relationships. According to Sitnikov et al. (2021), consumer loyalty can be meaningfully supported by a company's CSR activities. In detail, perceived value is able to affect consumer satisfaction that can then positively influence loyalty (e.g., Kusumawati and Rahayu, 2020).

Ad H.) Last but not least, the perceived value plays a critical role also for human resource marketing – it is necessary to realize that consumers can easily become employees. In this context, Biedma-Ferrer et al. (2017) claim that CSR policy helps to attract, retain, and motivate employees.

This research paper works with some limitations and suggests ideas for future research as follows. It presents results derived from respondents at the age of 18-44;

i.e. this is the younger half of the population in the Czech Republic as the average age was 43.2 in 2020 (Worldometers.info, n.d.). Although some connections between consumers' perception of selected CSR activities and age were identified, it was impossible to interpret them ambiguously. Hence, future research should be concerned with finding details related to the respondents' age, and e.g. trying to confirm whether older consumers value CSR activities more or not.

Further, it would be worth analysing whether CSR activities support consumer retention (the design of this future research may be inspired by Othman and Hemdi (2014) who primarily focus on the hotel industry in their study).

Last but not least, future in-depth research should take into account the cultural aspects. Nowadays, we deal with both separate cultural systems determined by national and regional traditions, influencing the tastes, preferences, and behaviour of consumers, and with universal patterns shaped by mass culture, causing blurring of existing cultural differences and global globalization of consumption. Only a few studies aimed at cross-cultural value perception in the CSR context are available (e.g., Rim and Dong, 2018); therefore, this scope needs to be more developed.

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DZIAŁANIA W ZAKRESIE SPOŁECZNEJ ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚCI BIZNESU (CSR) JAKO SPOSÓB TWORZENIA WARTOŚCI DLA KONSUMENTÓW

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego artykułu było ustalenie, w jakim stopniu konsumenci postrzegają wybrane działania z zakresu społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu (CSR) jako wartościowe na rynku elektroniki użytkowej, reprezentującym konkurencyjne otoczenie rynkowe. Znaczenie testowania zestawu działań CSR jest wspierane przez skłonność konsumentów do odzwierciedlania postrzeganej przez nich wartości w swoich indywidualnych decyzjach zakupowych. Do zebrania danych ilościowych wykorzystano technikę ankietową online (n = 2000) przy zastosowaniu metody doboru kwotowego z uwzględnieniem grup wiekowych respondentów. Następnie otrzymane dane zostały poddane analizie statystycznej przy pomocy testu niezależności Chi-kwadrat oraz współczynnik korelacji Pearsona. Uzyskane wyniki badań wskazują, że postrzeganie wartości przez konsumentów jest zależne od przypadku działań CSR. Niniejszy artykuł jest reakcją na podkreślenie potrzeby właściwego zrozumienia konsumenckiego postrzegania działań CSR, ponieważ ma on potencjał, aby wpłynąć na rentowność przyszłej firmy.

Słowa kluczowe: działania CSR, wartość dla konsumentów, postrzeganie wartości konsumenckiej, tworzenie wartości, rynek elektroniki użytkowej.

企业社会责任活动 作为为消费者创造价值的一种方式

摘要: 本文的目的是找出消费者在多大程度上认为选定的企业社会责任(以下简称CSR)活动在消费电子市场中具有价值,代表了竞争激烈的市场环境。测试一组CSR活动的重要性得到了消费者将感知价值反映到他们的购买决策中的倾向的支持。使用在线问卷调查收集定量数据(n = 2,000;采用了针对年龄组的配额抽样);随后通过Pearson卡方独立性检验对受访者的性别和年龄数据进行了分析。我们的结果表明,消费者的价值感知取决于企业社会责任活动的情况。本文旨在强调需要正确理解消费者对CSR活动的看法,因为它有可能影响未来公司的盈利能力。

关键词: 企业社会责任活动, 消费者价值, 价值感知, 价值创造, 消费电子市场