

Role of CSR Communication Mode and its Effect on Message Effectiveness



ISBN: 978-1-943295-14-2

Noushad P.K

Cochin University of Science and Technology, Kerala, India
(noushadferoke@gmail.com)

Sreejesh S

Anandakuttan B Unnithan

Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode
(sreejesh@iimk.ac.in)

The study examines the role of CSR communication mode and construal level on message outcomes such as message attitude and recommendation intention. The study employs a 2 (CSR communication mode: symmetric vs. asymmetric) X 2 (construal level: abstract vs. concrete) between-subject experimental design. The study is the first empirical insight to show how differences modes of CSR communication in social media influence consumers' message related outcomes.

Keywords: CSR, CSR Communication, Construal Level, Message Attitude, Recommendation Intention

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), a concept that has deliberate attraction to the consumers, is a novel and successful apparatus that encourages the organization to achieve its various objectives such as brand value, customer trust, competitive advantages, and the like (Andreu, Casado-Díaz & Mattila, 2015). In order to enjoy the entire benefits of CSR, the corporates have to apply an appropriate strategy for communicating their CSR initiatives to the relevant stakeholders (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). Thus, CSR communication is considered to be an essential building block to facilitate expected customer outcomes concerning the company investing in CSR. In this technological era, making use of social media for communicating CSR helps the company to establish a stronger relationship with the stakeholders rapidly. In addition to this, social media advances the possibility of both one-sided, asymmetric in nature and two-sided, symmetric in nature communication with the stakeholders. In asymmetric CSR communication the company aims an informative strategy, whereas in symmetric CSR communications, the company expects an interactive communication with the stakeholders. In addition to the mode of communication, the construal level of the person who interacts with the message also plays a pivotal role in the interpretation of the messages (Liberman & Trope, 1998), which is an essential component of message assimilation and communication effectiveness. Thus, the objective of this study is to examine the role of CSR communication modes and message construal (abstract vs concrete) on the effectiveness of the communicated messages. More specifically, this understanding is desperate, because little or no research so far explored: how does mode of CSR message communication, influence message related outcomes, and does the message construal level play any role in conditioning the effect of mode of CSR communication, and in turn, message related outcomes. Hence, in this study, we proposed that various CSR communication strategies over social media, such as symmetric and asymmetric CSR communication strategies, and levels of construal of the consumers differently influence the message-related outcomes. The study is the first empirical insight to show how differences in the mode of CSR message communication in social media influence consumers' message related outcomes. It provides managerial insights by highlighting the importance of message construal in social media message communication, especially in the case of CSR as a theme of communication. It also provides practical insights into under what conditions the CSR as a communication strategy reinforces the communication effectiveness in the social media platforms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 CSR communication Mode

To explain the role of CSR communication mode and its effect on message effectiveness, we propose one convincing prediction that the CSR communication mode generally influences the message-related outcomes gained by both the stakeholders and the company. We approach this issue from a sense-making and sense giving perspective. Sense-making is the ability of the stakeholders or the company to comprehend what others need as they are assuming a part of the CSR communication process of a company and attribute meaning to it, on the other hand, sense-giving is the effort made by the stakeholders or the company to influence the manner in which another party comprehend or make sense from the message communicated as a part of a company's CSR messages (Nijhof & Jeurissen, 2006; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). The concepts of both sense-making and sense giving processes are the basic ingredients of a company's CSR communication strategies, because a continuous and operative sense-making process followed by the sense-giving procedure will result in constituting a healthy relationship between the company and the stakeholders (Gioia, Thomas, Clark & Chittipeddi, 1994).

According to the stakeholder theory, the company is required to establish and maintain a transparent and responsible relationship with the stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). A dialogue-oriented, interactive strategy designed to communicate the CSR initiatives of a company can better constitute such a relationship. If a company communicates its CSR activities over the social media platforms, it can make use of either an asymmetric or a symmetric mode of CSR communication. In an

asymmetric mode of CSR communication, where the aim of the company is just to inform, in other words, just to 'give sense' to the stakeholders by providing a general idea about its CSR performances, and hence one-way in nature. However, in the symmetric mode of CSR communication, where the company as well as its stakeholders will make changes in their attitudes and approaches as a result of the continuous processes of both sense-making and sense-giving, and hence two-way in nature. Previous studies report that the mode of CSR communication differentially influences the stakeholders (Kollat & Farache, 2017). Hence, based on the above arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: Using the symmetric mode of CSR communication will be more effective in influencing consumer's message attitude than using an asymmetric mode of CSR communication.

H2: Using the symmetric mode of CSR communication will be more effective in influencing consumer's recommendation intention than using an asymmetric mode of CSR communication.

2.2 Construal Level of the Message

To explain the effect of the construal level on message effectiveness, we propose one compelling prediction that the psychological distance generally influences the stakeholder's thoughts and behaviour while reading a particular message. We approach this issue from the construal level theory approach. The Construal level theory assumes that individuals construe psychologically nearer objects in terms of their low-level or concrete-level features, whereas, the psychologically distant events in terms of high-level or abstract level characteristics (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Construal level is a multi-dimensional concept consisting of four types of psychological distance, such as temporal distance (near future vs. distant future), spatial distance (nearby vs. far-away), social distance (in-group vs. out-group) and hypothetical distance (certain vs. uncertain) (Trope, Liberman & Wakslak, 2007). The present study plans to construct its arguments on the dimension of social distance. From CSR communication point of view, it is necessary to consider the specific characteristics of stakeholders while framing the CSR-messages of the company. If the targeted stakeholders themselves feel like an in-group member to the company, say for instance, as a result of the close relationship created because of the interactive and dialogue-oriented communication in between them, they can construe the CSR messages in a concrete level. However, in case of an out-group member feeling, the stakeholders will construe the CSR messages at an abstract level. In both these cases, the stakeholder approach towards the message related outcomes will be different. Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are formulated

H3: Using concrete-level messages in CSR communication will be more effective in influencing consumer's message attitude than using abstract-level messages.

H4: Using concrete-level messages in CSR communication will be more effective in influencing consumer's recommendation intention than using abstract-level messages.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Method

The present study proposes to employ a 2 (CSR communication mode: symmetric vs. asymmetric) X 2 (construal level: concrete vs. abstract) between-subject design. This study considers CSR communication mode and regulatory focus as independent variables and message attitude and recommendation intention as dependent variables.

3.2 Stimuli Development

To select the independent variables, a pre-test will be conducted with experts in the marketing area as well as with students. The CSR communication mode will be manipulated by adapting Kollat & Farache's (2017) method. The study will create a mock Facebook page of a fictitious corporation called XYZ Ltd. Fictitious company is capable of avoiding any prejudices from the previous experiences towards the communicating company. The participants will receive three Facebook posts of XYZ Ltd., communicating its CSR information and will be asked to choose whether to react or not to the post. After they had reacted (or not reacted) to the posts, we will ask the participants whether they would rate the post as one-way in nature or two-way in nature to ensure whether the Facebook posts reflect our proposed manipulations.

Construal level will be manipulated by adapting Nan's (2007) method. In out-group condition, the participants will be asked to make judgements about the company's (that is, XYZ Ltd.) CSR performances from the perspective of their intimate friend. In in-group conditions, the participants will be asked to make verdicts from the perspective of an average post-graduate university students.

3.3 Study Participants and Procedure

The participant will consist of the post-graduate students of an Indian university, representing a well-educated population with an attraction to social media. First, a random selection of students will be conducted from a list of all the University students. Then, after considering their construal level features, they will be randomly assigned to different CSR communication modes. After reading the CSR communication message, participants will be asked to fill up the questionnaire, with items of manipulation checks and provoking their responses to message attitude and recommendation intention.

3.4 Independent Variables

Two independent variables will be used in this study. These are CSR communication mode and construal level. Both the CSR communication mode and construal level are the manipulated variables.

3.5 Dependent Measures

Message attitude and recommendation intention are the dependent variables in this study. Using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), participants were asked six questions to measure their attitude towards message (Shareef, Mukerji, Alryalat, Wright & Dwivedi, 2018): "I like to receive CSR information in my Facebook", "I like to view CSR information in my Facebook", "I collect CSR-related information from my peers in Facebook", "I prefer promotional CSR message in Facebook" and "I am interested to communicate any message related to CSR information with my Facebook network members".

Participants were asked answer three questions using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to measure recommendation intention (Al-Ansi, Olya & Han, 2018): "I will recommend the company to others", "I will say positive things about the company to others", and "I will encourage friends and relatives to buy goods from the company".

4. Conclusion

In marketing perspective, CSR communication is considered to be an important function to be performed by the company that enhances consumer value. While communicating CSR initiatives, the company should consider different modes of CSR communication that may be applied in different contexts. Consumers' level of construal is another factor influencing the effectiveness of CSR communication.

5. References

1. Al-Ansi, A., Olya, H. G., & Han, H. (2019). Effect of general risk on trust, satisfaction, and recommendation intention for halal food. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 83, 210-219.
2. Freeman, R.E. 1984. Strategic Management. A Stakeholder Approach. Marshfield, MA: Pitman
3. Gioia, D. A., & Chittipeddi, K. (1991). Sense making and sense giving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic management journal*, 12(6), 433-448.
4. Gioia, D. A., Thomas, J. B., Clark, S. M., & Chittipeddi, K. (1994). Symbolism and strategic change in academia: The dynamics of sense making and influence. *Organization science*, 5(3), 363-383.
5. Kollat, J., & Farache, F. (2017). Achieving consumer trust on Twitter via CSR communication. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 34(6), 505-514.
6. Liberman, N., & Trope, Y. (1998). The role of feasibility and desirability considerations in near and distant future decisions: A test of temporal construal theory. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 75(1), 5-18.
7. Nan, X. (2007). Social distance, framing, and judgment: A construal level perspective. *Human Communication Research*, 33(4), 489-514.
8. Nijhof, A., & Jeurissen, R. (2006). A sense making perspective on corporate social responsibility: Introduction to the special issue. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 15(4), 316-322
9. Shareef, M. A., Mukerji, B., Alryalat, M. A. A., Wright, A., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2018). Advertisements on Facebook: Identifying the persuasive elements in the development of positive attitudes in consumers. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 43, 258-268.
10. Trope, Y., Liberman, N., & Wakslak, C. (2007). Construal levels and psychological distance: Effects on representation, prediction, evaluation, and behavior. *Journal of consumer psychology*, 17(2), 83-95.
11. Maignan, I., & Ferrell, O. C. (2004). Corporate social responsibility and marketing: An integrative framework. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 32(1), 3-19.
12. Andreu, L., Casado-Díaz, A. B., & Mattila, A. S. (2015). Effects of message appeal and service type in CSR communication strategies. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(7), 1488-1495.