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An Integrative Framework for Evolving A Socially Responsible Marketing Strategy

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Abstract

The rise in the strategic importance of maintaining positive stakeholder relationships and the need to protect corporate brand reputation has moved the academic and business debates of ethical issues concerning corporate social responsibility (CSR) from being viewed as paternalistic philanthropy to an integral part of business strategy (Raynard et al., 2002; Husted et al., 2000). Subsequently, the integration of CSR issues into business and marketing strategy transitioned from an option to a requirement for doing business. In this paper, the authors suggest a framework for organising the alternative approaches for the integration of CSR into corporate and marketing strategy to evolve socially responsible corporate identity, corporate image, and corporate branding. Towards this objective, we examine these alternative approaches, present a number of propositions to advance notions about the relationships between corporate strategy, marketing strategy, market orientation and stakeholder oriented CSR, and suggest a research agenda for evolving metrics to measure outcomes of alternatives for evolving a CSR oriented marketing strategy.

Keywords Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), CSR Integration, Corporate Strategy, Marketing Strategy, CSR-Oriented Image/Identity/Branding, Corporate Branding

Jel codes: M1, M14, M31

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Introduction

Pressures from stakeholders including consumers, NGOs (non-governmental organisations), media, the state, and other public policy bodies, more often than not, are compelling reasons for firms to develop CSR strategies to avoid the risk of damaging their reputation and protect their brand image (Maignan et al., 2002; Raynard et al., 2002). Firms following and answering to an apprehended demand from the market are characterised as “market driven.” (Elg, 2002; Jaworski et al., 1993; Narver et al., 1990). Alternatively, the motivation to develop CSR strategies may emanate from the firm’s organisational values (Maignan et al., 2002). These firms are characterised as being “market driving.” A prime example of market driving is the introduction of “cosmetics with a conscience”, by the Body Shop. In essence, market driving constitutes pro-action to change the consumers’ traditional attitude towards cosmetics instead of merely responding to explicit requirement or signals from the market to change (Jaworski et al., 2000; Kumar et al., 2000).

In an effort to evolve a framework for the integration of CSR into corporate and marketing strategies of the firm, we draw on evidence from relevant corporate, marketing, and CSR literature. A review of relevant corporate strategy, marketing strategy, and CSR literature revealed anecdotal evidence of the integration of CSR issues into business and marketing strategies of the firm. We classify knowledge contained in the relevant literature in three main categories:

1. Alternative approaches to the integration of CSR into corporate and marketing strategy.
2. Propositions concerning necessary and/or sufficient conditions for the success of attempts to integrate CSR issues.
3. Anecdotal evidence of the success or failure of the integration of CSR issues.

The mandates for management accountability for results and the need to establish performance metrics for various strategies preclude simply referencing anecdotal evidence. Hence, there is an imperative to:

1. Identify valid alternatives for the integration of CSR issues into corporate and marketing strategies.
2. Evolve a process framework(s) for integrating CSR that demonstrate the relationships between and interfaces of corporate and marketing strategies and CSR issues.
3. Establish metrics for the measurement of the efficacy of the alternative approaches to the integration of CSR issues into corporate and marketing strategies.

The objective of this paper is to identify the alternative approaches, evolve the framework, and establish the metrics.

Foundations of the Framework

In the course of the literature review we identified four alternative approaches to the integration of CSR issues into business and marketing strategies. In all cases the integration of CSR issues into business and marketing strategy is an attempt to evolve

socially responsible corporate identity, corporate image, and develop corporate branding that reflect a socially responsible image. The literature reviewed leads us to believe that reach some or all of these objectives firms lead one of four alternative approaches to the integration of CSR issues. These alternative approaches may be classified along two dimensions. The first is market orientation, driven and driving. The second is the strategy formulation and implementation process, strategic and tactical. Accordingly, we identified four alternative approaches shown in Exhibit 1.

1. **Market Driving CSR Integration into Corporate Strategy Formulation.** This type of integration is accomplished by adopting CSR issues as the platform for formulating corporate vision- mission, articulating corporate values, and building distinctive competence(s). The objective is to establish socially responsible corporate identity and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.
2. **Market Driving CSR Integration into Marketing Strategy Formulation.** This type of integration is accomplished by deploying CSR as the foundation for the formulation of segmentation, targeting, differentiation, and positioning. The objective is to establish CSR oriented corporate brand(s).
3. **Market Driven CSR Integration into Corporate Strategy Implementation.** This type of integration is accomplished by reactively adopting CSR issue(s) as a competitive scope or platform for competition in the market place(s). The objective is to evolve CSR-oriented corporate image.
4. **Market Driven CSR Integration into Marketing Strategy Implementation.** This type of integration is accomplished by incorporating CSR issues into product, pricing, promotion, communication, and/or distribution programs. The objective is to demonstrate corporate responsiveness to CSR issues in its marketing practice including product development, pricing, communication, and/or distribution.

The stages, elements, and outcomes of integration for each of the alternatives are presented in Exhibit 2. In the remainder of the paper we advance a number of propositions that amplify the requirements of the effective implementation of the integration of CSR issues into corporate and marketing strategies. These propositions are based on a review of corporate, marketing strategy, and CSR literature .

CSR Integration	Strategic Market Driving	Tactical Market Driven
Corporate Strategy	Alternative 1	Alternative 3
Marketing Strategy	Alternative 2	Alternative 4

Exhibit I. Alternative Approaches for CSR Integration

Alternatives for CSR Integration	Stage of CSR Integration	Elements Into Which CSR Integration is Accomplished	Objectives Metrics Outcomes of CSR Integration
Alternative 1	Corporate Strategy Formulation	Vision Mission Values Competence	CSR Oriented Corporate Identity
Alternative 2	Marketing Strategy Formulation	Segmentation Targeting Differentiation Positioning	CSR Oriented Corporate Branding
Alternative 3	Corporate Strategy Implementation	Competitive Scope	Socially Responsible Corporate Image
Alternative 4	Marketing Strategy Implementation	Product Price Promotion Distribution	Socially Responsible Brand Image

Exhibit II. Stages, Elements, and Outcomes of CSR Integration

CSR Integration and Market Orientation Inputs

CSR integration into corporate and marketing strategy is initiated by the identification of the nature of market orientation of the corporation; i.e., market driven or market driving. Market orientation has been viewed as an organisational culture that efficiently creates a superior value for present and future customers and subsequently sustainable competitive advantage and superior performance for the business (Aaker, 1988; Kohli *et al.*, 1990; Narver *et al.*, 1990). Furthermore, market orientation has been characterised as market driven; i.e., identify demands from the market and responding to it (Day, 1994; Kohli *et al.*, 1990; Narver *et al.*, 1990). However, interpretations of the market driven approach has been criticised for being a diversion and distraction from the market orientation concept (Day, 1999; Slater *et al.*, 1999).

An alternative interpretation that has been suggested is the market driving approach to market orientation (Jaworski *et al.*, 2000; Kumar *et al.*, 2000). Market driving means to have a more proactive approach and to transform and lead the market in stead of merely respond to customer demands (Harris *et al.*, 2002). It posits that consumers do not always have the possibility to express or even answer to new concepts they are not aware of. This was the case when Sony was in the introduction phase of the Walkman. In their consumer surveys, consumers could not imagine what a Walkman would mean and were resistant to the idea of individual consumption of music in a collective environment. Sony did not follow the market information though, and successfully launched the Walkman. Another example is the case of the Body Shop, who introduced “cosmetic with conscience”, hence, changing the traditional consumer attitude towards cosmetics (Kumar *et al.*, 2000). The success of the Body Shop is likely to build to a certain degree on a desire from consumers not necessarily explicit but appreciated when once the product is on the market.

For a firm where CSR is market driven, it is more about being *tactical*, that is CSR is appended to various corporate strategies and functions because of apprehended CSR demands among their targeted customers. For a firm where CSR is market driving, CSR is *strategic*. In traditional marketing theory terms this would be about finding possibilities to position the company on a market, and then drive the CSR idea from the existing organisation. Two propositions emanate from this analysis.

P1: A market driven firm approaches CSR as a tactical add-on in the implementation of existing strategies in response to market demand for higher degree of CSR responsiveness.

P2: A market driving firm approaches CSR in a strategic formulation to shape the market for a higher degree of CSR responsiveness.

CSR Integration, Strategy Formulation and Implementation Processes

In the marketing literature, three alternative approaches to marketing strategy are advanced.(Day *et al.*, 2002). The first approach provides an inside-out perspective, where the firm starts with identifying corporate assets and capabilities. Maignan et al (1999) suggest that organisational culture should guide the way managers choose to address CSR for the company as either market driven or market driving.

P3: The strategic approach integrates CSR issues and values into the corporate vision, mission, and competencies.

For the formulation of CSR strategies and the implementation of CSR tactics, the CSR literature suggests the collection of information about CSR from stakeholders' view (Murray *et al.*, 1986). This is consistent with the outside-in perspective in marketing strategy theories where the evolution of market expectations and requirements are emphasised (Day *et al.*, 2002). Such a view also has much in common with Kohli and Jaworski's (Kohli *et al.*, 1990) starting point of a market orientation, the intelligence generation, which mirrors an outside-in perspective of the corporate environment.

To avoid "ad hoc policies" (Rondinelli *et al.*, 2000) and unwarranted reliance on habits of thought and practices (Ostas *et al.*, 2001), the CSR literature recommends for firms to seek creative ways to combine CSR and business through communication with different stakeholders. Rather than defend the organisation against pressure from NGOs, the proactive firm is advised to cooperate with these organisations and learn from their expertise on different CSR issues (Murray *et al.*, 1986). The importance of a dialogue with consumers has been illuminated by an empirical investigation where managers and consumers were found to have different definitions of corporate responsibilities (Maignan, 1999). Such a dialogue is suggested to take form through the firm's cooperation with consumer organisations (Murray *et al.*, 1986). Marketing strategy theorists recommend a network configuration perspective where an inside-out perspective is combined with that of an outside-in, resulting in webs of connection for a broader perspective of the business activities of the firm (Day *et al.*, 2002).

P4: The strategic integration of CSR into corporate strategy is a prerequisite for its effective integration into marketing strategy.

Protection or enhancement of brand reputation has been considered to be one of the most important reasons for companies to adopt CSR strategic posture (Raynard *et al.*, 2002). Communication about measures to integrate social responsibility in the corporate activities involves a promise to fulfill certain benefits connected with the corporate brand – benefits that could be categorised as emotional and self-expressive motives (Aaker, 1996).

Communication that projects a firm's image as socially responsible has been found to affect the overall positioning of the company and its products (Brown *et al.*, 1997). If the products are evaluated based on socially responsible operating methods, the output of the firm is a credence good which has important intangible qualities that cannot be traced in the mere product nor discovered after consumption. (Feddersen *et al.*, 2001). Thus, the CSR image of the corporate brand is not only influenced by internal as well as external corporate communication, but also by external members' (e.g. NGOs) communication about CSR in general and the evaluation of the specific firm's CSR.

CSR Integration and Strategy Implementation Processes

Although the CSR literature stresses marketing managers' importance for disseminating the CSR strategy in the entire organisation (Lantos, 2001; Maignan *et al.*, 1999; Murray *et al.*, 1986), market orientation theories (Kohli *et al.*, 1990) point out that market intelligence does not always have to be disseminated by the marketing department, but emphasises that effective dissemination of the intelligence throughout is important so that an integrated approach of organisational core values is provided for across different functional areas. In order to turn CSR plans into action programmes, recommendations within the CSR literature are to provide elements of CSR programmes including training activities, formal CSR departments and managers, formalised procedures for auditing and evaluating, and cross-functional committees for setting and evaluating CSR policies and procedures (Weaver *et al.*, 1999a).

P5: *Corporate Marketing Strategy formulation and implementation is a cross-functional effort.*

Top management values, commitment, and promotion of core values in business is also considered as particularly important (Weaver *et al.*, 1999b). Furthermore, the interpretation of the corporate identity has been pointed out to take place through internal as well as external communication, as for instance top management communication, organisational culture, work experience and social influence in settings outside the corporate entity (Hatch *et al.*, 1997).

In CSR literature, top management commitment is regarded as an influential factor in the impact implementation of CSR strategies. (Weaver *et al.*, 1999a). Furthermore, CSR should not be established through visible and popular activities such as volunteer programmes, philanthropic donations, or sponsorship, but requires activities such as informing employees about regulations guiding appropriate relations with customers and co-workers (Maignan *et al.*, 2000). The critical role of top managers in fostering a certain orientation is reflected also in the literature on market orientation. Kohli & Jaworski (1990) refers back to market orientation theorists from the 1950s

(Felton, 1959) and the 1960s (Levitt, 1969), as well as within the management literature where junior managers have been considered as the gap between what top managers say and what they do (Argyris, 1965).

P6: *Top management commitment, and communication of CSR impacts middle management and staff interpretations and implementation of CSR.*

In the CSR literature Weaver et al (1999b) suggest that in order to attain structures and policies that affect everyday decisions and actions, decisions have to be made in light of the CSR policies, and people occupying specialised CSR positions should have the confidence of and regular interaction with other departments and their managers. The authors also emphasise the importance of having the CSR policies supported by other organisational policies. When CSR demands appear to be in conflict with other corporate goals, CSR policies may be marginalised. This type of structure, Weaver et al argue, provides the appearance of conformity to external expectations while making it easy to separate much of the organisation from those expectations. According to the market orientation concept, high interdepartmental conflict would obstruct the effective implementation of a certain orientation while a high interdepartmental connectedness would facilitate it (Kohli *et al.*, 1990).

P7: *Conformity in CSR policies with overall organisational policies combined with high interdepartmental connectedness facilitates the implementation of CSR strategies.*

The main outcome of the integration of CSR into the marketing strategy is an organisational CSR image. As Hatch and Schultz (1997) argue, the organisational image involves also externally produced interpretation of the symbolic material used to construct the organisational image. In the CSR literature it is argued that information about business activity has to be made accessible so that stakeholder groups can make informed decisions about their relationships with companies (Joseph, 2002). Audit instruments are also considered not only for external communication, but also as a self-assessment instrument for the CSR oriented company (Kok *et al.*, 2001). A problem with social reporting is that the indicators are less well developed than those established for economic or even environmental performance (WBCSD, 2000). Yet, this was also a problem at the start of creating systems for reporting environmental issues, and may perhaps be considered as a normal phase in the formulation of new types of reporting systems.

P8: *The evaluation of CSR activities is facilitated by communication of CSR internal and intraorganisational policies, actions and activities.*

CSR Integration Outcomes

The outcomes of the integration of CSR into business and marketing strategy can be classified in terms of stakeholder responses, market change, brand reputation, and sustainable and competitive advantage as suggested by the literature.

Stakeholder Responses

CSR orientation has been reported to enhance employee satisfaction, motivation and commitment {Kohli, 1990 #111;Lantos, 2001 #21;Maignan, 1999 #22.

P9: *The stronger the CSR identity of the firm, the higher the satisfaction, motivation and commitment of its employees.*

CSR orientation has also been considered to enhance customer commitment and thereby lead to improved overall competitive position {Maignan, 1999 #38}. For a firm where the CSR is market oriented, this could lead to superior customer value (Narver *et al.*, 1990) and improved customer responses (Kohli *et al.*, 1990).

P10: *The higher the market orientation of CSR, the higher its customer value, commitment and loyalty.*
Market change

For a firm where CSR strategies emerge from organisational values, CSR serves as an enabler to choose, initiate and plan for a market change, hence constituting a market driving force.

P11: *The stronger the organisational values for CSR, the higher the ability of the firm to become market driver.*

Brand reputation

Through increased customer value and loyalty, CSR is believed to enhance the brand reputation (Maignan *et al.*, 1999). Enhancement of brand reputation (socially responsible image, stronger brand image) CSR as a brand value – and promise – is communicated through the brand, and hence could be a way to differentiate the firm from its competitors (Balmer *et al.*, 2003; Hatch *et al.*, 2003).

P12: *The stronger the CSR image in brand communication, the higher the differentiation from competitors.*

Development of a sustainable competitive advantage

Irrespective of CSR orientation, market driven or market driving early development of a credible CSR image could constitute a sustainable competitive advantage. This is particularly the case if companies are mandated to report on a wide range of CSR indicators that are clearly comparable across competitors, sectors and countries, recommends, predicting “irresponsible” companies becoming exposed to the risk of market punishment (Joseph, 2002).

P13: *The earlier the institution of a credible CSR image, the more likely it will constitute a sustainable advantage.*

Conclusion

A firm may integrate CSR into business and marketing strategy either strategically or tactically depending on its market orientation. While integration of CSR values into corporate vision and mission is the departure point of a market driving firm, add-on tactical integration of CSR issues into marketing policies and operations is the departure points for a market driven firm.

Conceptual framework operationalised

This paper builds on a conceptual framework. Our suggestion is to examine the research propositions empirically to operationalise a socially responsible marketing strategy. We consider three main research questions as pivotal for structuring future research on socially responsible marketing strategies:

1. How is CSR defined within firms and among stakeholders?
2. How are firms formulating and communicating CSR?
3. Are objectives with CSR obtained?

Despite the vast amount on definitions on CSR in the literature, empirical investigations on the definitions of CSR among a firm's different stakeholders are scarce. Firms invest resources into CSR to communicate a certain CSR image connected to their corporate brand (Cerne, 2003), yet stakeholder norms regarding CSR issues and norms are still rather unexplored (Maignan et al., 2004). In this paper we have taken up that the stakeholder oriented view of CSR brings about difficulties since different stakeholders can have conflicting norms depending on their situation both inside and outside the firm. Such a definition of CSR could help structuring different types of CSR from a stakeholder perspective and render visible conflicting norms among different stakeholders.

By studying how CSR is formulated, implemented and communicated, and comparing it with evaluations of CSR among different stakeholder groups, insights on whether objectives with CSR are obtained could be given. For instance, how are stakeholders affected by communication on CSR when evaluating corporate socially responsible identity, image and brand? This type of empirical investigation could also examine whether a strong CSR image in communication could differentiate a firm from its competitors and how important it is on being early with a credible CSR image in order to create a sustainable advantage.

Empirical investigation could help creating knowledge on how to work systematically with CSR within a specific industry or geographic area. This could also help illustrating whether market driven or market driving CSR, with corporate identity, image and brand in mind, would be managed differently. Empirical research could bridge the gap between marketing theory and its application to corporate entities considering ethical issues and how these are related to corporate identity, image and branding. This paper is a first step in that direction.

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