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COMPANY'S CSR ACTIVITIES ADDRESSED TO ITS EMPLOYEES – DIFFUSION OF CSR TO CUSTOMERS BY EMPLOYEES

Summary: CSR is a concept of a constantly growing significance in companies' strategies. The benefits of the implementation of CSR in the relationships between companies and their stakeholders are a strong reason why businesses should more diligently analyze the results of their initiatives and select the best CSR tools for building relations with their stakeholders. The objective of this article is to clarify the significance of CSR in the internal relations within an organization – between employers and employees, as well as to present the diffusion of the effect of CSR to contacts with customers. To achieve this aim, the results of a survey conducted on a purposive sample of employees of a retail chain have been used. The research was conducted within the project financed with the resources of the National Center of Science, granted on the basis of the decision no. DEC-2011/03/B/HS4/03576. The method of bootstrapping was used in this study. The obtained results allow us for a conclusion that the diffusion of CSR to customers by employees may be caused by the CSR activity of a retailer. It should be pointed out that this diffusion is conditioned by a change in the retailer's image. Only after this image is improved in the eyes of employees, are they likely to diffuse this positive image to consumers.

Keywords: CSR, employees, CSR activity diffusion, bootstrapping.

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1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility is a concept of company's activity, which assumes that a company accepts economic, legal and ethical responsibility for the results of its activity and is also involved in charity work. This idea is the subject of numerous research studies, the authors of which focus on explaining the essence of CSR [Dahlsrud 2006], modeling CSR [Carroll 1991, pp. 39–48; Carroll 1999, pp. 268–295], placing CSR in theories [Garriga, Melé 2004, pp. 51–71] linking CSR with competitive advantage [Porter, Kramer 2006], or significance of CSR

for consumers [Sen, Bhattacharya 2001, pp. 225–243]. There are also studies on the effects of CSR on creating a company's value [e.g. Clayton 2008, pp. 260–265]. A relatively less researched area is the role of CSR in building relations between employers and employees, as well as the influence of CSR on the employee–customer relationship. However, the relationship between employers and employees is a very significant sphere of CSR activities. For example, a French poll on CSR indicated that employees were seen as the most important stakeholder group towards whom corporations have to exercise their social responsibility [Gond et al. 2010]. Therefore, some studies aim at developing tools for researching the perception of CSR activity by employees and employees attitude toward CSR [McShane, Cunningham 2012, pp. 81–100; Burnthorne Lopez, Babin, Chung 2009, pp. 594–600; Turker 2009, pp. 411–427, Stefańska 2014b]. Other studies, e.g. Bauman and Skitka's [2010 pp. 63–86], use the Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the context of employees and meeting their needs at various levels. Another research study confirmed that organization's social actions matter to its employees, although more work is needed in this area [Greening, Turban 2000, pp. 254–280]. The research shows that job applicants' perceptions of firm's corporate social performance influenced their desire to work for a firm. CSP is positively related to employer attractiveness only for job seekers with high levels of job choice. Other researchers, Gond, El-Akremiti, Igalens and Swaen [2010], focused on the internal effects of CSR implementation – on the organization's image in the eyes of its employees. What seems also interesting is the results of research made to identify segments of employees and implications for human resource management of socially responsible retailers. Interesting and promising consequence of using CSR in relation to employees may be strengthening their orientation towards meeting customers' needs [Korschum, Bhattacharya, Swain 2011]. This type of multi-level relationship based on transferring values and behavior connected with CSR by various subjects can be defined as CSR diffusion. It is more often subject to theoretical than empirical studies. It appears in Bhattacharya, Korschum and Swain's model [2011], according to which the more employees are engaged in CSR actions, the more they are likely to build strong relations with their co-workers. It corresponds to the assumption that cooperation between individuals is better when they perceive themselves as parts of a team rather than separate individuals [Flynn 2005, pp. 737–750]. These authors point out that managers should engage employees in CSR activities, as it may lead to the latter's involvement in creating CSR values.

2. CSR diffusion

The above-mentioned CSR diffusion, i.e. transferring values and behaviors related to social responsibility from employees to consumers, may be induced by company's previous actions towards its employees. It means that there is a hierarchical relation

whereby company's CSR activities towards its employees in consequence lead to performing CSR activities by employees towards consumers. Relations of this kind can be observed in trade firms or in other service companies, where employees have a direct contact with consumers. Transferring these actions may be conditioned by various additional factors. Researching the influence of the mediation factors on the CSR relation is the basic purpose of this article.

The effectiveness of the CSR activities depends on a number of mediator variables. Among others, these are: the relationship between employees and management or the retailer's image.

Also relations among employees may foster implementing the idea of CSR. Not only do they show them what is important for a company, but also they serve as a factor strengthening the sense of community among them.

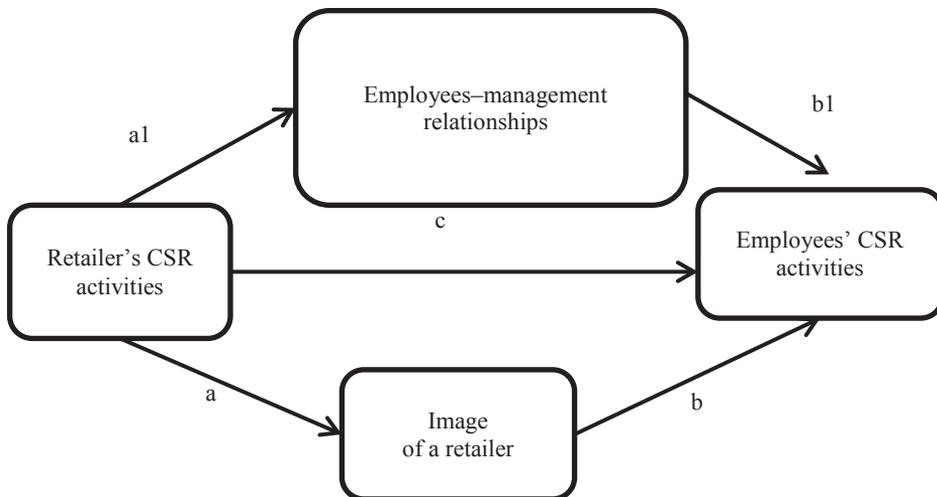


Figure 1. The model of CSR diffusion with mediator variables

Source: own study.

A company's image supports the acceptance of the CSR idea, which results from the fact that also the intentions of actions are important for employees [Lange, Washburn 2012, pp. 300–326]. The image of a company as socially responsible may convince its employees about the honesty of managers' intentions, which will result in employees' stronger involvement in CSR activities as well as their acceptance of socially responsible values. These relations can be presented in a model, such as the one in Figure 1. The basic relation – marked as “c” – combines the CSR activities of employers towards employees with the CSR actions of employees towards customers. Relations a1 and b1, as well as a2 and b2 refer to the mediation influence of employer's CSR activities on CSR diffusion.

The two above-mentioned variables, i.e. the relations between employees and managers, as well as a retailer's image can be regarded as two mediator variables. The existence of these variables makes it necessary to employ appropriate statistical procedures. The most frequently used is the one suggested by Baron and Kenny [1986]. However, due to its weaknesses, the bootstrapping procedure will be used to verify the model shown in Figure 1.

3. The bootstrapping procedure

Bootstrapping is a procedure based on repeated sampling with replacement so that the distribution of estimation errors and confidence intervals can be assessed. This procedure allows for estimating and testing the indirect and direct effects occurring among variables. It generates empirical approximation of the sample distribution through multiple sampling with replacement and at the next stage it employs the obtained distribution to evaluate the estimation error distribution and the confidence intervals. Bootstrapping eliminates the problems with the procedure proposed by Baron and Kenny [1986, pp. 1173–1182]. These problems are connected with the impossibility of testing the existence of indirect effects, with omitted variables, which may distort the estimation of parameters and the occurrence of normal distribution of variables, which can be easily damaged in small samples [Preacher, Hayes 2004, pp. 717–731; Shrout, Bolger 2002, pp. 422–445]. Moreover, this procedure ensures flexibility of the model specification and simplicity of use, resulting from the possibility of using typical statistical programs (i.e. SPSS). The form of the bootstrapping procedure used for defining the influence of the CSR activity in trade on CSR diffusion to consumers was the one presented by Preacher, Hayes [2008].

3.1. The variables used in the research

The analytical tool for the quantitative survey was based on the questionnaire prepared by D. Turker [Turker 2009], as well as on authors' own detailed collective interviews with employees of shops. Due to the limited number of publications on the research on CSR diffusion, the questionnaire was modified and new variables were added to learn if and how CSR influences the relationship between employees and customers. Those variables were identified after mini focus groups interviews (3 groups of 6 sales persons employed in stores), which were conducted before quantitative research [Stefańska 2014a]. Four variables were considered in the research: retailer's CSR activities, employer's actions, diffusion of CSR, a retailer's image and the relationship with superiors.

3.2. Research

The research was conducted among store employees. The survey was quantitative and limited only to the workers directly involved in customer service. The selection

of the sample was purposive. The respondents for the survey were selected among shop-assistants from shops selling FMCG, clothes and cosmetics. As many as 272 people participated in the survey conducted in the period from May to July 2013 in a selected group of Polish cities.

3.3. Retailer's CSR activities

CSR activities comprised 13 yes-no items. Table 1 contains the basic information connected with these items. Individual items differ in their frequency of occurrence in trade companies. For each respondent, responses were summarized in such a way that higher scores reflected a higher level of retailer's CSR activities. The range of the variable was between 0 and 13 with the average score of 5.

Table 1. Selected CRS activities by employers

Retailer's activities towards employees	In percentages		
	Yes	No	I don't know
Adjusts work schedules to employees who participate in training courses	69.8	16.4	13.8
Gives workers extra discounts for shopping	65.8	29.8	4.4
Applies the same rules (rewarding, punishing, employment) for all employees	65.2	20.4	14.4
Supports employees voluntarily, not because of legal obligations	42.3	31.1	26.6
Has a code of conduct which specifies how to behave in the case of employees' unethical conduct (e.g. spreading rumors, malicious treatment) or corruption	40.9	26.8	32.3
Employs workers discriminated against for various reasons	33.1	29.4	37.5
Subsidizes holidays/children's camps, etc.	31.4	49.4	19.2
Discloses to employees reports of retailer's social/ecological engagement	30.2	42.2	27.6
Facilitates employees improving their qualifications through subsidizing studies or training courses	27.7	47.2	25.1
Encourages them to become volunteers and take part in actions initiated by the retailer	26.7	48.5	24.8
Publishes reports about their social and ecological involvement	24.8	39.1	36.1
Subsidizes employees' children's textbooks and workbooks	22.8	51.9	25.4
Has a department or section dealing with complaints related to CSR	20.1	26.5	53.4

Source: own study.

4. Diffusion of employees' CSR activities

Diffusion of CSR was assessed by means of 3 items. Internal consistency of this measure was acceptable (Cronbach's alfa = 0.690). Descriptive statistics for this variable are shown in Table 2. Items were measured in 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the items related to employees' CSR activities toward consumers

Items	M	SD
I help consumers to choose products the most suitable for them, even if it is not the most profitable for the shop.	4.0502	0.93665
I encourage consumers to buy ecological or Fairtrade products, even though they are more expensive.	3.3320	1.12313
I recommend goods to consumers as if I was buying them for myself	4.1351	0.89847

Source: own study.

4.1. Retailer's image

A retailer's image was devised for this study as an index. It consists of 5 items depicted in Table 3. The items were measured by a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The internal consistency of the index was very good (Cronbach's alfa = 0.886). A retailer's image is restricted to the issues related to employees. It does not comprise traditionally understood retailer image factors.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of items related to retailer's image

Items	M	SD
My employer decently treats their employees.	3.3372	1.17724
Through their treatment of employees my employer attracts those interested in a job.	3.0115	1.10413
My employer offers more facilities and benefits to their employees than obliged by the law.	2.7214	1.17225
My employer cares for the safety and health of their employees more than obliged by the law.	3.1336	1.17823
My employer helps its workers at work and outside work, if needed.	2.8582	1.25844

Source: own study.

4.2. Employees–management relationship

The employees–management relationship is the relationship between an employee and an immediate supervisor. To create this measure 6 Likert-type items were used, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). This measure demonstrated sufficient internal consistency (Cronbach's alfa = 0.743). Descriptive statistics for items are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of items related to employees–management’s relationship

Items	M	SD
Superior gives me information about the social responsibility of the employer	3.0463	1.25049
Superior informs me about our company’s humanitarian or ecological actions	2.8958	1.20751
Superior praises me for higher involvement in helping customers, e.g. in looking for a product	3.3012	1.17221
I feel that employees are equally treated by their immediate superior	3.3707	1.16542
I have a higher job satisfaction because I feel I am appreciated by my superior	4.1731	0.95297
I am not afraid to contact management if somebody’s rights are violated or feelings hurt	3.4192	1.25095

Source: own study.

4.3. Results

A multiple mediation analysis was conducted with the purpose of verifying whether a retailer’s image and the relationship between employees and management are mediator variables in the relation between the CSR activities undertaken by a trade company and the employees’ activities towards consumers. Indexes for particular paths are shown in Figure 2 and Tables 5 and 6. The bootstrapping technique was conducted according to Preacher and Hayes’ [2008] guidelines. There were 1,000 samplings to assess the intermediate effects. The confidence intervals were assumed at the level of 95%, which corresponds to testing the hypothesis at the significance level 0.05.

The test results for CSR diffusion are shown in Table 5. The results suggest that enhancement in diffusion of CSR was significantly and substantially mediated only by the retailer’s image variable. The effect on CSR diffusion attributed to CSR activities was reduced from 0.1323 (see total CSR activities in Table 5) to -0.0190 (see Remaining Direct Effect in Table 5) by the set of two mediator variables (employees–management relationship and retailer’s image). However, it was the retailer’s image that accounted for virtually all these effects.

Confidence intervals were CI.95: $-0.0863, 0.0798$ and CI.95: $0.0545, 0.253$, respectively (see Table 6). Bootstrap results showed that a retailer’s image is significant (it is assumed that whenever zero is not contained within the bootstrap confidence intervals, one can infer that the effect is significantly different from zero). Moreover, as the residual direct effect of CSR activities do not remain significant in the model (see the remaining direct effect of CSR activities in Table 5), according to Baron and Kenny’s [1986] procedures, these results demonstrate complete mediation by the retailer’s image variable.

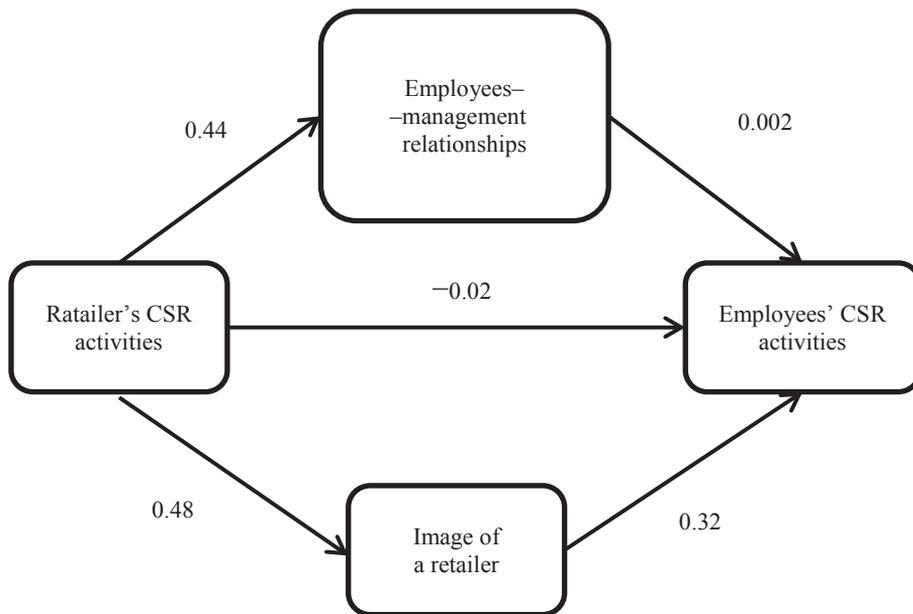


Figure 2. Multiple mediation bootstrap analysis of CSR diffusion

Source: own study.

Table 5. Multiple mediation estimates for CSR diffusion

Variables	b	t	p
CSR activities to mediators			
Employees–management relationship	0.4384	7.6883	0.0000
Retailer's image	0.4788	8.5385	0.0000
Direct effects of mediators on CSR diffusion			
Employees–management relationship	0.0017	0.0213	0.9830
Retailer's image	0.3145	3.9099	0.0001
Total effect of CSR activities on CSR diffusion	0.1323	2.1149	0.0354
Remaining direct effect of CSR activities on CSR diffusion	-0.0190	-0.2722	0.7857

Source: own study.

Out of the two mediator variables only one turned out to have a significant influence on employees' activities. This variable is the retailer's image. It should be noted that this image is shaped over a long period of time. Therefore, undertaking CSR activities may be effective only in the long-term perspective. Single CSR

Table 6. Indirect effects of CSR activities on CSR diffusion via mediators (bootstrap results) N = 253

Variables	CI _{lower}	CL _{upper}
Total indirect effects	0.0729	0.2613
Employees–management relationship	−0.0863	0.0798
Retailer’s image	0.0545	0.2530

Source: own study.

actions addressed to employees may not change the way in which they perceive their employer, so they will not result in the diffusion of CSR to consumers.

What is surprising is the lack of the effect of an immediate superior on employees’ CSR activities. A possible explanation may be that if employees have internalized CSR values, they may not feel the pressure from their superiors in this respect. Therefore, the role of a superior is not so significant for them.

5. Conclusion

The position of a retailer’s image as a mediator variable has important consequences. Firstly, there is no simple relationship between the CSR activities of a company (addressed to its employees) and CSR diffusion to consumers. The necessity to take into account changes in the image means that the process can be long-drawn-out, as changes in attitudes to a trade company (its image) take a long time. They require a long-term policy and patience in waiting for results. Secondly, it seems necessary to enhance CSR activities by communication, with a view to accelerating the changes in a retailer’s image.

To sum up, in the article it has been proven that the CSR activities undertaken by a trade company may result in the CSR activities of employees addressed to customers. However, it can only happen through the mediation of a retailer’s image. The conclusion is that employees’ behavior towards consumers will change only on condition that a company’s image changes as a result of its efforts.

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DZIAŁANIA CSR KIEROWANE DO PRACOWNIKÓW – DYFUZJA CSR NA KLIENTÓW ZA POŚREDNICTWEM PRACOWNIKÓW

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest wyjaśnienie znaczenia CSR w relacjach wewnątrz organizacji – pomiędzy pracownikami a pracodawcami oraz przeniesienia efektów CSR wobec pracowników na ich kontakty z nabywcami. W tym celu odwołano się do wyników badań przeprowadzonych na celowo dobranej próbie pracowników sieci sklepów w Polsce. Badania przeprowadzono w ramach projektu sfinansowanego ze środków Narodowego Centrum Nauki przyznanych na podstawie decyzji numer DEC-2011/03/B/HS4/03576. W opracowaniu posłużono się metodą *bootstrappingu*. Uzyskane wyniki pozwoliły sformułować wnioski, że dyfuzja działań CSR przez pracowników na rzecz klientów może być wywołana przez działania CSR jednostki handlowej. Przy czym pośrednio wpływają nań zmiany w postrzeganiu wizerunku firmy handlowej. Dopiero poprawa wizerunku firmy wśród pracowników zachęca ich do dyfuzji działań CSR nakierowanych na nabywców.

Słowa kluczowe: CSR, pracownicy, dyfuzja działań CSR, *bootstrapping*.