

A Review of Research on Corporate Social Responsibility in the Field of Marketing

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Abstract: In the global business environment, corporate social responsibility has become increasingly crucial in the field of marketing. Both domestic and international enterprises tend to integrate the concept and practice of CSR into their strategic goals and business activities to seek a better brand image and competitive edge in marketing. This paper systematically reviews the research of relevant scholars and elaborately expounds on the research findings regarding the related concepts, variable measurements, antecedent factors, and consequence variables of CSR. Finally, a comprehensive review is conducted based on the existing research, aiming to provide a valuable reference for further research on CSR in the field of marketing.

1. Introduction

In today's globalized business environment, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a crucial topic attracting extensive attention in the field of marketing. With the awakening of consumer awareness, the increasing pressure of public opinion, and the strengthening of government regulations, enterprises are no longer merely regarded as entities aiming to maximize economic benefits. Instead, they need to consider their impacts on various aspects such as society and the environment during their business operations. As a key link for enterprises to interact with consumers and society, marketing has made the integration and interaction between CSR and marketing a focal point of joint exploration in both academic and business circles.

From a macroscopic perspective of social development, with the rapid economic take off in China, the living standards of the public have significantly improved, and society's expectations of enterprises have undergone profound changes. In the past, the focus was solely on economic output, but now it has been extensively extended to enterprises' contributions to overall social welfare. Especially in the context where environmental issues have drawn significant attention, government organizations and the public require enterprises to earnestly fulfill their environmental responsibilities during production and operation, reduce pollutant emissions, and actively promote sustainable development [1]. This shift has compelled enterprises to incorporate elements of social responsibility into their marketing strategies to meet social expectations and win public recognition. Some research indicates that enterprises' fulfillment of social responsibility can have a positive impact on consumers' perceived value, thereby enhancing their loyalty to products. Providing high

quality products to consumers is the key to the successful development of enterprises [2].

At the micro - level of an enterprise's own operation and development, fulfilling social responsibility has also become crucial for building core competitiveness. In a market landscape where products and services are increasingly homogenized, corporate social responsibility practices can shape a unique brand image, enhance brand reputation and customer loyalty [3]. An increasing number of enterprises have established a brand image of being caring and socially responsible in the minds of consumers through long - term participation in public welfare and charitable activities, thus standing out in the fierce market competition. From the perspective of internal enterprise management, proactive social responsibility initiatives help attract and retain outstanding talents. Employees working in an enterprise environment with a sense of social responsibility often gain a higher sense of belonging and job satisfaction [4], thereby improving the overall operational efficiency of the enterprise.

The rise and development of corporate social responsibility in the field of marketing result from the synergistic effects of multiple factors, including social expectations, corporate competitive needs, and policy orientations. Numerous studies have been dedicated to uncovering the mechanisms of CSR in various aspects such as marketing strategies, brand image building, and influencing consumer behavior. This is of great significance for understanding the comprehensive development and sustainable operation of modern enterprises. In light of this, this paper summarizes the relevant research on CSR in the marketing field in recent years by reviewing three aspects: the related concepts of socially responsible marketing, its antecedent factors, and consequence variables. Finally, it evaluates the latest research progress in the integration of CSR and marketing, and looks ahead to future research directions.

2. Related Concepts and Variable Measurement of Corporate Social Responsibility

The conceptual framework of CSR involves multiple dimensions. Currently, there are two main categorization methods that are most widely recognized in the academic community. The first is Carroll's CSR pyramid theory based on the content dimension. CSR encompasses four levels: economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility [5]. The second is the categorization from the stakeholder dimension, where CSR corresponds to the responsibilities towards stakeholder groups such as shareholders, employees, the government, and consumers. This theory provides the foundation for CSR practices in marketing and permeates the entire product life - cycle as well as the whole process of interaction with various stakeholders.

The current measurement methods of corporate social responsibility mainly include content analysis, reputation index, and KLD index. Content analysis measures a company's fulfillment of social responsibility by deeply analyzing various publicly available information materials released by the company. Researchers will classify, count, and quantitatively score the descriptions related to the company's economic, environmental, and social responsibilities in these texts according to a pre - set coding framework [6]. The reputation index is a measurement indicator of corporate social responsibility that focuses on the perspective of stakeholders. By conducting extensive surveys of different types of stakeholders, such as consumers, investors, employees, industry experts, and the media, it collects their evaluations and perceptions of the company's performance in social responsibility, and then constructs the corporate social responsibility reputation index [7]. For example, a questionnaire can be designed to ask consumers about their satisfaction and recognition of the company in aspects such as product quality assurance, community participation, and environmental protection. These feedbacks are sorted, summarized, and calculated with weights to obtain a specific value reflecting the company's social responsibility reputation, thus measuring the company's performance in the field of social responsibility. The KLD index method is an influential

and widely - used method in the field of measuring corporate social responsibility variables. Developed by Kinder, Lydenberg, and Domini Research & Analytics (KLD), it aims to quantitatively evaluate a company's social responsibility performance by systematically and comprehensively considering multiple factors [8]. The KLD index method covers a wide range of evaluation dimensions, focusing on core dimensions such as community relations, employee relations, environmental responsibility, and product responsibility. At the same time, it also involves the consideration and evaluation of the company in other important social responsibility related fields such as corporate governance and human rights, forming a relatively complete and detailed corporate social responsibility evaluation system from multiple perspectives. Compared with other measurement methods, the advantage of the KLD index method lies in its strong systematicness and professionalism. Through long - term practice and improvement, it can comprehensively and deeply explore a company's performance in different social - responsibility dimensions, providing researchers with relatively detailed data support. However, it is not without flaws. Its limitations are that the cost of data collection and update is relatively high, and the definition and measurement of some indicators may be affected by factors such as industry differences and subjective judgments, resulting in certain challenges in universality and adaptability in different industries or research scenarios.

In actual academic research and corporate practice evaluations, researchers and relevant practitioners often combine the KLD index method with other measurement methods such as content analysis, reputation index method, and comprehensive evaluation method, in line with specific research objectives and corporate characteristics. This is done to measure the fulfillment of corporate social responsibility more accurately and objectively, maximizing the advantages of each method and compensating for their respective shortcomings.

3. Antecedent Factors of Corporate Social Responsibility

There are numerous antecedent factors influencing corporate social responsibility. Synthesizing existing research and integrating with the market environment analysis logic in marketing, these factors can generally be summarized into two parts: the macro - level and the micro - level. At the macro - level, mainly through PEST analysis, it encompasses three aspects: politics, economy and socioculture. At the micro - level, it mainly includes three aspects: the enterprise itself, the industry environment, and consumers.

3.1 Political Factors

Political factors play a crucial role in the practice of CSR, especially in the field of marketing, where the political environment exerts a profound impact on a company's CSR behavior. The political environment encompasses various aspects such as government policies, laws and regulations, political stability, and the relationship between the government and enterprises. Research indicates that government policies and regulations guide and restrict a company's CSR behavior. The government can encourage enterprises to adopt environmental protection measures or participate in social welfare activities by offering tax incentives, subsidies, or other incentives. Among these, political incentives can prompt the actual controllers of enterprises to be inclined to release highly substantive CSR reports, while economic incentives in policies may lead to the opposite result [9]. Moreover, political stability also affects a company's investment in and commitment to CSR. Political unrest may cause enterprises to reallocate resources to risk management rather than social responsibility activities [10]. The political connection between enterprises and the government also has a significant impact on CSR practices. Politically - connected enterprises can obtain resources and support by establishing connections with the

government. This connection may prompt enterprises to pay more attention to social responsibility in order to maintain their good relationship with the government and preserve their social legitimacy [11].

3.2 Economic Factors

In the current context of globalization and fierce market competition, enterprises' economic behaviors and decisions are not only influenced by internal factors but are also closely related to the external macro - economic environment. Specifically, macro - economic factors such as the growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP), inflation rate, and exchange rate fluctuations have a significant impact on enterprises' CSR behaviors. The GDP growth rate, a key indicator measuring a country's economic vitality, has a significant positive impact on the fulfillment of corporate social responsibility. During periods of rapid economic growth, enterprises often have more resources and capabilities to assume social responsibilities, such as increasing investment in environmental protection and improving employee benefits [12]. Secondly, changes in the inflation rate also affect enterprises' costs and profits, thus influencing their investment in social responsibility. In a high - inflation environment, enterprises may reduce investment in non - core businesses, including social responsibility activities. Related research also indicates that exchange rate fluctuations have a particularly significant impact on multinational corporations. It not only affects enterprises' costs and revenues but may also change their global resource allocation strategies, thereby influencing their social responsibility performance in different regions around the world [13].

3.3 Sociocultural Factors

Corporate culture, values, and social norms are key factors shaping CSR behavior. Corporate culture, as an embodiment of internal values within an enterprise, directly influences the enterprise's perception and actions regarding social responsibility. A positive and healthy corporate culture can encourage enterprises to assume more responsibilities in issues such as environmental protection and consumer rights. Moreover, socioculture, as a non - institutional factor, ranging from the overall moral level of society to regional cultural characteristics, has a significant impact on CSR [14]. Values and beliefs within the sociocultural context guide CSR behavior. Some scholars' research shows that traditional cultures such as "harmony between man and nature" and "karma" may prompt enterprises to attach greater importance to environmental protection and sustainable development [15]. Social public opinion and media attention are also important external influencing factors. Public concern and the pressure of public opinion can drive enterprises to invest more in CSR activities [16]. Therefore, sociocultural factors influence the perception and practice of CSR, either indirectly or directly, by shaping enterprises' values and codes of conduct.

3.4 Enterprise - specific Factors

Enterprise - specific factors, including enterprise size, history, culture, and strategic objectives, have a direct impact on the fulfillment of corporate social responsibility. The size and resource capabilities of an enterprise determine the scope and depth of its social - responsibility commitment. Large enterprises generally have more resources to invest in social - responsibility projects, while small and medium - sized enterprises may focus more on social - responsibility activities in local communities. The history and culture of an enterprise also influence its commitment to social responsibility. Enterprises with a strong "patriotic sentiment" are more likely to engage in continuous social - responsibility practices during their strategic transformation[17]. In addition, an enterprise's strategic objectives affect its social - responsibility behavior. If an enterprise

incorporates social responsibility into its core strategy, then social - responsibility practices are more likely to become an integral part of its decision - making and operations.

3.5 Industry Environment Factors

When conducting marketing activities, enterprises need to consider their position within the industry, pay attention to the market dynamics of their competitors, and are significantly influenced by the degree of industry competition and industry changes. Specifically, although enterprises make decisions related to corporate social responsibility independently, these decisions are affected by factors such as market competition, industry status, industry associations, and industry attributes. This is especially true for manufacturing enterprises. With the development of environmentalism, enterprises fulfill their environmental responsibilities during the technological innovation process to generate sustainable impacts. Among these, the intensity of market competition plays a crucial moderating role in the influence of corporate social responsibility on technological innovation performance[18]. In highly competitive industries, enterprises form new competitive advantages through the synergistic effect between corporate social responsibility and competitive strategies. Under different competitive strategies, enterprises have different corporate social responsibility costs and reputation effects. The low - cost strategy weakens the performance impact of corporate social responsibility by reducing the reputation effect, while the differentiation strategy strengthens the performance impact of corporate social responsibility by reducing the cost effect[19].

3.6 Consumer Factors

Consumers as the ultimate recipients of enterprises' marketing activities, are key stakeholders of enterprises and play a decisive role in motivating enterprises to actively assume social responsibility. Individual characteristics such as income level, education level, and age play a crucial role when consumers evaluate enterprises' social - responsibility behaviors. Young consumers, in particular, show a stronger identification with the active fulfillment of corporate social responsibility. With the enhancement of consumers' awareness of social responsibility and sustainable consumption, enterprises have begun to pay more attention to consumers' feedback. Enterprises' social - responsibility practices play an important role in shaping consumers' brand perception and influencing their purchasing decisions. Effective social - responsibility activities can enhance consumers' brand loyalty and satisfaction . At the same time, consumers' feedback provides guidance for the optimization of corporate social responsibility, helping enterprises better adapt to consumers' needs[20]. Therefore, when fulfilling social responsibility, enterprises need to deeply understand consumers' demographic and psychological characteristics and adjust their social - responsibility strategies accordingly to more effectively win consumers' recognition and support for their consumption behaviors.

4. Consequence Variables of Corporate Social Responsibility

At present, research on the outcome variables of CSR in the field of marketing mainly focuses on its effects at the organizational and individual levels. At the organizational level, scholars have emphasized the analysis of the impacts of CSR on aspects such as corporate financial performance, innovation capabilities, and brand image. At the individual level, the focus is on the influence of CSR on consumers.

4.1 Financial Performance

All marketing activities of an enterprise aim to maximize profits. Financial performance indicators are crucial for measuring a company's profitability. As a new marketing approach, corporate social responsibility (CSR) fulfillment by enterprises has received extensive attention in the marketing field in recent years. The academic community generally believes that CSR activities can have a positive impact on a company's financial performance [21]. From a long - term perspective, by fulfilling social responsibility, an enterprise can enhance its brand value and market competitiveness, attract more consumers and investors, thereby increasing revenue and market share. Meanwhile, CSR practices help reduce a company's operational risks and costs, and improve operational efficiency through measures such as environmental protection and energy conservation and emission reduction [19]. In addition, good social - responsibility performance can improve employee satisfaction and loyalty, reduce employee turnover rates, and thus increase work efficiency and productivity. These factors work together to promote a company's financial performance and market performance. Corporate social responsibility is not only a moral requirement but also an important way to achieve financial goals.

4.2 Corporate Innovation

Corporate innovation affects the implementation of a company's marketing activities. Developing innovative products and applying innovative promotion methods in actual marketing help enterprises maintain long - term competitive advantages. CSR can stimulate corporate innovation activities by enhancing a company's social capital and promoting the flow of knowledge and information. By fulfilling social responsibility, an enterprise can build a good social image and brand reputation, attracting more partners and outstanding talents, which are crucial for corporate innovation [22]. Moreover, CSR activities can improve a company's market sensitivity, enabling it to respond more quickly to market changes and consumer demands, thus promoting the innovation of products and services [23]. Therefore, corporate social responsibility not only contributes to the long - term sustainable development of an enterprise but also serves as an important driving force for corporate innovation.

4.3 Brand Image

In marketing activities, building a positive brand image is one of the core goals that enterprises pursue. The impact of corporate social responsibility on brand image is mainly reflected in enhancing brand value and safeguarding brand reputation in crisis situations. An enterprise's outstanding performance in social responsibility can significantly improve the image of the enterprise and its products. Academic research has explored the influence of CSR on corporate reputation from multiple dimensions of CSR and found that, except for economic responsibility, other dimensions of social responsibility have a significant positive impact on enhancing corporate reputation [24]. In brand - crisis situations, especially in functional - crisis incidents, an enterprise's good social - responsibility practices can protect the brand image and reduce the enterprise's operational risks. Enterprises that actively fulfill their social responsibilities can not only enhance the brand image positively but also, to a certain extent, restore the brand image when facing negative crises. Conversely, if an enterprise lacks or deviates in social responsibility, it will cause serious damage to the brand image.

4.4 Consumers

Consumers' responses and feedback are key indicators for measuring the effectiveness of an enterprise's marketing activities. The performance of CSR can influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors. Firstly, CSR can significantly affect consumers' purchase intention. Research shows that consumers' awareness of CSR is positively correlated with their evaluation of the company and has a direct and positive relationship with purchase intention [25]. In addition, a good CSR image can enhance consumers' loyalty to the enterprise [2]. Secondly, the impact of the way CSR information is presented on consumers' perceived value and brand identification cannot be ignored. For positive CSR information, joint promotion by the enterprise and a third - party has a greater impact on consumers' positive perceived value. The way of CSR information dissemination can enhance the influence of positive CSR information on consumers' perceived value and brand identification [26].

5. Research Review and Future Prospects

Existing research has systematically analyzed the integration of corporate social responsibility and marketing from the perspectives of concepts, antecedent factors, and consequence variables, providing a solid theoretical foundation for understanding their interactive mechanisms. However, gaps remain: most studies focus on static relationships, lacking exploration of how CSR marketing strategies adapt to dynamic changes in the digital economy (e.g., social media influence and big data applications). Additionally, cross-cultural comparative research on CSR implementation is insufficient, and the long-term impact of CSR on corporate competitiveness across different industries requires deeper investigation. Future studies could prioritize: (1) examining the impact of emerging technologies (e.g., AI and block chain) on CSR practice and consumer perception; (2) exploring contextual differences in CSR marketing across cultural and institutional environments; (3) analyzing the dynamic feedback mechanism between CSR and corporate innovation in the long term, so as to bridge theoretical gaps and enhance practical guidance for enterprises.

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