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Research Article

The Antecedents and Consequences of CSR Skepticism: An Integrated Framework.

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) skepticism is examined in marketing literature, but the understanding of its role in the domain of CSR is lacking. Previous studies revealed that consumers compensate for the companies that engage in CSR activities, but the level of CSR skepticism inhibits the success of CSR programs. This paper describes the antecedents and consequences of CSR skepticism. The antecedents conclude the motives that affect the level of consumer skepticism about CSR programs, while the consequences examined the relationships between CSR skepticism and some outcome variables through two broad dimensions; the companies and consumer behaviors. The results have demonstrated the expected direction force of the motives on CSR skepticism, and the expected consequences of CSR skepticism on both the companies and the consumer behaviors. The findings have indicated that it is not sufficient for a company to solely engage in CSR, but they must also take into account the level or extent of CSR skepticism. This paper contributes to the literature by examining the antecedents and consequences of CSR skepticism, by integrating a framework of research on an important topic, and by offering broad paths for further research.

1. Introduction

Organizations' social concerns have been studied by scholars and researchers since the beginning of the twentieth century (Berle, 1931; Bowen, 1953). However, in the recent few decades, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has developed and taken an interesting domain in the study and business world (Carroll, 1991; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Corporate executives and practitioners have struggled with the matter of the firm's responsibility to its society (Carroll, 1991). According to Wu and Wang (2014), There are two main reasons why CSR is obtaining more attention: firstly, firms are observing that CSR is a key to business success, and secondly, those non-profit organizations need support to be effective. Meanwhile, Lii and Lee (2012) posit that CSR is a key component of a company's marketing toolbox because it responds to the expectations of the consumer, improves reputation and corporate performance. Moreover, (Lii et al., 2013) argue that the ultimate goal of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is sustainability that not only incorporates, but also meets social, economic, and environmental responsibilities at the same time that they are affected to corporate success.

Many people skeptical about the extent to which
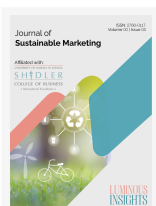
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companies committed to their professed standards and their corporate social involvement (Skarmeas et al., 2014). The increasing importance and effect of CSR skepticism have triggered numerous studies on its antecedents and consequences. Some researchers focus on the antecedents affecting CSR skepticism (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014). Other research investigates the indirect role of CSR skepticism, such as its mediating role (Elving, 2010; Ham & Kim, 2020). Meanwhile, other studies examine the consequences of CSR skepticism (e.g., Connors et al., 2017; Elving, 2010). Despite the previous studies, the literature on CSR skepticism remains few and fragmented, and the research on the antecedents and consequences of CSR skepticism still not sufficient.

Thus, this study represents an attempt to bridge this gap, and propose a conceptual model that explains some antecedents and consequences of CSR skepticism. The conceptual model in Figure. 1 posits that there are four motives; egoistic, values, strategic, and stakeholder, that affect the presence of consumer skepticism about CSR programs, which in turn affect the company and consumer behaviors.

This study contributes to the CSR skepticism literature by developing an integrative model, likely highlight the importance of some antecedents of CSR skepticism and its consequences on the company and consumer behaviors, and suggest directions for future research.

2. CSR and CSR skepticism

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly popular among corporation (Nan & Heo, 2007), used by companies as an important strategy to improve consumers' favorable responses (Aljarah, 2020), and to improve the well-being of its societies (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). CSR is defined as the expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time, it involves the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations (Carroll, 1991). The misleading CSR will lead to a harmful effect on overall brand evaluation, whereas trustful CSR can improve a favorable brand evaluation (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Previous research demonstrated that

the consumers' information about CSR programs affects companies and consumer behaviors from many dimensions, such as buying attitudes (Wu & Wang, 2014), consumer responses (Nan & Heo, 2007), service brand (He & Li, 2011), consumer satisfaction (Rivera et al., 2016), CCB (Aljarah, 2020), corporate reputation (Park et al., 2014). More specifically, the studies have found that CSR information may have positive or negative effects on companies and consumers, but the negative CSR information has a stronger effect than positive information (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Today, public criticism towards socially irresponsible business practices has increased, where more and more consumers tend to doubt incorporate social involvement, and feelings of skepticism toward CSR (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Generally, the term skepticism reflects a doubt situation about the truth of something (Skarmeas et al., 2014). Consumer skepticism is defined as consumer disbelief or distrust of marketer actions such as CSR actions (Foreh & Grier, 2003; Ham & Kim, 2020). CSR skepticism refers to the contradiction between the company's goals (e.g. profit, reputation) and the nature of the CSR domain, which represents a voluntary company's commitment to enhance the wellbeing of society (Rim & Kim, 2016). According to Elving (2010), the levels of skepticism, linked with the motives of the company engaging in CSR, represent the main predictor of the ultimate success of a CSR campaign. Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) explains the individual's attitude and satisfaction where there is an incongruity between an individual's expectations of a company and its subsequent fulfillment (Oliver, 1980).

3. Antecedents of CSR skepticism

Within consumer research and the formation of skepticism towards CSR, there are two views: traditional and modern view. The literature of traditional view explains that the consumers attribute to companies two types of motives: firm-serving motives; refer to the potential benefit to the firm itself, and public-serving motives; refer to the potential benefits to people outside the company (Alhouti et al., 2016; Foreh & Grier, 2003). In other words, the term public-serving refers to
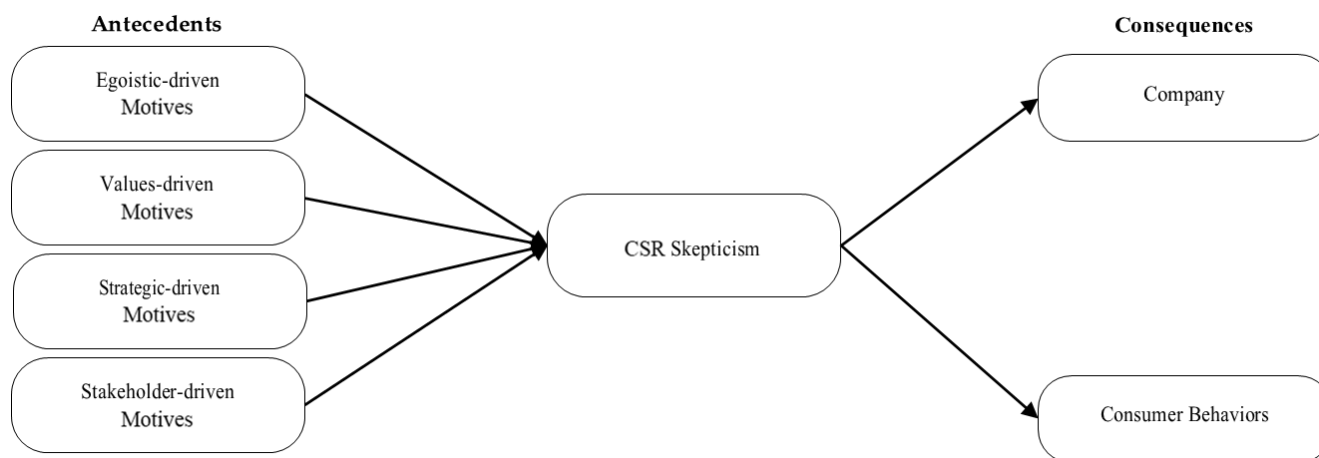
Figure 1. The conceptual model

the motives that include attention to the well-being of individuals or society outside of the firm but it may also include attention to firm interests as well, and the term firm-serving refers to the motives that focus solely on the needs of the firm itself (Foreh & Grier, 2003). Generally, consumers realize firm-serving as a negative motive because they consider that the company has an opportunistic behavior, meanwhile, consumers realize public-serving as a positive motive because they consider that the company has socially altruistic behaviors (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). The literature of the modern view explains that the consumers attribute to companies four driven types of motives: egoistic, values, strategic, and stakeholder (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Consumers perceive values and strategic-driven motives as a positive CSR effort while perceiving egoistic and stakeholder-driven motives as a negative CSR effort (Ellen et al., 2006).

In keeping with a modern view, attribution theory (Kelley, 1967) considered as an important gate to understanding these motives, where it explains the role of consumer skepticism toward CSR by illuminating the way people interpret CSR and how this cognitive perception affects their subsequent behavior and attitudes (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013).

3.1. Egoistic-driven motives

Egoistic driven motives refer to beliefs that the company exploits rather than supports a cause because it aims to achieve its own goals such as build a positive reputation and enhance profits (Rim & Kim, 2016). According to Elving (2010), skepticism and cynicism are a result of distrust in others when an individual perceives that the behavior of others is mainly based on egoistic driven motives. When consumers perceive an opportunistic motive behind CSR programs, their skepticism arises and leads them to false conclusions about the company's ethos (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Meanwhile, Skarmeas et al. (2014) pointed out that the antecedent "egoistic-driven motives" lead to high CSR skepticism. Thus, we conclude that egoistic driven motives have a positive effect on CSR skepticism.

3.2. Values-driven motives

Values-driven motives build on the beliefs that the company engages in CSR activities purely because of its ethical, moral, and societal criteria (Ellen et al., 2000; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Consumers will appreciate CSR activities more positively when they are driven apparently by corporate values (Ellen et al., 2006). Non-financial motives, such as value-driven, often reflect intrinsic motives that perceive CSR as an end in itself, independent from (financial) benefits, and

consider CSR as a moral duty where the moral duty to be socially responsible can be derived from ethical and religious principles (Graafland & Mazereeuw-Van der Duijn Schouten, 2012). Moreover, Skarmeas et al. (2014) pointed out that the antecedent "values-driven motives" deter the development of CSR skepticism. Thus, we conclude that values-driven motives harm CSR skepticism.

3.3. Strategic-driven motives

Strategic-driven motives build on the belief that the company can achieve its business goals while supporting the cause (Ellen et al., 2006). The study of Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013) and Skarmeas et al. (2014) concluded that strategic-driven attributions neither facilitate nor mitigate CSR skepticism, which indicated that consumers are tolerant of strategic-driven motives for corporate social engagement. No empirical evidence was found for the relation between the strategic motives to reduce consumer skepticism Amawate and Deb (2021). Meanwhile, Consumers responded most positively to CSR activities they judged as strategic driven motives (Ellen et al., 2006). Thus, we conclude that strategic-driven motives have a negative effect on CSR skepticism.

3.4. Stakeholder driven motives

The influence of stakeholders represents an important predictor of CSR policies, where they affect whether the firms choose to engage in CSR and the types of CSR initiatives (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Stakeholder-driven motives build on the beliefs that the company engages in CSR activities to satisfy the expectations of different stakeholders (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Vlachos et al., 2009). Vlachos et al. (2009) claimed that stakeholder-driven motives negatively influence trust and patronage intentions. Moreover, Skarmeas et al. (2014) pointed out that the antecedent "stakeholder-driven motives" fuel consumer skepticism about CSR. Thus, we conclude that stakeholder-driven motives have a positive effect on CSR skepticism.

4. Consequences of CSR skepticism

The primary objective of interest is whether CSR skepticism affects the outcomes of companies and/or consumer behaviors towards them. Researchers have studied different consequences of CSR skepticism such as cause-related marketing (Amawate & Deb, 2021), public evaluations toward CSR (Rim & Kim, 2016), attitudes, and intentions (Ham & Kim, 2020), and consumer response (Connors et al., 2017). In this section, the relationships between CSR skepticism and outcome variables are examined through two broad dimensions; the companies and consumer behaviors.

4.1. CSR skepticism and company

A company is expected to prioritize its actions and articulate its values in such a way as to better meet the legal, economic, environmental, and social expectations of society (Park et al., 2014). As more and more cases of corporate hypocrisy are discovered, consumers have developed an inherent general skepticism towards CSR campaigns of companies (Connors et al., 2017). Regarding the consequences of CSR skepticism, this study will investigate the interrelationship between CSR skepticism and the outcomes of companies from many dimensions or perspectives.

4.1.1. CSR skepticism and brand image

Brand image is defined as the set of associations linked to the brand that consumers hold in their memory (Keller, 1993). Brand image is considered a special component in designing and planning the marketing mix for the product (Malik et al., 2012). According to Wu and Wang (2014), there are inseparably tied between brand image and CSR. Elving (2010) claimed that high levels of skepticism negatively affect purchase intention and attitude towards the company. Moreover, Rim and Kim (2016) claimed that there is a negative relation between customer skepticism and attitude toward the brand image. Thus, we conclude that CSR skepticism has a negative effect on brand image.

4.1.2. CSR skepticism and corporate reputation

Corporate reputation is defined as public or global perception of the extent to which a company is held in high regard or esteem in consumers' eyes (Weiss, Anderson, & MacInnis, 1999). The level of corporate investment in social causes makes it clear that CSR activities are viewed as key for many companies to build their reputation (Ellen et al., 2006). Moreover, Park et al. (2014) claimed that the CSR programs, especially within economic and legal responsibility, had a sig-

nificant direct impact on corporate reputation. Previous studies on CSR motives empirically demonstrated that public suspicion of corporate sincerity has negative effects on corporate reputation (Rim & Kim, 2016). The skeptical responses of consumers and other stakeholders on CSR activities of organizations negatively affect the reputation of the company (Elving, 2010). Thus, we conclude that CSR skepticism has a negative effect on corporate reputation.

4.1.3. CSR skepticism and cause-related marketing

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is defined as the firm planning marketing activities that are characterized to contribute a specified amount to designated worthy causes when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Cause-related marketing is appropriate for the examination of consumer skepticism because of its dual nature; cause-beneficial and cause-exploitative (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Skepticism was the primary negative factor determining responses to CRM since the negativity toward CRM stemmed from consumer skepticism about implementation and/or cynicism about the firm's motives (Webb & Mohr, 1998). Moreover, Amawate and Deb (2021) claimed that skepticism about the CRM program negatively impacts the company. Thus, we conclude that CSR skepticism has a negative effect on cause-related marketing.

4.2. CSR skepticism and consumer behaviors

Attribution theory (Kelley, 1967) provides a convenient framework for the situation-based analysis of consumer skepticism, where consumers evaluate the contributions of others and explain how these perceived motives influence subsequent behavior (Foreh & Grier, 2003). When the public learns about a company's CSR programs, skeptics would doubt whether the CSR activities are truthful, where consumers' disbelief stems from the paradox between the nature of philanthropy and business (Rim & Kim, 2016). Regarding the consequences of CSR skepticism, this study will investigate the interrelationship between CSR skepticism and consumer behaviors from many dimensions or perspectives.

4.2.1. CSR skepticism and consumer's purchase intention

Consumer purchase intention is defined as a subjective tendency toward a product or service and can be an important index to predict consumer behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). CSR can have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Connors et al. (2017) claimed that CSR skepticism has a negative effect on consumer evaluations including purchase intentions. Elving (2010) found that skepticism concerning the motives of CSR has a negative influence on the purchase intention of products of the company. Thus, we conclude that CSR skepticism has a negative effect on consumer's purchase intention.

4.2.2. CSR skepticism and consumer's attitude toward a company

A consumer's attitude toward an object (e.g., brand, company) is determined by accepting beliefs about the object and is defined as the subjective probability that the object has a certain attribute to the consumer (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). CSR can have a positive effect on attitude toward the company (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). In keeping with the CSR program, corporate hypocrisy had a significant and negative effect on attitude toward the company (Wagner et al., 2009). When a consumer skeptical about the motives of a company, then engaging in CSR could negatively influence the consumer's attitude toward the company, where high levels of skepticism lead to a more negative attitude toward the company (Elving, 2010). Connors et al. (2017) showed that CSR skepticism has a negative effect on the consumer's attitude toward the company. Thus, we conclude that CSR skepticism has a negative effect on the consumer's attitude toward a company.

4.2.3. CSR skepticism and Customer citizenship behavior (consumer's word of mouth)

Customer citizenship behavior (CCB) is defined as a discretionary and voluntary activity by a customer toward a company, above and over the normal requirements of an exchange, which benefits the company (Gilde et al., 2011). Previous research on CCB has argued that CCBs are formed from multiple categories or dimensions (Mandl & Hogreve,

2018; Groth, 2005), of most studies, Bove et al. (2009) identify that consumer's word of mouth (WOM) is considered as a dimension of CCBs. The consumer's word of mouth (may be positive or negative WOM) is defined as a communication activity between customers, which leads a customer to give information about the services and products of a company to another customer (Akbari et al., 2015). Skepticism toward a company's altruism is identified as the strongest predictor in determining negative public response to CSR and supportive behavioral intentions (i.e., engaging in positive word-of-mouth communication and volunteering for a company doing CSR) (Rim & Kim, 2016). In keeping with CSR (Aljarah, 2020) demonstrated that CSR positively impacts the target-based CCBs, where it is a stronger predictor of customer-oriented CCB than firm-oriented CCB, whereas Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013) and Connors et al. (2017) claimed that CSR skepticism increases unfavorable word of mouth intentions. Thus, we conclude that CSR skepticism has a negative effect on word-of-mouth.

5. Conclusion

This research investigates the attributions made by consumers about the motives that impact consumers' skepticism toward CSR programs, and the consequences of CSR skepticism on consumers and companies that participate in such CSR activities. An overall review of the antecedents and consequences of CSR skepticism was discussed along with an integrative framework. This paper contributes to the literature and business both by integrating a framework of research on an important topic and by offering broad paths for further research. For future research, antecedents and consequences of CSR skepticism represent a wide domain to enter, where academics can also guide researchers to new directions from the integrative review and framework. First, there is a lack of studies about the motives of CSR skepticism and its consequences relating to the companies and consumer behaviors. CSR skepticism has increased due to the hypocrisy of corporates of CSR activities, and the paradox between the nature of philanthropy and the utilitarian business objectives. It would be interesting to study CSR skepticism to overcoming the threats facing the companies regarding their CSR programs and overcome the doubts of consumers and societies. Second, this study demonstrates the expected direction force of each factor (i.e., motives and consequences) which impact on and affect by CSR skepticism. The studying of these expected factors (motives and consequences) of CSR skepticism will help managers to better control the consumers' skepticism, enhance the interrelationship confidence between company-customers, and simultaneously benefit both the society and the company. Finally, future studies could find other factors that may potentially influence CSR skepticism and its impact on both the outcomes of companies and the consumers' behavior toward these companies.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest.

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