

Doing Good Is Doing Right: Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility on Customer Attitude and Behavior

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of corporate social responsibility on customer advocacy behavior with mediating role of customer attitude (i.e. satisfaction) using social exchange and expectation conformation theories respectively. Data collected through a self-administered questionnaire from 302 customers of cellular service providers of Pakistan was analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equations model. Mediation hypothesis was tested with bootstrapping method. Results showed that corporate social responsibility has indirect effect on customer advocacy behavior while direct effect hypothesis was not supported. Results also provided support for direct effect of corporate social responsibility on customer satisfaction, and direct effect of customer satisfaction on customer advocacy behavior. Implications for organizational managers and directions for future studies have been suggested along with limitations of the study.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, customer satisfaction, customer advocacy behavior, Pakistan

In today's competitive business environment, companies need to be familiar with the new demands of market and society. For this purpose, they need to manage their business processes to create a positive impact on society through CSR (corporate social responsibility) activities (Jenkins, 2009). As a result of this competition, many companies communicate their CSR practices and achievements to their stakeholders as a strategy to enhance their competitive advantage (Lee-Wong & More, 2016) because CSR as a competitive strategy helps the companies to differentiate themselves from the rival firms (Flammer, 2015).

Firms that engage in CSR activities like to be viewed as “good corporate citizens” (Jeurissen, 2004) and make active efforts to communicate their CSR initiatives (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006) in order to build and enhance their image in the minds of their key stakeholders i.e. customers. Present research has pointed out that CSR activities have a meaningful influence on many customer related outcomes (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). For example, positive word-of-mouth,

loyalty and trust (Walsh & Bartikowski, 2012), purchase intentions (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010), identification with the company (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001) and overall product evaluations (Perera & Chaminda, 2012).

Customer advocacy behavior, defense and promotion oriented behavior of customers for a company (Walz & Cleuch, 2010), an extended form of word of mouth behavior, is one of the key customer behavior that can be influenced by CSR image of the company because company's social image can help to build corporate image, reinforce stakeholder-company relationship and boost stakeholders' advocacy behaviors (Du et al., 2010). Word of mouth behaviors like advocacy are nine times more successful than advertising in changing customer attitudes (Day, 1971), so it will be of high value for organizational managers to know that how and to what extent CSR initiatives can play their role in this regard. Empirical attempts in this regard are not only limited but also lack theory based underpinning of relationship.

To advance the understanding and knowledge in domain of CSR and customer advocacy behavior, we draw upon the social exchange theory (Blau 1964; Homans 1958) to argue that CSR-advocacy behavior relationship is kind of social exchange between customer and company because Homans said that social behavior is an exchange process which tends to work in equilibrium to create balance in exchange. For example, exhibition of CSR by companies will lead the customer to reciprocate by engaging in advocacy behaviors.

However, an important question arises as to the mechanisms responsible for the effect of CSR on advocacy behaviors which have not received any attention in extant research. Also, recent standpoints on CSR have echoed more research on mechanisms via which CSR affects individuals (Evans & Davis, 2011). In this regard, we argue that customer satisfaction can be one of the psychological mechanisms that can influence the CSR-advocacy relationship because in recent years customers have become concerned with socially responsible outlook of firms and derive satisfaction from products and services of firms which they view more socially responsible (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006), ultimately leading them to exhibit advocacy behavior for the company.

Thus, using expectation confirmation theory (Oliver, 1980), we theorize for the mediating role of customer satisfaction in relationship between CSR and advocacy behavior. Our study contends that in line with expectation confirmation theory, customers have prior expectations regarding CSR activities of a company. When these expectations are materialized, the customer shows tendency to exhibit advocacy behavior. Thus, we propose a conceptual framework for examining the impact of customers' perception of CSR initiatives of company on their advocacy behaviors with the mediating role of customer satisfaction.

Additionally, another important contribution of our study is that it provides evidence of effects of CSR initiatives on customers' attitude

and behavior from non western context (Pakistan, a developing Asian country) whereby most of the extent research in the domain of CSR belongs to the western developed countries (Dobers & Halme, 2009). As, testing of western theories in non-western cultures has been recommended by different researchers (Tsui, Nifadkar & Ou, 2007) so this study adds to the confidence of organizational managers in Pakistan about CSR investments and initiatives so that they view them beyond mere regulatory compliance.

Overall current study entails three objectives. First, it examines the direct effects of CSR on customer advocacy. Second, it investigates the mediating role of customer satisfaction in relationship between CSR and customer advocacy. Third, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing evidence from developing Asian country.

Theory and Hypotheses

Corporate Social Responsibility and Customer Advocacy Behavior

Corporate social responsibility refers to “company activities – voluntary by definition– demonstrating the inclusion of social and environmental concerns in business operations and in interactions with stakeholders” (van Marrewijk, 2003, p. 102). Generally, CSR activities are viewed as a tool for enhancing reputation of a firm and provoking goodwill among its customers (Chernev & Blair, 2015). Importance of corporate social responsibility is now evident globally like European Multi-stakeholder Forum for CSR (Singh, Sanchez & Bosque, 2008) and locally like issuance of “Corporate Social Responsibility Voluntary Guidelines 2013” by Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP, 2013). Previously, CSR has been studied with several positive customer related outcomes such as industrial brand equity, brand performance (Lai, Chiu, Yang & Pai, 2010), customer satisfaction (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006), and customer loyalty (Walsh & Bartikowski, 2012). Therefore, many companies are seriously taking steps to communicate their CSR initiatives to various stakeholders including customers (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006).

Customer advocacy behavior is a recently developed construct in the field of consumer behavior and is an extended form of customer word of mouth behavior (Walz & Cleuch, 2010). According to Cross and Smith (1995), customer advocacy results from a stronger relationship in which customer actively promotes the brand or company and defends it against critics. Social exchange theory of Blau (1964) may provide a solid foundation for understanding of the relationship between CSR initiatives of a company and advocacy behavior of customers. This theory is based on exchange of valued resources which helps to initiate, strengthen and continue interpersonal relationships (Lynch, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 1999). When company engages in CSR initiatives, it signals investment of valued company resources for welfare and betterment of its stakeholders including customers which leads to strong relationship

with customers. Furthermore, social exchange theory explains exchange relationships in terms of cost and benefits associated with the relationship (Homans, 1958). When benefits (i.e. rewards) are more than costs, they lead to relationship satisfaction (Rusbult, 1983) which results in form of exhibition of promotion and defense oriented behaviors for the products and services of that company.

Also, in exchange process like company-customer relationship, customer advocacy is a key behavior signaling customer's commitment with the company (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and engagement in word of mouth marketing for that brand or company (Murray, 1991). In addition, when customers hold positive beliefs about the CSR activities of a company, it leads them to engage in advocacy behaviors (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007), and ultimately to support that company (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig 2004). So we propose:

H1: CSR is positively related to the advocacy behavior of customers.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Customer Satisfaction

In marketing literature, satisfaction is considered as a major outcome with the central feature that profits are generated through the satisfaction of customers' needs and wants (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982). For that reason, customer satisfaction is considered as an important constituent of corporate strategy (Fornell, Mithas, Morgeson, & Krishnan, 2006). By definition, satisfaction is as an outcome of purchase and use which results from buyer's comparison of rewards and costs associated with the purchase relative to their expectations (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982). Customers' expectations about social performance of the company producing product or providing service have highly increased in recent times (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006) and when company performs high on social dimension, this creates the feelings of satisfaction among customers. Literature shows that strong record of company's CSR activities positively influences the customer's evaluations about the company and attitude toward that company (Brown & Dacin, 1997). As Lou and Bhattacharya (2006) argued that customers are more likely to feel satisfaction from the products and services of the companies that are socially responsible. Thus, we can hypothesize that:

H2: CSR is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Customer Satisfaction and Advocacy Behavior

In relationship marketing, customer satisfaction is the key component for monitoring and controlling activities as well as central determinant of customer retention (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997). A satisfied customer tells six other persons about his positive experience with the company as per Pareto principal (Pandey, Sahu, & Jaiswal, 2008). Marketing literature shows that satisfied customers are considered as assets for the company (Fornell, 1992) because these customers are involved in positive word of mouth marketing (Szymanski & Henard, 2001) that is a part of advocacy behaviors. Wangenheim and Bayón

(2007) also confirmed that customer satisfaction positively influences customer word of mouth behavior. Furthermore, satisfaction from usage of a product and service generates feeling of trust and confidence in the mind of customer and resultantly customer starts advocating that product or service as well as the company (Pandey et al., 2008). So, we propose that:

H3: Customer satisfaction is positively related to advocacy behavior.

Customer Satisfaction as Mediator

We have argued that CSR activities of companies are likely to enhance the advocacy behavior of customers toward a company but there is a strong likelihood that a bridge exists between CSR activities and customer advocacy behavior. Drawing upon expectation confirmation theory (Oliver, 1980), it is asserted that customers hold expectations about a product or service in terms of its performance. These expectations are confirmed, when product performs according to expectations (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982). When expectations are aligned with perceived performance, it positively influences customer attitude (satisfaction) which in turn affects customer behavior (advocacy).

Using this theory, we can argue that customers expect the companies to be socially responsible, and when they perceive that companies are actually involved in social activities, customer's expectations are fulfilled. This sense of expectation fulfillment leads to an attitudinal change i.e. higher customer satisfaction because CSR associations affect the overall evaluation of company, which ultimately affects customers' evaluation of products and services of that company (Brown & Dacin, 1997). The positive attitudinal change in customer achieved through CSR initiatives consequently sets out the disposition in customer behavior towards higher advocacy. According to Brown and Dacin (1997), CSR activities assert a positive influence on behavioral outcomes of customers directly or indirectly i.e. through mediated paths. Past research shows that customer satisfaction has been found to mediate relationship between CSR and firm's market value (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). Thus, we expect that customer satisfaction acts as a psychological mechanism in relationship between CSR and customer advocacy behavior. So, we propose that:

H4: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between CSR and customer advocacy behavior.

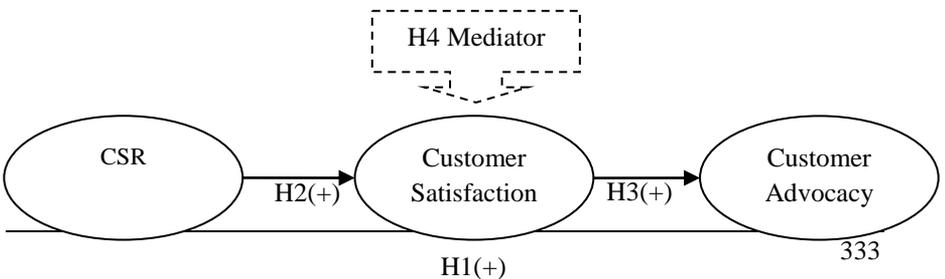


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Research Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

For this study, we targeted customers of all five cellular service provider companies of Pakistan because of active involvement of these companies in social activities. These companies have formal CSR policies and publish their social reports annually. For data collection, we selected customers of all the five cellular companies because word of mouth behaviors like customer advocacy are more critical for service companies due to the elements of intangibility and non standardization (Smith & Bush, 2002). Total of number of customers of these five companies is approximately 134 million (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, 2016). However due to large size and wide spread nature of population we used convenient sampling (non-probability) to select respondents for our study. We distributed 350 questionnaires to customers of all cellular service providers, out of which 312 were received back and 302 questionnaires were usable for study making a response rate of 86%. Data was collected through self administered questionnaires from all customers who voluntarily participated. In this study, most of the respondents (65.2%) were males, 91.4% were 30 or less years of age, 72.8% were professionals working in different organizations and 27.8% were full time students.

Measures

All the measures were adopted from previous studies and original English language self reported questionnaire was used. Though English is not the native language of Pakistan but it is heavily used medium of instruction and communication in all universities and most private organizations of Pakistan (Raja, Johns, & Ntalianis, 2004), so there was no need to translate the questionnaire in native language. We recorded responses for all items on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree to 5 = strongly agree. The details of measures are as follows:

Corporate Social Responsibility. We used a four item scale from the study of Lai et al. (2010) to measure social responsibility of a company. Sample item is “my cellular company actively participates in social initiative”. The scale’s alpha was .72.

Customer Advocacy Behavior. We used four items to measure this construct from study of Walz and Celuch (2010). This scale was based on positive word of mouth scale (Verhoef, Franses, & Hoekstra, 2002) with addition of some items by Walz and Celuch. Sample item for this

scale is “I say positive things about my cellular connection provider to people I know”. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability was 0.82 for this scale.

Customer satisfaction. To measure this construct we adopted a three-item scale by Maxham and Netemeyer (2002). Sample item is “I am satisfied with the services the company provides to me”. This scale’s alpha reliability was .81.

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis

We used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to calculate the validity of constructs by following the guidelines of Gerbing and Anderson (1988). Validity of all the constructs was satisfactory because all the loadings were significant ($p < .001$) and above the suggested threshold level of .5 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The Cronbach’s alpha values were above the .7 (see table 1) benchmark of Nunnally (1978) indicating internal reliability of the measures used. Hence, validity and reliability of the scales is adequately ensured.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, bivariate correlations and alpha reliabilities of the variables. All correlation coefficients between study variables are in line to our hypothesized relationships. CSR is positively correlated with customer advocacy ($r = .44, p < 0.01$) and customer satisfaction ($r = .46, p < 0.01$). The correlation between customer satisfaction and customer advocacy is also significant and positive ($r = .68, p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities and Correlations

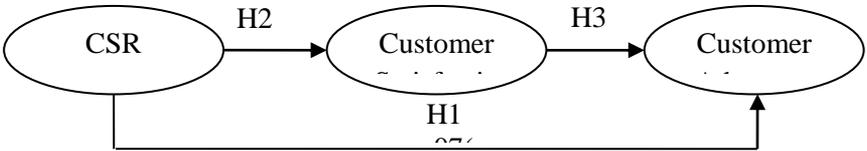
	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender	1.35	.48					
2. Age	25.32	4.48	-.17**				
3. CSR	3.13	.74	.02	.00	(.72)		
4. Customer satisfaction	3.71	.90	-.11	.08	.46**	(.81)	
5. Customer advocacy	3.37	.84	-.04	.02	.44**	.68**	(.82)

Note. N=302, ** $p < .01$, alpha values in parentheses

Structural equation model (SEM) and hypotheses testing

We used structural equation model to test the direct effect hypotheses (H1 to H3) of the study because SEM combines the aspects of factor analysis and multiple regression for the simultaneous estimation of series of paths (Hair et al., 2006). The results of model fit indices and beta values are shown in figure 2 below. All values of goodness of model fit criteria ($\chi^2 = 89.97, df = 41, \chi^2/df = 2.19, RMSEA = .06, GFI = .95, AGFI = .92, IFI = .96, CFI = .96$) are above the acceptable standards indicating that model fits the data well.

Based on the standardized path beta coefficients reported in figure 2, H1 of the study that CSR has a direct positive effect on customer advocacy behavior, was rejected ($\beta = .07, p > .05$). We found support for the H2 of the study ($\beta = .61, p < .001$) which confirmed that CSR has significant and positive direct effect on the satisfaction level of its customers. According to prediction, H3 of the study was also supported in our result ($\beta = .79, p < .001$), so we can conclude that customer satisfaction has positive direct effect on customer advocacy behavior.



F_1 N=302, *** $p < .001$, n.s.= not significant, $\chi^2 = 89.97, df = 41, \chi^2/df = 2.19$,

Mediating role of customer satisfaction

To test for mediating role of customer satisfaction between CSR and customer advocacy behavior, we used bootstrapping/replacement with resampling approach as suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004). This nonparametric approach is considered to be superior for testing of mediation as compared to competing approaches like Barron and Kenny (1986) procedure and Sobel test (Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

Using 1000 bootstrapped samples, with bias correction method we obtained 95% confidence interval (CI). If 95% CI for indirect effect does not include zero, mediation is determined (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Results of mediation analysis are presented in table 2 given below.

Table 2. *Mediating effects of customer satisfaction*

Path	Total effect	Direct effect ^a	Indirect effect ^b	95% CI ^c	
				Lower level	Upper level
CSR → CS → CAB	.55	.07	.48	.38	.62

CSR (Corporate social responsibility), CS (Customer satisfaction), CAB (Customer advocacy behavior)

^a CSR → CAB

^b (CSR → CS) × (CS → CAB)

^c Determined by bootstrapping with bias correction

It was found that direct effect (.07, n.s.) of CSR initiatives on customer advocacy behavior was not significant while total effect (.55, $p < .01$) and indirect effect through customer satisfaction (.48, $p < .01$, 95% CI=.38, .62) were significant. The standardized total (direct and indirect) effect of CSR on customer advocacy behavior is .55. That is,

due to both direct (unmediated) and indirect (mediated) effects of CSR on customer advocacy behavior, when CSR goes up by 1 standard deviation, customer advocacy behavior goes up by 0.55 standard deviations. This result showed that H4 of the study was accepted confirming the mediation of customer satisfaction in relationship between CSR and customer advocacy behavior.

Discussion

This study addresses a research gap by examining the direct and indirect effect of CSR on customer advocacy behavior through customer satisfaction. Using social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) for direct effect and expectation confirmation theory (Oliver, 1980) for indirect effect we tested our hypotheses. Results showed that corporate social responsibility initiatives of a company do not have direct effect on advocacy behavior of the customer. This result although rejects our first hypothesis but provides strength to our main assertion that CSR initiatives do not influence the advocacy behaviors of customers directly, rather through a psychological mechanism of customer satisfaction which will be further discussed later in this section. Thus, it can be inferred from the findings that customers do not feel an obligation to reciprocate in the form of advocacy behaviors in response to mere investments by the company in CSR initiatives.

Results confirmed that CSR initiatives have a significant influence on customer satisfaction which is in line with the previous findings of Luo and Bhattacharya (2006). When customers see that company is actively involved in CSR initiatives, they feel satisfaction with products and services of that company. As customer satisfaction is measured in terms of expectations (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982), so fulfilment of expectations by the companies in terms of social initiatives leads toward a positive attitude in the form of satisfaction.

The positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer advocacy behavior was also confirmed by the findings of our study which is in accordance with previous findings of Pandey et al., 2008 and Wangenheim and Bayón, 2007. This means that satisfied customers act as advocates of the products and services of the company because satisfaction is a positive attitude in the minds of customers which leads them to promote and defend the products and services of firms to their friends, family and relatives.

Finally, key contention of our study was that CSR initiatives of a company influence advocacy behaviors of its customers through mediating role of customer satisfaction. Based on results of bootstrapping method, support was found for this claim. These results show that customer satisfaction acts as a bridge linking the CSR activities of the company to brand through psychological mechanism i.e. cognitive, affective and behavioral response of the customers (Anderson, 1993). These results are also in line with the expectation confirmation theory and also important for companies in the sense that customers

expect the companies to be socially responsible, when companies behave in socially responsible manner customers' expectations are fulfilled generating a feeling of satisfaction which resultantly influences advocacy behavior of the customers.

Managerial implications

Our study has several important implications for managers in general and in Pakistan particular. Investments in CSR should be continued by the organizations as this is not only the “good thing” to do but “the right thing to do” (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Usage of CSR as a strategic tool is highly recommended to managers as it generates favorable customer outcomes for the organization. In addition, managers should design and implement CSR initiatives by keeping in view the expectations of customers of the country in which they are operating.

Market research through surveys and focus groups is a good way to know what customers expect from the company in the domain of CSR initiatives. It is extremely important to communicate CSR initiatives undertaken by the companies to customer as “consumers’ lack of awareness about CSR initiatives is a major limiting factor in their ability to respond to these initiatives” (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004, p. 23). Information regarding CSR activities of the company should be conveyed to customers via advertisements, product labels and through frontline employees.

Limitations and direction for future research

Though our study significantly contributes in the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on key constructs but it is not free from limitations. First, for this study, data was collected from customers of one sector only i.e. telecom service providers which limits the generalizability of results to other sectors. In future studies, diverse samples should also be included to generalize the findings. Second, data was cross sectional in nature and was collected through self report measures which can lead to the issue of common method variance (Schappe, 1998). Although, to combat this issue, we carried out confirmatory factor analysis to establish the validity of our constructs; it is strongly recommended for future studies to use longitudinal data and objective measures. In future, CSR-advocacy relationship should be tested with other mediators like customer-company identification, employee-company identification, consumer expectations, corporate or brand image, and trust. Also customer's awareness of CSR initiatives can be tested as moderator of the relationship between CSR initiatives of the company and different customer responses to these initiatives.

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