

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CONSUMERS?

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Abstract

The objective of this qualitative study is to explore consumers' perception of and means attached to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Semi-structured interview was utilised to obtain the data. Fourteen respondents were selected using the criterion and snowball techniques. In details, eight respondents represented average consumers, three respondents were representative of consumer interest groups and three respondents consisted of CSR practitioners in business organisations. This study found that consumers' perception of CSR were categorised into seven constructs and concluded that consumers have distinct knowledge of CSR, which are different from the definition of CSR viewed from firm perspective.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility (CSR), consumer-based CSR, qualitative

Introduction

Society's expectation on firms and its role in the society has changed in which firms are expected to do more than earn profit and generate growth. Consequently, businesses entities are placing great emphasis on the Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) and are engaging the CSR concept in their business operations. As such, CSR can be viewed as the calibrations of firm's roles in satisfying stakeholders' expectations about the responsibilities of firms in the society along the years (Carroll, 1999; Dahlsrud, 2008).

CSR has always been viewed from the firm's perspective even though few studies (e.g. Gupta, 2011; Siltaoja, 2006) indicated that different stakeholders hold different perspectives and expectations towards social responsibilities of the firms. This is especially important for consumers who hold contradictory interest to that of the business organisation so as not to impose firm's view on CSR to that of the consumers.

In addition, in the Malaysian context, CSR is at the embryonic stage that many consumers aware about CSR through philanthropic and public relations activities conducted by the firms (Lu & Castka, 2009). Interestingly, there is recent evidence that some consumers' expectation go beyond giving donations and helping the underprivileged and that their backgrounds influence such assessment. Specifically, Yam and McGreal (2010) found that Malaysia house

