The Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Relationship

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine the effect of the dimensions of perceived corporate social responsibility (PCSR) named social, economic and environmental responsibility on brand relationship (BR). In order to achieve the study goal, a model was developed to test the effect relationship between study variables based on data which were collected from 400 banks customers in Damietta governorate. That is through online questionnaire which is designed via Google drive. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was adopted via Path analysis which was employed to test the study hypotheses using Warp PLS 7.

The study results indicated that there were direct positive significant effects of perceived corporate social responsibility (social, economic and environmental dimensions) on brand relationship. In light of the study results and in view of the great importance of the relationship between the customer and the brand, set of recommendations and future research are proposed to participate in building successful, strong and long lasting relationships with customers.

Keywords: Perceived corporate social responsibility, brand relationship.

1. Introduction:

Marketing build on interchange is not only seen as a transactional process but also based on a relationship building (Cayolla et al., 2020). Customer- brand relationship is considered critical topic, especially when customers see brands like persons who can deal with, interact, connect, talk and build strong relationships (Kaufmann et al., 2019). Because it can affect positively or negatively brand attitudes, brand assessment, purchase and repurchase intensions, brand loyalty as well as word of mouth (WOM) (Ahn and Back, 2018). So, marketing managers should search for incentives and tools help them in building and improving customer- brand relationship. Where, Kim et al. (2015) mentioned that brands adopting corporate social responsibility engagement strategy can succeed in building strong and long-lasting relationship with customers.

By reviewing literature review, Lo (2020) has examined the relationship between corporate social responsibility engagement and brand relationship quality. Xie and Beng (2010) investigated the effect of two kind of publicity (social relationship related publicity and ability related publicity) on customer brand relationship strength. However, no previous studies have examined the relationship between corporate social responsibility dimensions and brand relationship from interpersonal perspective. By revealing the influence of corporate social responsibility on building customer- brand relationship from social psychology perspective which the existing models and empirical studies tend to ignore (Romani et al., 2016). Therefore, this study contributes to fill the research gap in corporate social responsibility literature. So, the research question is what are the direct effects of PCSR dimensions on brand relationship in banking sector?

To answer above question, the research objective concerns with examining the effect of perceived corporate social responsibility dimensions (social, economic and environmental) on brand relationship.

2. Literature and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

There are myriads of definitions of CSR (Olanipekun,2019), and it is difficult to reach a widely agreed definition (Jamali et al., 2019). CSR is recently defined as "an organization's context-specific actions and policies that aim to enhance the welfare of stakeholders by accounting for the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental performance" (El akremi et al., 2018, p. 623). Ait Sidhoum and Serra (2018) stated that CSR means making a balance between economic (profit) social (people) and environmental (plant) responsibilities through

achieving business goals. Furthermore, Aramburu- Pescador (2019) mentioned that CSR shapes the TBL of corporations that extent to include social, economic and environmental issues. The study adopted the three dimensions of CSR: social, economic and environmental dimensions. Those dimensions are compatible with TBL and three main types of sustainability.

2.2. Brand Relationship (BR)

Brand relationship (BR) is a term existed in different fields with different dimension based on variety of concepts, theories and different attachment styles (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014). That is why BR research is convoluted (Fetscherin et al., 2014). There is no obvious definition of BR in the field of marketing research (Veloutsou, 2007). Schultz and Schultz (2004) described BR as "some sort of bond (Financial/physical or emotional) that brings the brand seller and buyer together".

The dimensionality issue of BR is still under debates and there is no universal approval about BR dimensions (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015). Veloutsou was the first to describe BR as a pure relationship between two persons. He developed two dimensions of BR two-way communication (TWC) and emotional exchange (EEX), whereas social psychology pointed out that communication is a significant part of any relationship between two parties or more (Veloutsou and Moutttinho, 2009). Moreover, emotions exist in all sorts of social relationships (Kumar et al., 2019). According to Levy (1959) customers' actions are not controlled by the product features but also the emotions and intimacy that exist between the consumer and brand (Mingione et al., 2020). So, the study depended in the two dimensions of TWC and EEX.

2.3. Hypotheses Formulation

The relationships between study variables were clarified as shown in the following fig. (1).

The Relationship Between PCSR and BR

Pai et al. (2015) stated that companies must exert all the efforts to keep a robust long-lasting customer-brand relationship and sometimes CSR initiatives are used as a stimulant to boost this relationship (BR). In other words, when the corporation participates in CSR actions it is a sign to its customers or even the whole stakeholders that it dispenses some of its valued resources for the purpose of customers welfare. This can generate such a strong and long-lasting relationship with customers (Shahzad et al., 2016) when CSR strategy and policy are built on customers collaboration and empowerment (Heidinger, 2012). Moreover, brand CSR actions can provide a level of safety and confidence which enables customers to have a close relationship with the brand (Abbas et al., 2018).

There are some limited empirical studies that set a correlation between CSR and BR. The study of Lo (2020) has examined the relationship between CSR engagement and brand relationship quality (BRQ) in the tourism field. The survey has targeted the customers of two resort hotels in Asia. It has been proved that CSR engagement positively affects BRQ with hotel brands in accordance with the study of Lacy et al. (2015). Another study of Xie and Beng (2010) investigated the effect of two kind of publicity (social relationship related publicity and ability related publicity) on customer brand relationship strength. The study affirmed that both positive / negative social responsibility related publicity affects positively / negatively the BR strength. The findings of this study are based on collected samples from the customers of National Basketball Association team franchise in Southeastern region of the United States.

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By considering two- way communication is a component of BR, Kirat (2015) pointed out how the exchangeable communication strategy is important for brand-customer relationship through CSR. CSR practices can set a connection between the company and customers through owning communication channels e.g., advertising, public relation or corporate website. Firms can gain a prosperous customer -brand relationship through adopting the two-way CSR communication strategy which is based on the customers involvement and integration (Heidinger, 2012).

According to the emotional side in BR, Romani et al. (2016) mentioned that it's important to focus on the emotional trend in the correlation between customers and practiced CSR brands. Moreover, Perez and del Bosque (2015) stated that socially responsible brands increase the overall status of positive feeling in customers where customers became emotionally attached to socially responsible brands for what it generates of intimate sensation (Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Abbas et al., 2018). Some research papers have focused on the emotional aspect in CSR such (Baena, 2018; Castro-Gonzalez et al., 2019). The study of Baena (2018) proved the positive relationship between CSR and brand love. As well, Castro-Gonzalez et al. (2019) confirmed the positive link between CSR and customer admiration.

Based on the previous discussion and empirical studies, this study suggests the following hypothesis:

H1: PCSR has a significant direct positive effect on brand relationship.

This hypothesis is sub-divided into three sub- hypotheses:

H1.a: Perceived Social responsibility has a significant direct positive effect on brand relationship.

H1.b: Perceived Economic responsibility has a significant direct positive effect on brand relationship.

H1.c: Perceived Environmental responsibility has a significant direct positive effect on brand relationship.

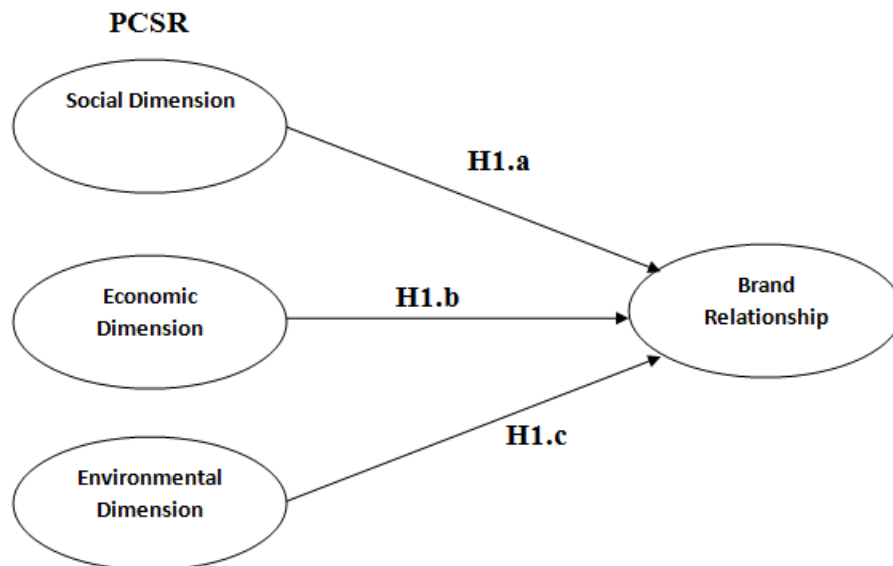Finally, figure (1) shows the conceptual framework of this study.

Figure (1): Theoretical framework and hypotheses.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Samples and Data Collection

The study adopted post-positivism philosophy with a quantitative research method to confirm the proposed framework. It also employed an online questionnaire to collect data from banks customers in Damietta governorate from February 2020 to July 2020. The applied sampling technique in this study was convenient sampling method. The sample size was determined based on a table of sample sizes for different sizes of population at 95 confidence level and 5% margin of error (Saunders et al., 2009). Since the customers of the commercial banks in Damietta governorate are not easily identified or counted, the population size was assumed to be 100 000 customers depending on the expectation of employees and managers of commercial banks in Damietta.

Hence, the sample size was 384 customers. Four hundred online questionnaires were collected; 398 were valid and usable. Gender classification of the respondents was 41.5% (165) males whereas 58.5% (233) were females. As for age categorization, 2% (8) customers were aged from 21 to less than 30, 31.4% (125) customers were aged 30 to less than 40, and 27.1% (108) customers were aged 40 or over. The Educational level of the customers was 11.8% (47) undergraduate,59.5% (237) highly educated and28.6% (114) post-graduates. There were 398 customers, 69.8% (278) of them were customers of governmental banks and 30.2% (120) were customers of private banks.

3.2. Measures

Measurement items were approved according to different scales of previous studies to ensure content validity. The scale items were modified to be convenient for the Egyptian dialect and to make the questionnaire understandable. Moreover, some modifications were done to be consistent with the banking sector. For measuring the variables, a five-point Likert Scale was used ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The independent variable of study was PCSR which is divided into three dimensions: social is measured by 12 items, developed by Maignan (2001) and Alvarado (2008) and used by Aramburu and Pescador (2019). 8 Items are adopted to cover the economic, they are developed by Alvarado (2008) and adopted by Aramburu and Pescador (2019). The environmental dimension encompasses 7 items which are developed by Alvarado (2008) and employed by Aramburu and Pescador (2019). Customers specified how each statement about CSR fit their bank.

The dependent variable was BR which was operationalized using two dimensions; TWC and EEX. It was measured by Veloutsou (2007) and used by Kumar and Kaushik (2020). Six items were followed as indicators of the two-way communication and seven items were adopted as indicators of emotional exchange. Consistent with previous studies (Deng and Xu, 2017; Tian et al., 2011; Castro-Gonzalez et al., 2019), the demographic variables of the study cover respondents' gender, age and academic qualification. The bank type that consumers are dealing with is added to control variables to be four items totally.

4. Analysis and findings

Structure equation modeling with Warp PLS 7.0 program was used to examine the hypothesized causal relationships. In structure equation modeling, warp PLS analysis is divided into major parts, namely measurement model (outer model) and structural model (inner model).

4.1. Measurement Model

Indicators were used in testing the measurement model (Hair et al., 2017). Hence, the model describes the relationship between latent variables and their measures, where indicators quality is assessed by considering item factor loadings, internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity.

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Table (1)

Confirmatory factor analysis (PLS approach)

	Constructs, dimensions, and indicators	Mean/ Statistic	Std. Deviation / Statistic	Loading	α	CR	AVE
	PCSR						
SOC	csr1	4.523	0.657	0.600	0.874	0.903	0.575
	csr2	4.372	0.82	0.795			
	csr3	4.407	0.812	0.845			
	csr4	3.997	0.982	0.796			
	csr5	4.399	0.75	0.698			
	csr6	3.987	0.924	0.758			
	csr7	4.221	0.769	0.786			
ECO	csr13	4.754	0.476	0.659	0.841	0.884	0.561
	csr15	4.590	0.568	0.790			

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	csr16	4.608	0.556	0.799			
	csr17	4.588	0.564	0.818			
	csr18	4.239	0.748	0.630			
	csr20	4.455	0.6	0.776			
ENV	**csr21**	4.07	0.889	0.735			
	csr22	4.59	0.615	0.657			
	csr23	4.274	0.763	0.808	0.863	0.895	0.551
	csr24	4.065	0.92	0.834			
	csr25	3.824	0.93	0.750			
	csr26	4.342	0.777	0.662			
	csr27	4.276	0.767	0.733			
BR							
TWC	**BR28**	4.296	0.75	0.781			
	BR29	4.146	0.79	0.782			
	BR30	4.093	0.793	0.851	0.849	0.893	0.625
	BR32	3.987	0.792	0.783			
	BR33	4.204	0.788	0.753			
EEX	**BR34**	4.033	0.85	0.806			
	BR35	4.033	0.856	0.756			
	BR36	3.91	0.826	0.826			
	BR37	4.008	0.82	0.872	0.922	0.938	0.683
	BR38	3.854	0.845	0.852			
	BR39	3.96	0.78	0.848			
	BR40	3.995	0.751	0.820			

All of the variables are reflectively measured just as first order factors. As shown in Table (1), the factor loading for the items were greater than 0.5 and indicators lower than 0.5 were omitted (Kock, 2014). Moreover, the values of both Cronbach's alpha (**α**) and the composite reliability (CR) for each of the variables exceeded the suggested threshold of 0.70, indicating that the measurement items were reliable (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, average variance extracted (AVE) is a popular criterion to assess convergent validity where the proposed threshold value of (AVE) should be at least (0.50) (Fornell and Lacker, 1981). Table (1) reveals that all variables achieved the convergent validity criteria.

Table (2)
Correlations among variables with sq. rts. of AVEs

	SOC	ECO	ENV	TWC	EEX
SOC	(0.758)	0.423	0.650	0.415	0.264
ECO	0.423	(0.749)	0.548	0.439	0.367
ENV	0.650	0.548	(0.742)	0.612	0.415
TWC	0.415	0.439	0.612	(0.791)	0.587
EEX	0.264	0.367	0.415	0.587	(0.843)

Highlighted values show the square roots of AVE.

For checking the discriminant validity, table (2) shows that the extracted variance is greater than the squared correlation (Kock &Verville, 2012). So, all the measures included in this study were valid and reliable.

4.2. Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

Table (3) presents the results related to the study hypotheses. Effect sizes (f2) were used to determine to what extent the independent variables affect the dependent variable. It can be measured by effect size values (f^2) where it can be (0.02, 0.15, and 0.35) representing (weak, moderate, strong) respectively. Path coefficients ought to be significant. It is measured by P- value. It could be significant when P value ≤ 0.05 (Huber et al., 2008).

Table (3)
Path Analysis

	Independent variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coeff.	P-value	Effect Size	Result
H1	Social	BR	0.112	0.012	0.038	Accepted
H2	Economic	BR	0.247	<0.001	0.097	Accepted
H3	Environmental	BR	0.247	<0.001	0.104	Accepted

As expected, the results showed that hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 were supported in that social, economic and environmental responsibility were significantly and positively associated with brand relationship (**β**= 0.112, p = 0.012 with $(f^2) = 0.038$;**β**= 0.247, p < 0.001 with $(f^2) = 0.097$ and **β**=0.247, p < 0.001 with $(f^2) = 0.104$ respectively). The coefficients of determination (R2) values for brand relationship was (R2 = 0.238). It means that 24% of the change in BR is due to the social, economic and environmental dimensions of CSR, whereas76% residual is due to other determinants which are not included in the model.

5.Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the direct association between PCSR dimensions and brand relationship. The study results revealed that PCSR is significantly and positively related to brand relationship (H1). This result stressed the idea that CSR with different activities whether social, economic or environmental supports the corporation in building a good relationship with the new customers, improving the relationship with current customers and enhancing the customers attitude towards the corporation (Lacey et al., 2015). The study results are in consistence with (Lo, 2020) and (Lacey et al., 2015).

More specifically, the study results explored that social responsibility has a significant positive effect on brand relationship (H1.a). By considering that any relationship is based on mutual benefits. It is expected to have a positive feedback from the customers when they notice the company is supporting and helping the society. Customers are encouraged to build a relationship with the company when they touch the value added to the community, when they see respect for human rights and the fair treatment of employees. This result is compatible with (Uhlig et al., 2020).

In addition, the study results showed that economic responsibility affects positively and significantly brand relationship (H1.b). The result implied that when the company makes high profits, it would affect positively the quality of services or products produced by the company. It also may motivate to adopt the latest technology; hence the company economic performance would be affected positively and would also affect the overall economic growth of the community. In addition, a company with high profits and economic performance encourages customers to invest in this company and this would be beneficial in having a successful customer-brand relationship.

Finally, the study confirmed that environmental responsibility has a significant and positive impact on brand relationship (H1.c). This means that consumers appreciate all activities done by the company that are related to environment protection like recycling its wastes, sponsoring green projects, participating in activities to reduce the pollution. In other words, participating in environmental activities can give the consumers good impression about the brand which can play a motivator to increase consumers- brand relationship intention. The study result is in the line with (Han et al., 2019).

5.1. Theoretical and practical implications

This study proposes that there is a significant positive direct effect of perceived corporate social responsibility on brand relationship. This suggestion contributes to the customer-brand relationship research by determining the extent to which customers are motivated to build a relationship with the brand when their brands act in socially responsible way. Furthermore, previous research on brand relationship explained it as trust toward, satisfaction from, commitment to the brand or even brand attachment and all are antecedents to or consequences of the relationship itself (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Resulting to this, little is examined the brand relationship from interpersonal perspective. In addition, there is no any study test the effect of PCSR with three dimensions of social, economic and environmental CSR on the brand relationship from the interpersonal perspective. That is why this study contributes to the literatures of customer- brand relationship and corporate social responsibility.

On the other hand, there are some practical implication directed to banks managers. Firstly, managers should concentrate on CSR practices to build a level of confidence and trust with customers and to save banks from negative feedback and rumors. Secondly, due to the competitive environment of bank markets, banks mangers should adapt to the rapid changes and exploit them as a kind of CSR practices. For example, Egyptian banks had a significant role in dealing with the crisis of COVID-19 (Corona Virus Pandemic). Thirdly, managers should concentrate on the importance of communication and adopting successful CSR activities that would lead to strong relationship with customers.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

The current study used a sample from Damietta governorate. Therefore, future studies can be applied to other cities in Egypt. Furthermore, the study used a sample from the bank's customers in Egypt. Since Egypt is a developing country, it is preferable to focus on developed countries in the futuristic research work. It is recommended to compare the futuristic results with the current study results so as to make significant contribution.

In addition, the current study is cross-sectional study which can compare different responses at a single point in time. Thus, further studies may benefit from longitudinal study to address methodological limitations. Moreover, future studies may use employees instead of customers as a sampling unit to investigate how CSR toward employees affect their relationship with the company they work. Finally, we suggest that Perceived CSR (social, economic and environmental activities) by customers could affect brand attachment and brand evangelism.

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