

CSR and Responsible Marketing Concepts—An Integrative Framework

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Abstract

The requirement of sustainable development in the performance of for-profit organizations is a frequently discussed topic. The responsibility of business is referred by several denominations in the literature, but in several works giving an overview of the field, all these are considered as approaches to the CSR (corporate social responsibility) concept. However, these studies are not 'compatible' with each other: the present paper discusses their synchronisation and defines the three levels of CSR approach. At the same time, the history and goals of responsible marketing concepts (e.g. societal marketing concept and green marketing as the main ones) are analysed, and the features of the corresponding three levels of marketing approach are defined and discussed. This helps to show the translation of theory into practice: the realization of strategic business goals by marketing tools.

Introduction

Europe needs business to do what it does best: to provide products and services that add value for society and to deploy entrepreneurial spirit and creativity towards value and employment creation. However (...) does not need just business but socially responsible business that takes its share of responsibility for the state of European affairs (EU 2006, 3).

The theoretical framework of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is thus defined. The practical implication, however, is not as clear as the theoretical background. The general aim of the current paper is to enhance CSR success by revealing the common points of already existing theories and practices concerning business strategy and marketing management activity.

Sustainable development and business strategy

Corporate social responsibility, or CSR, is used in the present work to refer to the wide environmental and social responsibility of businesses in sustainable development. CSR approaches, however, are enormously varied in their scope. The concept was introduced in the USA; the first modern understanding of the CSR concept is considered to be Bowen's work in 1953 (Carroll 1999). Afterwards, several terms with various focuses arose referring to the responsibility of the business sector in achieving sustainability. Nevertheless, neither the limits of the concepts are not widely accepted, nor the use of terms is consistent in the literature.

At the same time, the use of a generally accepted CSR concept is spreading, based on the activity of the European Union. The Commission of the European Communities published a Green Paper in 2001 (EU 2001) and a Communication on CSR in 2002 and in 2006 (EU 2002; 2006), referring to the environmental and social responsibility of businesses. The present work uses the CSR definition of the European Commission (EU 2001), which was considered to be widely accepted and was affirmed by the European Multi-Stakeholder Forum on CSR (EMF 2004). Accordingly,

{CSR is} a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis (EU 2001, 6).

On the one hand, the definition explicitly contains the environmental as well as social requirements of sustainable development, and on the other hand, it emphasizes the voluntariness of corporations in this activity. However, different approaches reflect different scopes of CSR. The overview of the development of the CSR concept marks these differences and the evolution of corporate motivation.

The literature defines three levels of CSR understanding (e.g. Kovács 2000; Lantos 2001; Matten & Crane 2005). These three levels were first introduced in a publication in New York as early as in 1971 (CED), represented by three concentric circles. The inner circle represents the economic efficiency and the intermediate circle encompasses the business sensibility to changing social values and priorities (protection of the

natural environment, rights and health of employees, etc.). The outer circle refers to a wide range of corporate responsibilities forming at that time, and to the active roles of corporations in the development of society (Carroll 1999, 275).

The boundaries of these three levels, however, are not always clear or consistent in the various studies. Moreover, the terms referring to the different approaches seem unclear and mixed. For example, Sethi (1975) uses the term 'Corporate Social Performance' instead of CSR, and calls the middle level 'social responsibility'. At the same time, Matten and Crane (2005) propose the term 'Corporate Citizenship' instead of CSR. Sometimes even the same name is used for different levels in different studies, thus further complicating the situation (e.g. Kovács 2000; Lantos 2001).

Nevertheless, three more or less equivalent levels in these studies can be differentiated based on common features (see Table 1).

Table 1. The three levels of CSR approach

	Levels of CSR		
	Lower level	Intermediate level	Upper level
Main features	Repair and avoid the direct effects of corporate operation in a cost-effective way	Handle the direct and indirect effects of corporate operation	Commitment, corporation is the active and responsible member of the society
Motivation	Direct economic interest	Indirect economic interest, stakeholders, legitimating corporate operation	Ethics, economic benefits are considered as by-product
Focus	Profit	Long term profit	Long term corporate competitiveness
Time period	Short term (2–5 years)	Middle term (10–20 years)	Long term (20–30 years)
Concepts	Concept of costs and benefits	Stakeholder concept Social contract theory	Corporate citizenship concept

	Levels of CSR		
	Lower level	Intermediate level	Upper level
Terms used:			
Sethi (1975)	Social obligation	Social responsibility	Social responsiveness
Kovács (2000)	Strategic	Social / transitional	Ethical / value-based
Lantos (2001)	Ethical	Strategic	Altruistic
Matten & Crane (2005)	Limited view	Equivalent view	Extended view

Source: own research

Lower level (CSR1)

The narrow understanding of CSR (lower level) is represented by the opinion that 'sometimes actions need to be taken because they are right, not because they are profitable' (Chewning et al. 1990*; Goodpaster 1996*; Miller and Ahrens 1993* cit. in Lantos 2001, 606). Its theoretical base is well represented by Friedman's famous objection concerning corporate social responsibility in 1962:

(...) few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible (133).

As this statement shows, the responsibility of corporations in this approach is concerned solely with economic interests. Profit maximization must be the first and foremost goal of all firms. The handling of stakeholders' interests is very limited: i.e. only in situations that have a direct effect on corporate stock and finance, and only the interests of close stakeholders directly affecting corporate success (e.g. owners, consumers and government). The aim is clear: decreasing the risk of short-term loss (e.g. loss of consumers due to bad corporate image, avoid penalty, etc.).

Intermediate level (CSR2)

The questions concerning the ethics of business came more to the fore in the 1960s. In these years, the exploitation of employees, the existence and production of unsafe products, the destruction of the natural environment, international corruption, etc. were revealed and widely communicated in the United States, resulting in a general negative image of the business sector. Consequently, the importance of the non-economic factors was emphasized in society. Thus, the approach of the intermediate level of CSR started to develop, which was outlined by Henry Ford II in 1969 as follows:

The terms of the contract between industry and society are changing (...) Now we are being asked to serve a wider range of human values and to accept an obligation to members of the public with whom we have no commercial transactions (Chewing et al. 1990* cit. in Lantos 2001, 598).

The representatives of this approach are Bowen (1953) (considered as the founder of the modern understanding of CSR) and his followers (e.g. Bauer 1972; Davis 1960; Frederick 1960; Frederick & James 1977). Typically, they distinguish their approach from Friedman's narrow CSR understanding by exceeding it. However, the intermediate CSR level still remains within the old business framework, being based primarily on economic considerations. At the same time, it goes beyond legislative obligation, and the importance and necessity of considering the interests of stakeholders is emphasized in order to achieve long-term economic success (e.g. Davis 1960, 70–71). Correspondingly, a wider view of social effects of business is characteristic, together with a wider view of stakeholder groups. Beyond business partners and consumers, it also emphasizes the interests of employees, the natural environment, and, in some cases, the people living in the neighbourhood. The basic motivation of corporations is to acquire, manage and consolidate the legitimacy of corporate operation.

Upper level (CSR3)

The motivating factor of the wide understanding of CSR (the upper level), in contrast to the lower and intermediate levels, is the ethical

commitment of the business. In this view, corporations, based on their citizenship-like situation, have similar obligations to those of other members of society. Consequently, several authors (e.g. Falk 2000; Matten & Crane 2005) refer to this level as corporate citizenship—differentiating it from the previous levels and accentuating the difference in the motivation. Another important feature is its voluntary character, which was introduced in the literature during the early 1970s (Manne & Wallich 1972* cit. in Carroll 1999, 276).

Based on this extended view, business shares the tasks and obligations of society (and the government) in order to achieve long-term coexistence with it. The financial advantages are considered as secondary by-products of CSR actions; long-term business operation is emphasized. The stakeholder view is the widest at this level, considering the interests of the local community, the country, and usually extending to international responsibility.

At this point, the effects of the globalization process must be mentioned, as its consequence is the extension of business operation beyond the geographical, political and legislative borders of individual countries. The traditional regulations of governments are impossible to use at the international level, which emphasizes the importance of business self-regulation. Thus, e.g. the starting point of Matten and Crane's work (2005) is the concept of liberal citizenship when discussing the extended view of corporate citizenship (in our work: the upper level of CSR).

Integrative concepts

The most widely cited concept concerning the social responsibility of business is Carroll's CSR model (1979), which defines four types of responsibilities: economic responsibility to make profit; legal responsibility to conform to laws; ethical responsibility to do what is right and fair; and philanthropic responsibility to contribute to the welfare of society. The CSR levels discussed above are thus implicit in this concept. However, another study contains these levels and their features more explicitly.

Novak (1996) distinguishes seven internal and seven external responsibilities of corporations. The internal responsibilities are related to

the economic performance of the company and to profit maximization (equivalent to the lower level of CSR). These are:

- (1) to satisfy consumer wants with products and services of real value
- (2) to produce reasonable profit for shareholders
- (3) to create new wealth for the operation of the non-profit sector
- (4) to create jobs
- (5) to provide for the continuous development of employees (career and salary)
- (6) to promote innovations
- (7) to diversify economic interests.

However, the seven external responsibilities are not related to business itself, but to interests of people involved in the business processes, its 'practitioners'. The seven external responsibilities are:

- (1) to establish a community within corporations and to respect the dignity of persons
- (2) to protect liberty
- (3) to exemplify the respect of law
- (4) to enhance social justice
- (5) to ensure intensive communication with investors, shareholders, pensioners, customers, and employees
- (6) to contribute to the development of the local society
- (7) to protect the moral base of liberty.

Thus, Novak's concept completes the financial interests of corporations with responsibilities motivated by ethics. Consequently, it corresponds to the third level of CSR approach, explicitly containing the responsibilities of the lower and intermediate levels.

Sustainable development and marketing

The most well-known marketing concept related to sustainable development is green marketing, corresponding to the environmental orientation in the 1990s. However, different initiatives can be found in the history of marketing science, referring to the wide social responsibility of marketers. In this sense, the discussion of both environmental and social issues is present in the marketing literature. These responsible marketing concepts are neither explicit nor systemized from the perspective of the sustainability concept, although some works present overviews of the field. The goal of this section is to systemize socially responsible marketing tendencies chronologically, based on the guidelines given by the three levels of approach explored in CSR.

1960s and 1970s: Ethical base

The discussion of ethical issues in the USA in the 1960s had an effect on the science of marketing as well. Kotler (1972) reveals two main groups of studies concerning the relationship of marketing management and society from an ethical point of view. Kotler and Levy (1969) propose to adapt and use marketing tools in non-profit organizations, which is the root of non-business marketing. The term they use is 'social marketing'. Additionally, Kotler introduces the 'societal marketing concept' in his work in 1972 for the discussion of the ethical responsibility of marketing activities of for-profit organizations. This is the first systematic appearance of social responsibility of for-profit businesses in the marketing literature, which is based on the scientific works of the previous decade.

The main goal of the societal marketing concept is to achieve corporate success by balancing customers' short-term personal needs and society's long-term interests (Kotler 1972, 54). From the moral side, this is a shift from psychological egoism towards ethical egoism (Crane & Desmond, 2002). However, the competence of defining the long-term interests of society and the general welfare is often discussed by the critics of the societal marketing concept. According to Crane and Desmond (2002, 559–561), the long-term interests of society are in practice defined by:

- (1) marketing managers themselves (the business) based on their own opinion
- (2) business, based on social concerns of consumers
- (3) the ‘hidden hand’ of the market: consumers through their purchase decisions
- (4) the Government through regulations
- (5) pressure groups (mainly NGOs and the media).

At the same time, Winsor (1999) revealed contradictions in the societal marketing concept, on a theoretical basis. The starting point is Kotler's work of 1977* (cit. in Winsor 1999), in which the author adapts McGregor's managerial Theory X concept to the description of consumers. Accordingly, the consumers in the societal marketing concept (corresponding to Theory Y) are well informed, intelligent, motivated, unique, and rational. By contrast, consumers according to Theory X are lazy, ignorant, gullible, suspicious, and disloyal.

According to Winsor's explanation (1999, 7), the societal marketing concept is rooted in Theory X: it focuses on unexpressed needs rather than over-expressed wants. This corresponds to the statement in Bell and Emory's work, which states ‘*it is the duty of business to promote proper consumption values*’ (1971, 40, emphasis added). This is in complete contradiction to the concept as, according to Winsor's (1999) explanation, the selling orientation (Theory X approach) is conflicting with the basic Theory Y approach of consumers in the societal marketing concept. While we consider consumers to be intelligent and rational (according to Theory Y) we guide them and help them as if they were X consumers.

Nevertheless, the adaptation of McGregor's Theory X concept described by Winsor (1999) is easy to synthesize with the practices described by Crane and Desmond (2002). Theory X corresponds to situations when marketing managers themselves define the long-term interests of society based on their own opinions. Theory Y is described by the ‘hidden hand’ of the market, when consumers define the welfare of society through their purchase decisions—as they are informed and rational enough to do so. According to their distances from these two endpoints, the intermediate

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situations between Theory X and Theory Y can be expressed based on how the interests of societies are defined. These are, in order from Theory X to Theory Y, the following: by governments through regulations; by businesses based on social concerns of consumers; and by the pressure exerted by different groups, such as NGOs and the media.

The societal marketing concept introduced and discussed during the 1960s and 1970s, however, remained isolated and overlooked. Only few studies deal with the issue, and these are mainly concerned with highly involved industries such as tobacco, alcohol, etc. (see e.g. Abratt & Sacks 1989). After a break of almost a decade, the responsibility of marketing was brought forth again, but with a new basis.

1990s: Environmentalism

As mentioned above, the societal marketing concept of the 1960s and 1970s was based on ethics. However, it did not become widely adopted in marketing practice. A reinforcement of this marketing approach can be observed after the publication of the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development titled *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987), which defines the concept of sustainable development. The motivation in marketing has, however, changed: the wide ethical base is altered by environmental motivation.

This is not a special feature of marketing science, as Borghesi and Vercelli state, despite the original definition of sustainable development in which

inequality and environmental deterioration are conceived as equally important and interdependent conditions of sustainability ... [later] ... the focus concentrated on the environmental condition as if it were fully independent of the social condition of sustainability (2003, 78).

Accordingly, this symptom can also be observed in the marketing literature: the concept called green marketing (in USA) and environmental marketing (in Europe) started to spread. Later on, different terms arose in order to differentiate the diverse approaches of environmental responsibility of

business and marketing. The most important terms are 'greener marketing', 'enlightened marketing', 'ethical marketing', 'cause-related marketing', and 'sustainable marketing' (Crane 2000; Crane & Desmond 2002). All of these are mainly concerned with environmental issues, and social issues are rarely mentioned apart from environmental requirements (such as e.g. in cause-related marketing). Green and environmental marketing are used as synonyms in the present paper, referring to the marketing activity considering the interests of the natural environment.

While the societal marketing concept was formed on a theoretical basis, the direct effects of market pull played an important role in the formation of green marketing. Elkington and Hailes's celebrated book, the *Green Consumer Guide* (1988), had an essential role in creating green market demand. Demand for green products emerged as a consequence of environmentalism spreading in the early 1990s. More than this, the willingness of some consumer segments to pay an extra fee for green product features was detected (Ottman 1993; Peattie & Crane 2005, 358). The segmentation of consumers based on their environmental consciousness was drafted in Elkington and Hailes's book mentioned above and the first comprehensive empirical study of the Roper Organization was performed in 1992 (Ottman 1993, 30). These segments are still relevant today; consequently, the study has been updated several times (see e.g. RoperASW 2002). Five consumer segments are formed based on environmental consciousness, measured by the extent of willingness to pay and spend time for environmental issues.

However, the growth of the green market started to decrease towards the middle of the 1990s, except in some industries such as food, tourism, and financial services (Peattie & Crane 2005). This phenomenon has been explained in the literature (e.g. Crane 2000; Kilbourne & Beckman 1998) by the excessive focus on meeting green demands, while neglecting the revaluation of the social and moral basis of marketing activities. Consequently, green marketing cannot be considered as the direct successor of Kotler's societal marketing concept. The reason is partly that green marketing does not target the reconstruction of the moral base of marketing theory, and partly that there is no shift in focus from satisfaction of individual consumer wants towards the satisfaction of society's long-term interests (Crane & Desmond 2002, 552).

Decline of environmentalism

By the end of the 1990s, green marketing had lost its importance, and green market growth underperformed earlier expectations. Peattie and Crane (2005, 360–364) investigated the reasons and determined five routes leading to the failure of green marketing concepts.

Green spinning is typical of the most criticized, ‘dirty’ industries, such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals, automotives, and oil. In order to maintain legitimacy for operation, these firms (over)communicated their environmental commitment and performance. Thus, green marketing activity concentrated on public relations and publicity and less effort was put on the products and product development. The formerly used and time-tested marketing tools stayed in use instead of starting an innovation process.

Green selling means a focus on the fast-developing green demands on the market, typically during the early 1990s. The goal is the post-hoc identification of environmental features of an already existing product. This is used to (re)position of the product in order to achieve (short-term) extra-profit. However, it has almost no effect on product development, as the investigation of the green features that customers demand was used solely for differentiation. The communication of exaggerated environmental performance of products, and even greenwashing (when false information is given for achieving a green image), not only resulted in an image loss of the product and / or the company, but also led to a general decline in consumers’ environmentalism and to increased scepticism. The goal of standardized environmental labelling is to increase customer confidence by means of authentic information. The plethora of these labels, however, is a barrier in the process, as consumers are confused by the variety of information available. The three categories of environmental labels defined by the ISO standards (ISO 14020) and the aims of the European Union indicate the endeavours in this direction.

Green harvesting has a more integrated view: it considers the positive economic effects of environmental performance. However, the goal is still to achieve short-term profit by enhancing efficiency of energy use, reducing the amount of packaging and the use of raw material, rationalizing logistics, etc. The product, which thus actually costs less, is usually priced at a premium, which is rarely caused by the internalization of external costs.

Consequently, this niche marketing makes significant contributions to the consumer view of green products being more expensive and leads to notable barriers in market penetration of green products. These concerns have been further increased by news on doubtful environmental performance of these products. Moreover, after exploiting the 'low hanging fruits' (improvement of environmental performance resulting in cost reduction), there is a need for significant innovation. Companies usually stopped the process at this point due to the inherent risks and the increased demand for time and stock.

The goal of corporations with *enviropreneur marketing* is to develop green product alternatives and to introduce them into the market based on customer wants. However, the lack of proper market investigation has been revealed. The consumers' attitudes and opinions have been highlighted in general and not in a product-specific context. Characteristically, the answers show the behaviour society is looking for rather than the consumers' concrete actions. The missing intention of customer development (by providing information, training, communication, etc.) deepens this product orientation.

The starting point of *compliance marketing* is not coming from customers, but from the legislative framework. The aim is to exert minimal effort in achieving compliance with present and future environmental legislation. However, some firms adopted a 'two-handed' approach and started the relevant innovation process while lobbying for more severe regulation in order to achieve competitive advantage. These cases of hypocritical behaviour were revealed by the media and pressure groups and contributed to the loss of customer confidence in environmentalism.

New millennium: New approach?

Green marketing gradually lost importance as a consequence and was shunted out of the mainstream by the end of the 1990s due to the mistakes listed above. There are signs of a new approach in the literature of recent years and a new concept is forming at present. This is based on the active role of the European Union in CSR issues since around the millennium, which contributed to the development of a general approach to the responsibility

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of businesses in achieving sustainability. From this perspective, CSR is considered as a strategic business approach in order to achieve sustainable development. Consequently, it embraces correspondence to environmental as well as social criteria. The main goal is to apply the strategic business objective in practice by providing adequate tools.

In this sense, CSR can be the framework in redefining the societal marketing concept and repositioning green marketing. The basis is dual: ethical initiatives answer social criteria, and green marketing responds to environmental criteria. The formation of an integrated view provides the possibility to sum up the marketing and management knowledge and practices available in the field. The framework is the sustainable development concept and the results are the practical implementation of the CSR concept. This triple bottom line approach of marketing can be found in some recent papers (e.g. Charter et al. 2002; Vágási 2004; Vágási, Szalkai & Jankó 2003).

CSR approaches in responsible marketing concepts

The levels of 'responsible' marketing corresponding to the three levels of CSR approach hitherto discussed can be defined based on the history of marketing explained above. McGregor's Theory X adaptation (Winsor 1999), combined with the practices of defining the interests of society described by Crane and Desmond (2002), mark the two endpoints: the features of lower and upper level. Additionally, the motivators of actions of societal orientation are to be revealed. The deeper the investigation of direct and indirect financial costs and benefits, the lower the CSR marketing approach. Similarly, the more intensive (corporate, product or brand) the image building aspect in corporate communications, the lower the CSR marketing approach.

Practical evidence for the social responsibility of corporations on an ethical basis appeared earlier than the more limited, 'middle level' in the marketing management field. The first work with the intention of systematizing the results and knowledge on the social responsibility of profit oriented organizations was a paper by Kotler (1972). The study includes ethical reasons, which is a sign of the upper level of CSR approach.

Related to the middle level of CSR approach, concepts about the role of marketing inside the company have appeared, emphasizing the role of the employees as stakeholders with an indirect effect on a corporation's financial performance. Besides, several works indicate the role of marketing theory in adapting the stakeholder concept, mainly in order to achieve a measurable profit increase by building corporate and brand image. Additionally, the goal of several responsible marketing concepts (e.g. cause related marketing and social alliances) is explicitly the increase of currency and image building (Murphy & Crowther 2002, 306), which indicates profit orientation.

Based on the discussion above, the three marketing approach levels corresponding to the CSR approaches are defined and characterized in Table 2.

Table 2. The three levels of approach of responsible marketing concepts

	Levels of 'responsible marketing'		
	Lower level	Intermediate level	Upper level
Features	Brand image (or product image)	Corporate image	Marketing decisions on an ethical basis
Motivators	Profit maximization through market extension (inside the legislative framework)	Increasing market share by taking part in (environmental or social) actions important for consumers	Long-term existence as active member of the society through socially responsible operation
Focus	Profit	Medium / long term profit	Long-term competitiveness
Time period	Short term (2–5 years)	Medium term (10–20 years)	Long term (20–30 years)
Concepts	Marketing (or marketing management)	Green / environmental marketing, stakeholder marketing, cause related marketing, sustainable marketing	Societal marketing concept, corporate community involvement, sustainable marketing

Source: own research

Conclusion

The starting point of the current research work was to investigate the reasons for the decline of green product development and green marketing in general. Inherently, the aim was to reveal the possible development of the field. Putting the question in the context of CSR, the questions were answered more profoundly than had been previously expected.

The main reason for decreasing green market demand has been described: meeting the new green consumer needs resulted in focusing on a market niche (reactive, static character) rather than a shift in corporate strategy. Green marketing reacts to already existing customer demands, while it does not focus on the potentials of market development (e.g. education of customers and their demand). From another point of view, it does not have such a strong motivator as the ethical concerns of the societal marketing concept had twenty years earlier. The slow-down of the green market is the consequence of this reactive character, the lack of dynamism.

The social and environmental effects of companies are related to their contacts with consumers: the products and services, the selling methods applied, corporate communications, etc. These are all to be mentioned as underlying processes of the different development tracks of responsible marketing and CSR. The experiences of several responsible marketing concepts and a synthesis of these with corporate strategy (CSR), however, points the direction towards future development. Additionally, the three levels of approach seem to be in line with the levels of new product development (explained in Köszeghy 2006).

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