

# **THE INFLUENCES OF AWARENESS LEVEL AND FIT BETWEEN CUSTOMER'S LIFE STYLE AND CSR INFORMATION DISCLOSURE: CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS, PURCHASE INTENTIONS, AND LOYALTIES**

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## **Abstract**

The advertisements about CSR activities are overwhelming in Thailand's media. The corporation/organization communicates their CSR initiatives or activities and by which mean is crucial to their public performance. This study tries to measure the performance of their CSR information disclosure to maximize the CSR management effectiveness, by focusing on type of media the used as communication channel. Moreover, the different human behavior creates different preferences and lifestyle. The similarity or match between type of customer's lifestyle and CSR information disclosed from company can incur a congruence between them call fit. Fit can be crucial prerequisite factor needs in implementing effective CSR management. Energy Company is the best example to study the effects of CSR advertising due to high expectations in environmental friendly from outside of corporation. Our expectation is to determine the benefits of CSR information disclosure and how to effectively implementing CSR management.

**Keywords:** consumer lifestyle, consumer perception, corporate social responsibility, purchase intention & loyalty, type of media

## **Introduction**

All Business Corporation and organization on different industries are expected to behave socially concerned beyond making a profit only. Unfortunately, there are many misunderstandings on CSR concepts among stakeholders, especially consumers and citizen.

The importance of CSR in Thailand is later become more awareness among private sector and government sector by paying more attention in creating commitment to society and environment. The evidence is shown by the presence of many Corporations are awarded with best-practices CSR awards in past few years. There are many important corporations and financial institutions in Thailand participating in being socially and environmentally responsible.

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After years of development, there is an increase in CSR engagement as seen through many campaign and activities and can be discover all over the media and advertisement. The feedback of the CSR engagement from consumer mostly is positive. According to the survey that was construct by Kenan Institute of Asia andDPU International College, on aspect about consumer attitude towards companies doing CSR. The results are shown that 60% of consumers are willing to purchase the product that provide by companies with responsible commitment to social, environment, safety of consumers & employees, or philanthropy. While 59% of consumers are willing to pay for products came from CSR Companies at premium price. 73% of consumers will choose to purchase products from companies that care and make less impact to environments. 87% of consumers will recommend products/services of companies that care and make less impact to environments to their relatives or friends (<http://www.csri.or.th/knowledge/csr/190>)

As you can see that the perceived CSR initiatives and engagement from customer can generate benefits to the company/organization. Therefore, how we communicate these initiatives and engagements are need to manage carefully.

## **Literature review**

### **Corporate social responsibility**

Sieff, the former chairman of Marks and Spencer plc, said that “business only contribute fully to society if and only if it is efficient, profitable, and socially responsible”. Being socially responsible is the appropriate practice in any corporate. The corporate social responsibility are including responsible to workplace (employees), marketplace (customers, suppliers), environment, community, ethics, and human rights

People are more aware of the impacts and incident that can harm the society by doing business recklessly. There is also a theory called stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) stated that firms have to realize that firm's business activities can have an impact directly/indirectly to society which considered as one in stakeholders. The corporate have to take the pressure from both intense business competitions and from social performance expectations from stakeholders. (Porter and Kramer, 2006, 2002; Crawford and Scaletta, 2005; Salzmman et al., 2005; Meehan et al., 2006; Kotler and Lee, 2005; Windsor, 2006).

### **Advantages of corporate social responsibility**

By implementing CSR with an aim to improve social performance and business related performance was so called strategic CSR (Lantos, 2001; Porter and Kramer, 2006; Crawford and Scaletta, 2005; Salzmman et al., 2005). The advantage of CSR is not just making profit or better social performance, but CSR also positively affects various firm performances such as firm reputation (Brammer and Millington, 2005; Turban andGreening, 1996), consumer satisfaction (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006), employee attractiveness (Backhaus, Stone, and Heiner, 2002; Turban and Greening, 1996, ) and commitment of employee toward firm (Peterson, 2004).

### **Type of media use to communicate corporate social responsibility and level of awareness**

The importance of Communicating CSR is not about communicating or not communicating, but how to communicate (Kotler, 2003). The reason why companies communicating their CSR initiatives are important because an intense competition makes CSR contribution is unable to neglect and become important part of ensuring future business (Charter and Polonsky, 1999). The companies will never get fully benefits from CSR initiatives unless the companies communicate those initiatives wisely to stakeholders and public (Maignan and Ferrell, 2004, 17). The way corporate communicate their social initiatives is important, by reporting activities and the fact about socially responsible behavior can leads to benefits among stakeholders, organization, consumer and society (Ursa and Jennifer, 2006). The author suggests that communicating CSR initiatives in form of report can brings most transparency and benefits of stakeholders to corporate. Moreover, financial report alone is not enough to satisfies the need of shareholders, customers, communities, and other stakeholders on organization overall performance.

A study constructs by Jian Wang and Vidhi Chaudhri discover that preferred communication channel for CSR activities in consumer are include company websites, corporate brochures and other publications, company Intranet, other internal corporate media, and Internet news media (Jian and Vidhi, 2009).

Therefore, the communication channels for transmitting CSR initiatives have to be choosing carefully depending on target group because not all audiences respond to the same way on same communication channel (Rodrigo Cervantes, 2010).

Mostly, the communications of CSR's activities are communicating through media. Modern marketing researchers have come up with new categorization of media that covered all traditional type of media which are owned media and paid media. Owned media refers to the media that under the control of certain brand or company. The purpose of owned media is to create long-term relationship with existing potential customer. For examples of owned media are web sites, mobile sites, blogs, and twitter account. Next type of media is Paid media which refers to media that brand or companies have to pay to leverage the channel of communication. The main purpose of Paid media is to improve the company owned media. For examples of paid media are display ads, paid search, and sponsorship.

Moreover, the source of CSR information's communicated is also important. Consumers tend to distrust any information from advertisement than other information sources (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1998). According to Schultz and Morsing (2006) consumers prefer to accept the CSR initiative information through annual report and website which is a minimal release source (Owned Media) rather than advertisement (Paid) which is more mass release (Schultz and Morsing, 2006).

According to the research construct by Madalene Milano, Bill McInturff and James L. Nichols about the seat belt enforcement campaign. They discover the significant relationship between type of media and awareness level of audiences. First thing they have discovered is that initiatives via paid media do increased awareness and the most effective communication channel is televisions. (Madalene Milano, Bill McInturff and James L. Nichols, 2004)

At this point there is a contradiction among the results from many researches. Schultz and Morsing (2006) found that consumer prefer owned media while Madalene Milano, Bill McInturff and James L. Nichols found that initiatives via paid media are more effective than owned media. One of the main objectives of this study is investigates the effects of paid media and owned media had toward awareness level of customer.

### **Importance of awareness as successful CSR implementation**

The abilities and benefits of CSR have been proven extensively by many studies and experimental in last decade. It is obvious that CSR play an important role in building a good relationship with stakeholders, consumers as example. Consumer perception and purchase intentions are influenced by CSR initiatives but if and only if consumer are aware of such initiatives. Marketplace poll among developed country shows that consumers want to be informed about social initiatives and will support those firm engaging in CSR. So creating consumers awareness is one of key successful in CSR implementations and significantly affect consumer's behaviors (Pomeriang and Dolnica, 2009).

The researchers Pomeriang and Dolnica (2009) construct a qualitative study on bank managers to get insight on how they communicate CSR initiatives, along with quantitative study on consumers to determine the level of awareness on CSR initiatives, the results is low. Their study is focused on bank sector in Australia (Australian consumers proven to have the highest expectations in CSR). Author tends to investigate the effect of CSR initiatives awareness only in highly CSR-involvement consumers because this type of consumer tends to rewards the firm with CSR engagement (Pomeriang and Dolnica, 2009). Unfortunately, Mohr et al. (2001) studies showed that consumers have difficulty acquiring and storing CSR information about the firms they buy from (Mohr et al., 2001) and consumers might act very differently if CSR information is provided

### **Using recall and recognition as swareness measurements**

Recall and Recognition are frequently used to measure the memory (Gillund and Shiffrin 1984;Lerman and Garbarino 2002) especially in advertisement and verbal phrase. According to the authors recall is ability to reproduce the previously presented items. While recognition is ability to identify the recently presented items (Wixted and Squire 2004, p. 58)

Recall and Recognition are also used in brand identification as well. The way customers identify the brand correctly and confidently is very crucial to brand differentiation of any firm or corporate, especially for their communication and advertisement. According to Keller (Keller, 1992), who constructed research about awareness. Keller used recall and recognition of the brand as instruments to measure awareness. Recognition is for measure aided awareness, word "aided" means visual and verbal subject will be provides to aiding recognition measurement. Same as recognition, recall is for measure unaided awareness which only verbal and non-verbal will be provides in recall measurement process (Esch, 2007). According to Aaker's brand awareness pyramid (Aaker, 1992). The pyramid shows the each level of brand position depends on consumer's preferences. The pyramid has shown that the recall has a greater level compare to the recognition in the pyramid. It means consumers are recalling the brand when they can list some brands by just giving only category of the brand.

The recall and recognition is also implemented in comparative study on each type presentation mode such as televised, radio broadcasting, and in-game advertisement. According to Walsh, Kim and Ross. They compared the level of recall and recognition of advertisement on different present mode. The results tell that different mode of presentation yields different level of correctness between recall and recognition among subjects (Walsh, Kim, and Ross; 2008).

### **Fit between customer's lifestyle and CSR information Disclosure**

“Fit” is referring to perceived link between a cause, firm product line, brand image, and target market (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). In other literatures, fit can be describe in other words such as congruent, relatedness or compatibility.

According to Lee (2011). The researcher found that most of companies were implement by engage in CSR activities in various dimensions instead of focusing or specify the target customer. This disadvantage of this approach is the higher investment of company’s resources. Lee discovered that match or fit between consumer and corporation results in benefits. For example, the fit between company and their CSR activities can effect consumer perceptions. Based on prior research, Lee used consumer’s lifestyle as one of the factor in fit to CSR activities. Lifestyle can represent individual characteristics and behaviors (Gonzalez and Bello, 2002). Lifestyle can reflects individual interests, attitudes, and opinions (Moore and Driver, 2005; Vyncke, 2002). In conclusion, lifestyle can determine can explain individual preferences and their overall perception (Lass and Heart, 2004). Lee also found out that increases in consumer perceptions can lead to consumer loyalty because consumer are likely to show loyalty behaviors when they notice socially responsibility behaviors from the company (Lee, 2011).

### **Effects of CSR’s activities awareness on perception and purchase intention**

Shelley Wigley (2008) suggests that company CSR activities do affect purchase decision and the recommending about company should publicize their CSR activities. Moreover, the author suggests that better understanding (more knowledge) about CSR activities will definitely leads to favorable perception of company. Finally, the author have proved that awareness and understanding on CSR activities strongly leads to better perception toward corporates and stronger purchase intentions. (Shelley, 2008).

## **Hypothesis & conceptual model**

### **Type of media and awareness**

The companies will never get fully benefits from CSR initiatives unless the companies communicate those initiatives wisely to stakeholders and public (Maignan and Ferrell, 2004, 17). The mediathat all companies mostly used to communicate CSR activities to consumer will be mainly divided into owned media and paid media. Owned media will include all media that in control by the company itself such as corporate website, sustainability report, brochure/flyer, mail/e-mail, billboard and kiosk. Next media is Paid media, include all media that company have to paid or invest to advertise such as TV advertise, radio advertise, internet advertise, magazine and newspaper. Adapting from the literature review in communication channels section about owned media and paid media. The author discovered that different type of media can results in difference awareness to public audience. (Madalene, Bill and, 2004).

*Hypothesis 1: The difference in type of media results in difference level of awareness among.*

### **Consumer's awareness and consumer's perception**

According to Pomeroy and Dolnicar (2009). Consumer perception is influenced by CSR initiatives but if and only if consumer are aware of such initiatives. Consumers also will support those firms engaging in CSR (Pomeroy and Dolnicar, 2009).

*Hypothesis 2: The level of consumer's awareness on CSR activities has a relationship with Consumer's perception.*

### **Fit between consumer lifestyle and consumer perceptions**

According to Lee (2011). The perceived fit between consumer lifestyle and CSR activities can reflect the congruence between them and influencing in better consumer perception of such CSR activities and subsequently results in loyalty.

*Hypothesis 3: The fit between consumer's lifestyle and CSR activities can result in better consumer perception.*

### **Effects of CSR's activities awareness on perception and purchase intention**

Refers to the result from Shelley Wigley research where awareness of CSR's activities leads to better understanding on those particular activities. Subsequently, result in favorable perception towards the company, and higher intention to support, increased purchase intentions of those particular product/services (Shelley, 2008). Therefore, the better of consumer's perception gained by awareness of CSR's activities results in purchase intention.

*Hypothesis 4: The consumer's perception of CSR activities has a relationship with consumer's purchase intention.*

### **Perception and loyalty**

Refers to Lee (2011), Increases in consumer perceptions can lead to consumer loyalty because consumer are likely to show loyalty behaviors when they notice socially responsibility behaviors from the company (Lee, 2011).

*Hypothesis 5: The consumer's perception of CSR activities has a relationship with customer loyalty*

### **Conceptual model**

This framework is an overview of factors explaining the effects of awareness level on type of media and Fitness between consumer lifestyle and CSR information disclosure. The objective of this framework is to investigate the hypothesis feasibility in Thailand case. We have classified the factors into three tiers; on the first tier is Type of media. Type of media used to

communicate CSR's activities affect the customer awareness of CSR's activities. This factors generally is a type of media company/brand uses to communicate their CSR's activities. Mainly, type of media can be divided into twotypes which are Owned media (Corporate Websites, Sustainability Report, Brochure, Flyer, Kiosk) and Paid Media (TV Advertisement, Radio Advertisement, Internet Advertisement, Magazines, Newspapers). The different in type of media company/brand uses to communicate their social CSR's activities will lead to different level of awareness customer responds (Madalene Milano, Bill McInturff and James L. Nichols, 2004).

For second tier, mainly focus on consumer awareness of CSR's activities and Fitness between consumer lifestyle and CSR activity and how both factors relate to perception of consumers. How consumer's awareness of CSR activities related to perception is that consumers perception do influenced by CSR's activities, but if and only they aware of such activities (Pomeroy and Dolnica, 2009). For fit between consumer lifestyle and CSR activity, perceived fit between consumer lifestyle and CSR activities can reflects the congruent between them and influencing in better consumer perception of such CSR activities

The third and fourth tier factor is perceptions of customer/consumer affected by CSR's activities awareness and fit between consumer lifestyle and how they relate to purchase intention and loyalty. Purchase intentions are the level of customer/consumer willingness or intention to purchase particular products/services from the companies engages in CSR's activities. Purchase intentions also including loyalty to particular product/services customer/consumer have towards companies whose doing CSR's activities. (Imran, Kashif, Ayse, Sajid and Jawaria; 2010). Moreover, according to Shelley Wigley research where awareness of CSR's activities leads to favorable perception towards the company, increased purchase intentions of those particular product/services (Shelley, 2008). For loyalty, increases in consumer perceptions can lead to consumer loyalty because consumer are likely to show loyalty behaviors when they notice socially responsibility behaviors from the company (Lee E.M., 2011)

## **Methodology**

The data will be collected by questionnaire and In-depth interview with CSR manager in energy Company. In questionnaire section, for starting questions, the respondent were ask whether they ever heard of term "Corporate Social Responsibility" before to measure their understanding about CSR term among consumer and we also put the definition of CSR in the survey after they were asked about CSR term to ensure they understand about CSR and answer the questionnaire correctly. Then, we are asking the respondent whether they ever heard the CSR's news and information from Energy Company before, to measure the level of consumer preliminary awareness of CSR among energy industry. Then, the respondent were ask which source of information they were received to identify their prefer type of media, the choices listed in question will be including three type of media; Owned media and paid media (Odwin and Badrie, 2008).

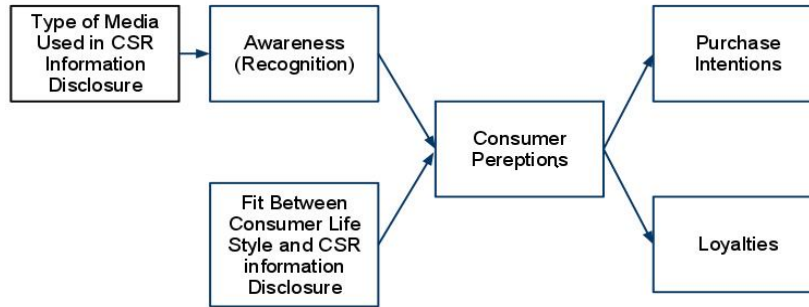


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Next measurement is awareness of CSR activities. According to the previous studies, mostly awareness is measured using graphical and verbal recall (Pomeroy and Dolnicar, 2009). Graphics and verbal phrases of CSR information from threeEnergy Company were placed in question and ask the respondent whether they can recognize that information. As well as the source of information (type of media) where they exposed.

Next measurement is fit between consumer lifestyle and CSR activities. Adapting from Lee (2011), we will ask respondent five point likert-scales questions (eg., “This company CSR activities are congruent with my interest”) (Lee, 2011).

Next section is Perception of consumers toward CSR and company which doing CSR. The respondent were ask how importance of company CSR engagement and what did they consider when select the company to purchase a gasoline. Moreover the favorable perception of energy company whose doing CSR were checked by five point likert-scales questions as well. (Ramasamy and Yeung, 2008)

The last section of questionnaire will be purchase intention and loyalty the product. The scenario of supposed company which extremely engaged in CSR was given. Respondents were asked in five point-likert scales whether they have intention to buy the product and likelihood to recommend the product (Prendergast and Ko, 2010). In-depth interview will be selected to investigate the perception of CSR from Energy Company. How much they engaging in CSR and what are their CSR strategies including the media used.

## Conclusion

The Pomeroy and Dolnicar suggest that firms may need to educate consumers to be able to aware and understand the CSR initiatives communicated (Pomeroy and Dolnicar, 2009). Therefore, energy company should focus on publicize and educates the consumer of how importance and benefits of doing CSR. According to pilot survey, consumers extremely see importance of doing CSR in Energy Company and looking forward sustainability development within industry. However, just only few consumers who actually received/aware the CSR information communicated by companies. Many consumers even never heard the term of CSR. This is where the opportunity is lost. The demand of CSR information from consumer is unmet. And this can only means ineffective of CSR information communication from Energy Company.

We hope that our paper contributes to the literature in the area of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). We also hope that our framework, though with limitations, can lead to a better understanding about the effects of Medias had to consumer's awareness and fit between



consumer lifestyle and CSR activities, which lead to change in consumer behaviors. Doing CSR is not a tool for creating better corporate image to the public, or advertising without actual activities. But create continually commitments to integrate the social wellbeing and environmental protections. Understand the effects of Medias have toward customer awareness can grants you an effective CSR publication management. While understand the responds customer have towards different types of media also grants companies advantage, effectiveness and cost reduction, while customer also gain preferable communication channel types which they can manipulate it effectively.

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