

Q-Step Internship: Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Behaviour

Cody O'Connor, BSc Sociology

Introduction

Reason digital are a social enterprise whose sole purpose is to make a difference through the web. They have recently developed a new tool, enabling companies to measure their corporate social responsibility-which is where I come in. Corporate Social Responsibility is increasingly prevalent: more consumers are taking notice, and more governments are legislating its importance. In an increasingly globalised world companies now more than ever need to take responsibility and give something back. These companies have huge power and influence, however we are often kept out of the loop, something I strongly believe companies should be held accountable and is therefore the focus of this research project.

As an intern at Reason Digital my research contributes to the literature and increasing importance surrounding CSR. CSR is a massively growing movement and I hope to of shown this through my use of statistics reflecting the different attitudes of consumers in my survey. The results would allow me to look at the perceived importance of CSR, and therefore (and whether) companies should modify their current business strategies to accommodate this.



Objectives

The central aim of the project was to see how aware consumers are of CSR, how much importance they place on different CSR initiatives, and whether their attitudes have influenced their behaviours. In addition to this, I also wanted to look at how demographics interact with how people perceive and engage with CSR. I looked at age, whether being an 'ethical consumer' is dependent on your social economic background, and gender.

Method

In order to measure this, I made a survey complied of different questions which was carried out through and with the help of 'audiencenet'. This allowed me to break down the data in terms of age, SEG bands, and gender allowing me to get a comprehensive image and representation of people's attitudes and behaviours in relation to CSR.

In total, there were 500 respondents who took part in the survey, however when breaking down this group it became clear that some groups were overrepresented: females, 25-35 year olds, the other variables were pretty equally represented.

To analyse this data I had to recode my variables and run a series of frequencies and cross tabs through SPSS this allowed me to look for any underlying patterns coming from the data and to check if there was a correlation between consumer behaviour and attitudes.

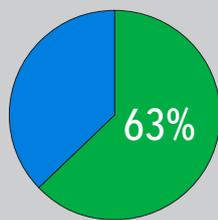


Figure 1 Respondent's who had never actively campaigned but had brought a fair trade product in the last 12 months

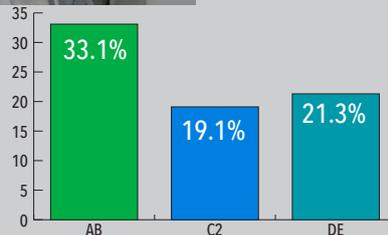


Figure 2 Respondents who believe they are an 'ethical consumer'

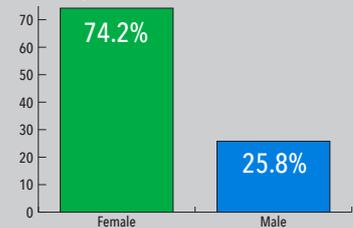


Figure 3 Brought a fair trade product in the last 12 months

Findings

Are consumers aware of CSR?

On the whole, the participant's in this survey were not very aware of CSR, which reveals the communication problems that are being had with CSR. Consequently, this effectively renders the public ignorant and unable to make an informed choice based on a company's reputation.

Do consumers place importance on CSR?

In spite of this, all respondents place high importance on CSR.

96.2% of people asked in the survey agreed that it is important for companies to have good social and environmental policies.

Respondents ranked 'fulfilling commercial and financial targets to create economic value' the least important CSR activity, this is evidence that the participants in this survey expect companies to contribute to a sustainable future rather than just generate profit.

Have respondent's attitudes influenced their behaviours?

My findings show that even though respondent's might not go out and actively campaign against CSR related issues, most are still committed to buying 'ethically good', showing the potential changes in consumer behaviour if there was better communication and awareness.

This could possibly lead to increased trust, loyalty and profit from consumers who will choose by CSR rather than just looking at fair trade and normal brands.

Demographics and CSR?

Age: Originally, I thought younger people would buy fair trade the least due to not having a disposable income compared to older groups, however it shows how enthusiastic and passionate young people are in terms of 'ethical consumerism.' You could conclude that this is down to CSR's reputation and influence on the younger generation and their commitment to the future.

Social Economic Background: CSR clearly affects consumer behaviour, however how people engage with CSR varies between people and this can most clearly see when looking at the SEG bands. The respondents in the higher SEG bands seem to engage with CSR more through buying fair trade products by having a willingness /ability to pay more.

However, those in the lower bands seem to engage with CSR by showing awareness by looking at reports and campaigning.

Gender: When looking at gender and CSR the differences were striking. Not only did females buy fair trade products a lot more, they also sought information about a companies CSR policies and were overall much more aware.