

Comparing the Corporate Social Responsibility Perceptions of Generation X

Megan Fixen
Minot State University

The purpose of this study was to examine differences between CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s versus those born in the 1970s. The researcher investigated Generation X perceptions using Carroll's dimensions including economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility. Although results provided support that statistically significant differences did not exist, this study provided evidence of which CSR perceptions Generation X'ers value most. Members of Generation X place the highest value on legal, followed by ethical, economic, and philanthropic responsibilities respectively. Results may inform leadership regarding which dimensions to utilize in building CSR initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an important factor for decision-making in the business environment (Hogan, Olson, & Sharma, 2014). Carroll (1979) described CSR as “The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” (p. 500). Kang and Hustvedt (2014) indicated that business leaders should develop CSR marketing strategies that attract the consumers' attention and build trust.

Existing research focuses on understanding the significance and impact of CSR. It is known that CSR initiatives influence consumer loyalty (Pérez & Rodríguez, 2015), and that CSR can increase a business's reputation among customers (Chernev & Blair, 2015). Shuqin (2014) indicated that choosing the right CSR strategy could result in financial reward.

The CSR perspectives and needs of stakeholders are very different (McGlone, Spain, & McGlone, 2011). Understanding the values of a specific generation can be challenging for business leaders (Marino, 2014). Because of the differences in histories and values, Jorge Arturo, José de Jesús, and Manuel (2016) suggested that each generation has different motivators and expectations. However, Generation X represents an economically significant market segment worthy of a marketing focus (Philp, 2015).

According to Rushing (2011), the span of members of Generation X includes those born between the years of 1960 to 1979. Members of Generation X, with 60 million U.S. consumers, continue to increase spending behaviors across a wide range of categories (O'Brien, 2016). O'Brien (2016) suggested that members of Generation X purchase art, cars, jewelry, travel, and wine. Because consumers consider the socially responsible behaviors of a business when making purchasing decisions (Abd Rahim, Jalaludin, & Tajuddin, 2011), the perspectives of Generation X play a critical role in establishing current and future CSR initiatives,

The goal of this study was to investigate CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers using Carroll's CSR model. The findings could inform leadership decisions regarding which strategies are needed to create CSR initiatives that appeal to Generation X members. Therefore, an understanding of customer perspectives is crucial because a business will only benefit from CSR initiatives that create value for the consumer (Gadeikiene & Banyte, 2013).

STUDY PROBLEM

It was not known if and to what extent statistically significant differences exist between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic CSR responsibilities. According to Carroll (2016), the ways in which a business balances CSR responsibilities is a large component in developing their reputation among consumers. Therefore, investigation of CSR preferences is purposeful.

Given that members of Generation X represent a large population of approximately 60 million U.S. consumers (O'Brien, 2016), business leaders could benefit from understanding Generation X CSR perceptions. Members of a generation see themselves as a distinct group (Klara, 2016). Each generation has different characteristics and desires, and these differences create the need to tailor marketing strategies to unique generational preferences (Bucuța, 2015). By understanding generational perspectives, a business can then create strategies that appeal to this specific market segment.

This study may contribute to an increased understanding of which CSR dimensions members of Generation X value most. To react and respond to desires appropriately, a business needs an understanding of consumer perspectives (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Businesses may use data from this study to attract consumers through targeted CSR initiatives. According to Vidaver-Cohen and Brønn (2015), consumers are more likely to support a firm that engages in CSR related activities.

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Modern Marketing

Marketing is a critical component in a business's decision-making, with relationship marketing becoming a priority (Kumar, 2015; Zhang, Watson, Palmatier, & Dant, 2016). Modern businesses strive to build consumer loyalty by creating value for specific target segments. Focuses on generational groups are useful in marketing (Knight, 2015). Generations include differences in experience and life obligations in addition to age (Khor & Mapunda, 2014). Turkina and Surzhko-Harned (2014) indicated that the forces that influence a generation are different, and that these forces stimulate different consumer behaviors.

Social responsibility is essential in the development of modern marketing practices (Parilti, Külter Demirgüneş, & Özsaçmacı, 2014; Yinhua Hu, 2014). Gaining an understanding of CSR perceptions can inform a business about what specific marketing actions are necessary to better satisfy unique groups of customers. Therefore, CSR is a marketing tool that may result in a competitive advantage (Tewari & Pathak, 2014).

Corporate Social Responsibility

According to Carroll (1991), a lack of a common CSR definition exists, which may cause confusion about a business' obligation to society. Because CSR includes a variety of issues, ambiguity exists about what is right and wrong (Daft, 2014). This study uses Carroll's (1979) definition of CSR as economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations of society toward an organization. Carroll (1991) proposed each CSR dimension warrants close consideration.

Esmailpour and Barjoei (2016) indicated that CSR is a primary issue for a business. CSR is a concept held in high regard within the business community despite its lack of common definition (Hack, Kenyon, & Wood, 2014). Increasingly, businesses may experience pressure to incorporate CSR into business practices (Freeman & Hasnaoui, 2011).

Corporate Social Responsibility Practices

Being socially responsible is good business practice (DesJardins, 2016). Businesses can no longer disregard CSR because research indicated that CSR has the potential to influence consumer actions (Creasey, 2015; Chernev & Blair, 2015). Galego-Álvarez, Formigoni, and Pompa Antunes (2014) indicated that socially responsible practices continue to increase in businesses around the world. CSR can create consumer loyalty, which in turn increases the value of a business (Malik, 2015).

Schrempf-Stirling, Palazzo and Phillips (2016) indicated that consumers judge businesses based on the activities that they engage in beyond traditional corporate activities. To operate successfully, businesses must commit to socially responsible practices. According to Malik, Ali and Anwar (2015), integrating CSR into business strategies can increase the ability of a company to build and sustain a competitive advantage.

Characteristics of Generation X

Speculation exists on the span of years for members of Generation X. According to Davis (2014), members of Generation X included the years 1965 to 1981; Seipert and Baghurst (2014) stated the years were 1960 to 1980; and Rushing (2011) argued the years were 1960 to 1979, which are the years for the current study. Members of this group currently range in age from to mid-30s to mid-50s.

Regardless of the small variances in age ranges that define Generation X, analysts agree that this generation differs significantly from previous generations (Miller & Washington, 2014). Mothers entering the workforce, and single-parent households were common for members of Generation X (Davis, 2014). Members of Generation X are possibly the most educated generation in the history of the United States, which contributed to the growth of dual income housing (Miller & Washington, 2014). Generation X'ers focus on their families, careers, and hobbies (Marino, 2014).

Benefits of Corporate Social Responsibility

Existing literature indicated that businesses do benefit from engaging in CSR activities (Joireman, Smith, Liu, & Arthurs, 2015). Organizations are placing a higher level of importance on CSR behaviors (Catano & Morrow Hines, 2016). Further, Wang and Li (2016) indicated that companies that engage in social responsibility have higher market value.

By engaging in CSR initiatives, a business can enhance long-term sustainability (Taran & Betts, 2015). Financial and social benefits may result from engaging in socially responsible behaviors (Jariko, Børsen, & Jhatial, 2016). CSR can increase sales, lead to higher profits, and increase investor attraction (Creasey, 2015).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Carroll's (1991) CSR pyramid model was the theoretical foundation for this study. Carroll described CSR in four dimensions that include (a) economic, (b) legal, (c) ethical, and (d) and philanthropic responsibility. Carroll (1991) arranged the four social responsibilities into a pyramid, beginning with economic responsibilities as the foundation for all business activity, followed by legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities respectively. Carroll's (1991) seminal model suggested that a business must strive to embrace all four dimensions to fulfill its' responsibility to society. According to Smith, Wokutch, Harrington, and Dennis (2001), the dimensions outlined by Carroll (1979) provide a useful way to discover how various factors may influence perceptions of the different components of CSR.

According to Aupperle, Hatfield, and Carroll (1983), Carroll's CSR model is the foundation for the development of the original CSRO forced-choice survey instrument. The researcher used a previously validated shortened version of the original CSRO survey instrument (Smith & Blackburn, 1988) for this quantitative causal-comparative study to assess participants' perceptions of CSR. Based on perceived importance, participants allocated up to 10 points between four statements within a total of 10 sets. Each of the four statements in a set represents one of Carroll's CSR dimensions (Aupperle et al., 1983). The

numerical allocation of points allowed the researcher to measure the perceived importance of each CSR statement in the set, and answer each research question.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The research questions in this study were designed based on peer-reviewed literature on CSR perspectives (dependent variable) of Generation X consumers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s (dichotomous independent variable) and the theoretical framework. The four research questions and subsequent hypotheses addressed were:

RQ1: If and to what extent is there a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive economic CSR?

H1₀: There is not a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive economic CSR.

H1a: There is a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive economic CSR.

RQ2: If and to what extent is there a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive legal CSR?

H2₀: There is not a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive legal CSR.

H2a: There is a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive legal CSR.

RQ3: If and to what extent is there a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive ethical CSR?

H3₀: There is not a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive ethical CSR.

H3a: There is a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive ethical CSR.

RQ4: If and to what extent is there a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive philanthropic CSR?

H4₀: There is not a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive philanthropic CSR.

H4a: There is a significant difference between how consumers in the age group of Generation X, dichotomized by those born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s, perceive philanthropic CSR.

METHODS

Methodology

The researcher used a quantitative methodology. Researchers use numerical data in quantitative research to test a hypothesis (Park & Park, 2016). Because the researcher used numerical data to examine the differences between the perceptions of Generation X'ers, a quantitative methodology was appropriate to address the problem statement and research questions that addressed if and to what extent there are significant differences between how consumers in the age group of Generation X perceive CSR responsibilities.

Participants

The researcher utilized the social media, word of mouth and physical distribution to attract participants who possess the desired characteristics to recruit a hard-to-reach target group through

snowball sampling. One hundred and fifty (150) surveys were distributed to members of Generation X born in the 1960s (1960-1969) and 150 surveys were distributed to those born in the 1970s (1970-1979). One hundred and sixty-five (165) surveys were returned; nine surveys were discarded due to incomplete or incorrect data, achieving a final sample size of 156. Seventy-eight (78) surveys were completed by Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and 78 surveys were completed by those born in the 1970s.

Procedure

Using a causal-comparative design, the researcher addressed four research questions. The researcher used a survey instrument that assesses CSRO based upon Carroll's four-part CSR model to collect data from Generation X'ers. The survey included 10 sets of questions, with four statements in each set.

The researcher conducted two univariate ANOVA tests to analyze data and address RQ1 and RQ4. Based on the data, the researcher concluded the univariate ANOVA was appropriate for analysis of normally distributed data. A univariate ANOVA is appropriate for testing the differences between groups (Herodek et al., 2011). Because the purpose of this research was to examine the differences in CSR perceptions between members of Generation X, the univariate ANOVA was appropriate to address the research questions.

The researcher conducted two Mann-Whitney U tests to analyze data and address RQ2 and RQ3. Based on the data, the researcher concluded that the Mann-Whitney U test was appropriate for analysis of non-normally distributed data. The Mann-Whitney U test should be used when testing the differences between two conditions (Mann & Whitney, 1947). Because the purpose of this research was to examine the differences in CSR perceptions between members of Generation X, the Mann-Whitney U test was appropriate to address the research questions.

RESULTS

Because no names or identifying factors are associated with the survey, no codes were necessary to protect identities. Data grouping was done according to numerical allocations assigned to each CSR dimension, separated by decades of participants' birth (1960s= 1 or the 1970s= 2). To determine if a significant difference exists between CSR perceptions in terms of the four dimensions between Generation X'ers the researcher conducted two univariate ANOVA tests and two Mann-Whitney *U* tests to compare each of the CSR dimensions individually. A significant variance between the two samples would indicate differences in perception between members of Generation X born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s.

Research Question 1

The researcher conducted a univariate ANOVA test to examine if a statistically significant difference exists between the economic CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s. The researcher concluded that a statistically significant difference between the economic CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s does not exist. The researcher also concluded that participants born in the 1960s ($M = 20.7$) value economic responsibilities slightly more than participants born in the 1970s ($M = 19.2$). However, no statistically significant difference exists between the economic CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s as determined by the univariate ANOVA, $F(1, 154) = 1.30, p = .13, \eta^2 = .01$. The null hypothesis that no statistically significant differences exist between how Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s perceive economic CSR was retained.

Research Question 2

The researcher conducted a Mann-Whitney *U* test to examine if a statistically significant difference exists between the legal CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s. The researcher concluded that a statistically significant difference between the legal CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s does not exist. The

researcher also concluded that participants born in the 1960s value legal responsibilities slightly more (*Mdn* = 32) than participants born in the 1970s (*Mdn* = 31), $U = 2914$, $p = .32$, $r = .037$. However, the results of the Mann-Whitney U test provided support that no statistically significant difference exists between the legal CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers. The null hypothesis that no statistically significant differences exist between how Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s perceive legal CSR was retained.

Research Question 3

The researcher conducted a Mann-Whitney U test to examine if a statistically significant difference exists between the ethical CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s. The researcher concluded that a statistically significant difference between the ethical CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s does not exist. The researcher also concluded that participants born in the 1970s value ethical responsibilities slightly more (*Mdn* = 27) than participants born in the 1960s (*Mdn* = 26), $U = 2894$, $p = .30$, $r = .042$. However, the results of the Mann-Whitney U test provided support that no statistically significant difference exists between the ethical CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s. The null hypothesis that no statistically significant differences exist between how Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s perceive ethical CSR was retained.

Research Question 4

The researcher conducted a univariate ANOVA test to examine if a statistically significant difference exists between the philanthropic CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s. The researcher concluded that a statistically significant difference between the philanthropic CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s does not exist. The researcher also concluded that participants born in the 1970s ($M = 16.7$) value philanthropic responsibilities slightly more than participants born in the 1960s ($M = 16.5$). However, no statistically significant difference exists between the philanthropic CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s as determined by the univariate ANOVA ($p = .42$). The null hypothesis that no statistically significant differences exist between how Generation X'ers born in the 1960s and those born in the 1970s perceive philanthropic CSR was retained.

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE RESULTS

Variable	<i>P</i>	Reject the Null Hypotheses
Economic	.13	No
Legal	.32	No
Ethical	.30	No
Philanthropic	.42	No

DISCUSSION

According to Kumar (2015), development of new marketing knowledge that will have a lasting effect on academicians and the business environment is necessary. The current study goes beyond the extant literature by examining CSR from the consumer perspective. Business leaders can use the study findings for an informed decision-making process, based on each of Carroll's CSR dimensions. The current study could provide business leaders with valuable information regarding CSR preferences based on a theoretical foundation considered seminal in the field of management. Although no statistically significant difference exists between the CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers, results of this study provide specific data to business leaders as to which CSR dimensions Generation X'ers value most.

Members of Generation X place a slightly higher value on legal ($M = 32.4$), followed by ethical ($M = 27.0$), economic ($M = 20.0$), and philanthropic responsibilities ($M = 16.6$) respectively.

CSR has drawn substantial interest in the business and academic field (Lizhen Chen, Marfo, & Hu Xuhua, 2016). Marketers realized that each generation has different characteristics and desires, and these differences create the need to tailor marketing strategies to unique generational preferences (Bucuța, 2015). Businesses may be able to increase consumer support by identifying which CSR dimensions Generation X'ers value and then developing business approaches congruent with those dimensions.

LIMITATIONS

This study was limited to members of Generation X in the state of ND. Collecting data from participants in the same geographic area may result in a sample that has similar ethnic backgrounds or socioeconomic statuses (Emerson, 2015). Examining a larger geographic area may have resulted in a broader range of perceptions. However, the small sample could also be considered a strength of the study because of the focus on a specific population.

Examining perspectives of only one age group, members of Generation X was another limitation for this study. The CSR perceptions of different generational cohorts may vary. Investigation of other age cohorts may be beneficial to extend on current CSR literature. However, focus on Generation X'ers is key because they represent a portion of one of the largest demographics in the United States (Rushing, 2011). O'Brien (2016) indicated that members of Generation X have more assets than any other generation, making them a wealthy group of spenders. Examination of multiple generational perspectives could minimize the limitations of only examining one generation.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher recommends qualitative research to expand on the findings of this research. Information exists which quantitative methods could not address. Quantitative research generates factual data, while qualitative research may offer stronger insight regarding participant perceptions (Barnham, 2015). A qualitative study would provide an opportunity to discover why consumers value one CSR dimension over another. By using a qualitative approach, researchers can obtain suggestions directly from consumers about how to cater to their CSR desires. Such findings could create valuable information for businesses about why they should implement various CSR initiatives into their practices.

The results of this study could lead to further investigation of the topic of generational differences in CSR perceptions. Although this study found that no statistically significant difference exists between the CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers, results provide specific data about the preferences of Generation X'ers. Future researchers may examine the CSR perceptions of other generations. As the need for market segmentation continues to grow, more researchers will have the opportunity to study this topic and provide valuable information to business leaders.

In this study, the researcher examined only age cohort as a potential cause for differences in CSR perceptions. Other factors may influence CSR perceptions including gender, race, educational backgrounds, or income status. Therefore, examining other segments in future research would be beneficial to enhance the ability of a business to appeal to a more specific customer segment while meeting business objectives.

CONCLUSION

The study findings provide data about the CSR perceptions of a specific consumer segment. Business leaders can use the study findings for an informed decision-making process, based on each of Carroll's CSR dimensions. The current study could provide business leaders with valuable information regarding CSR preferences based on a theoretical foundation considered seminal in the field of management.

Results of this study indicated that people who are members of the same generation, but born in different decades have similar CSR perceptions. Although no statistically significant difference exists between the CSR perceptions of Generation X'ers, business leaders can draw conclusions about which CSR dimensions Generation X'ers as a group value most. CSR initiatives influence consumer loyalty and may result in financial gain (Pérez & Rodríguez, 2015; Shuqin, 2014). Thus, information about the preferences of Generation X may provide businesses with a sound, data-driven basis for establishing responsive CSR initiatives that may result in a competitive advantage.

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