

Communication Needs for Corporate Social Responsibility in Developing Countries: The Case of Georgia

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Increasingly, the world is recognizing the role of business ethics as their effects are manifested towards society. Accordingly, there has been a shift towards socially responsible behaviour around the world. However, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in developing countries is rarely discussed among researchers. Moreover, there is no previous scientific research on CSR in Georgia. This research here is driven by the fact that there has not before been conducted any scientific research in Georgia in order to determine consumers' requirements for information about the CSR of companies operating in the Georgian market. Thus, the presented study is important for showing consumer attitudes towards communicating CSR and it serves as a starting point to guide future studies in developing countries. The scope of this research is confined to identify Georgian consumer awareness levels about CSR, and their needs for CSR communications. The research tests the hypothesis that consumers are dissatisfied and require more communication on CSR issues. The study results supported this hypothesis. This suggests that companies operating in the Georgian market can increase consumers' satisfaction by communicating more about their CSR activities, and since consumers consider CSR as a necessity for business, companies should implement more CSR programs and inform the society about it.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), marketing, consumer, communication, Georgia, developing country

Field of Research: Marketing

1. Introduction

Among many definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility, the most important one for a company is to take into consideration the needs of all stakeholders in every stage of its activities. Marketing plays a big role in terms of finding buying requirements not only of customers, but also of all stakeholders, and to satisfy them all. Any company examined has a need to be in touch constantly with their society through marketing communications, in order to inform them about the social responsibility activities implemented by the company.

The presented article discusses the theory of the social responsibility of marketing. There is a need for marketing to develop more of a stakeholder orientation rather than a narrow customer orientation. Stakeholder orientation in marketing goes beyond markets, competitors, and channel members to understanding and addressing all stakeholder demands. Marketing communication can help in spreading positive corporate reputation through promotions, advertisements, public speeches, newsletters, or other instruments. Social responsibility can be an effective marketing tool for improving the public image of a

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Gigauri

company. It is not just profit maximization, but business survival and the satisfaction of societal needs, which are also very important. Hence, it is necessary to balance current stakeholder and societal needs with the need of the future.

Consumers are demanding that companies implement social responsibility regardless of their company size, shape or origin. Since societies around the world are facing various social problems, they expect the companies to help in solving them, using their tremendous resources effectively. Companies around the world are more and more aware of the consequences of their activities. In addition, societies are demanding socially responsible behavior, and expecting that businesses will help in resolving many societal problems. Therefore, companies use CSR strategies to meet the requirements not only of their shareholders, but also of the society as a whole.

Gradually, awareness about the advantages of CSR is increasing among companies operating in Georgia (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.). The United Nations Global Compact Initiative promotes corporate social responsibility in Georgia. But its efforts are mainly directed towards the companies. Customers are less informed in the issues regarding social responsibility, and hence, they do not demand actively socially responsible behavior from companies operating in the Georgian market. Therefore, this research was driven by the fact that there is still too little awareness about CSR in Georgia, especially on the side of consumers.

The main purpose of this research is to define demand level for CSR, and to create awareness about communication of CSR issues throughout Georgia. The scope of the research is confined to identify consumer awareness level about CSR programs of companies operating in the Georgian market. The core questions address: how sufficient is the existing information about CSR? And whether Georgian companies should implement CSR from the point of view of Georgians? The research objectives herein were to ascertain the importance of CSR communication for Georgian consumers.

Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1: Due to the lack of CSR communication strategy of companies and insufficient information about CSR in Georgia, consumers are dissatisfied and require more communication on CSR issues.

The paper reviews literature on CSR, describes research methodology, analyses results and shows research findings, and finally, presents conclusion and recommendations based on the research results, as well as limitations and future research suggestions. The paper ends with References and Appendix.

2. Literature Review

Academics and practitioners have been trying for years to establish a universal definition for corporate social responsibility (Carroll 1991), but despite many definitions (Sweeney & Coughlan 2008), there is no universal definition for CSR yet (Commission of the European Communities 2001; Schlange & Co n.d.). CSR is also known as corporate social performance, sustainable business, sustainable responsible business, (Kanji & Chopra 2010), corporate responsibility, corporate citizenship, responsible business, and corporate governance (Schlange & Co n.d.). All these terms describe responsibility of a company towards its stakeholders, and means that a company can produce an overall positive impact

Gigauri

on society, and herewith, achieve maximization of profits. According to Rowe (2005), Corporate Social Responsibility is a self-regulation presented as a way to balance the interests of business and society without expanding government intervention in the global market place.

Among the many definitions of CSR the most important objective for the company is to take into consideration the needs of all stakeholders in every stage of its operations. Marketing plays a vital role in terms of learning about the needs and wants of all stakeholders, and to meet their requirements in order to survive and achieve success. The company should be constantly in touch with their surrounding society through marketing communication in order to inform them about the CSR programs implemented by the company. According to Hockerts (2007), CSR strategy increases competitiveness, and that companies are invariably engaged in four dimensions of CSR: risk, efficiency, branding, and new markets.

The definition of CSR in a marketing context has been presented by Vaaland, Heide and Grønhaug (2008) as follows: "Corporate social responsibility is management of stakeholder concern for responsible and irresponsible acts related to environmental, ethical and social phenomena in a way that creates corporate benefit". Consequently, it is not just profit maximization but also, and more critically, business survival and the satisfaction of societal needs. Hence, it is necessary to balance current stakeholder and societal needs with those of the future. This conceptualization of corporate marketing relates to the motivations and objectives of CSR, and determines its location in the firm-stakeholder landscape (Hildebrand, Sen & Bhattacharya 2011).

A recent definition of CSR is focused on the responsibility of a company towards other stakeholders (Spence, Coles & Harris 2001; Jones 2005; Sweeney & Coughlan 2008). Organizations must listen and respond to stakeholders that form part of the organization's relationships, networks and interactions. For this reason, marketing support is of great importance in the design and implementation of corporate social responsibility in any company. CSR must reach out to many different stakeholders (Lindgreen, Swaen & Johnston 2009). Consequently, communication plays a key role in the implementation the CSR (Associated Content 2008; Wagner, Lutz & Weitz 2009). Therefore, not only CSR practice is significant for companies, but also reporting back to the society is critical (Addy 2006; Dawkins & Ngunjiri 2008; General Electric 2009; World Business Council for Sustainable Development 2001). Thus, many companies attempt to understand and meet requirements both of their consumers and of all stakeholders. Stakeholder orientation in marketing goes beyond markets, competitors, and channel members, to understanding and addressing all stakeholder demands (Maignan, Ferrel & Ferrel 2005).

According to Kanji and Chopra (2010), CSR is an effective tool for improving the public image of a company. Marketing communication helps to spread a positive corporate reputation through promotions, advertisements, public speeches, or newsletters, and other instruments. Using the CSR of a company, corporate communications can help spread the image of good corporate citizens caring about important stakeholder issues. This type of communication keeps stakeholders informed about the firm's initiatives to address specific social responsibility issues (Maignan, Ferrel & Ferrel 2005).

According to Waller and Lanis (2009), the corporate annual report has become more than a mandatory financial report for companies, and many companies also use it as an important marketing tool. Webpages of companies are seen also as a tool for reporting about CSR activities. According to Lee, Fairhurst and Wesley (2009), corporate webpages have

Gigauri

emerged as a tool for communicating messages to various constituencies, as well as to share information. In a comparative study of corporate self-presentations on the internet, it was found that while 53 percent of U.S. companies mention CSR explicitly on their websites, only 29 percent of French and 25 percent of Dutch companies do the same (Matten & Moon 2008).

Studies confirm the overall positive effect of CSR on consumer attitudes and supports towards a company (Vaaland, Heide & Grønhaug 2008; Berens, van Riel & van Bruggen 2002). A number of surveys confirm that consumers in many countries increasingly use ethical criteria in their purchasing decisions. Moreover, socially responsible consumption has also grown. These developments have attracted the attention of researchers. However, most studies are conducted on the mature markets in the developed countries, and CSR in the emerging economies has been neglected (Yan & She 2011).

Developed countries have been showing increasing interests in CSR issues, but there is insufficient literature concerning CSR growth in the developing countries (Idemudia 2011). Studies in developing countries have demonstrated that consumers are often unaware and unsupportive towards CSR, but in developed countries, on the contrary, most consumers are willing to support CSR initiatives launched by corporations (Arli & Lasmono 2010).

According to Porter and Kramer (2006), CSR is much more than expenses or just philanthropy. On the contrary, CSR can be a profitable resource. This perspective emphasizes CSR as an essential and growing effect on the choice of marketing strategies, especially in terms of its impact on consumer values (Piercy & Lane 2009; Porter & Kramer 2006). Thus, CSR can be a source of competitive advantage, and consequently, a significant corporate capital (Piercy & Lane 2009).

As we have seen from the literature review, most studies on CSR address the developed countries, and there are a limited number of studies in this field in developing countries. Consequently, the communication needs of consumers for CSR are not known there. Besides, since company webpages are an important tool for communicating also CSR messages in mature markets, it needs to be found out whether this channel is preferable also in developing markets, and namely, for Georgian consumers. Moreover, the literature review demonstrated that communication plays a significant role in the implementation the CSR programs to keep stakeholders informed in this issue, however, there is a gap in theory whether consumers consider information about CSR sufficient and whether they are satisfied or not in less mature markets. There are no previous academic studies of this question in Georgia. Thus, this research aims to fill this gap and provide more data about CSR in Georgia.

3. Research and Methodology

The research method of this study was exploratory in nature, in the sense that there has been no previous academic research about consumers' perception of social responsibility in Georgia, to guide this study. The research was descriptive, and a quantitative research method was used. The study was conducted in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 2012. Respondents were selected by use of a purposive sampling method. Data were gathered by means of surveys.

Nonprobability purposive sampling was chosen for this research due to its low costs, flexibility and simplicity. In addition, it allowed collection of much information, quickly. The

Gigauri

respondents participating in the research were more or less informed about the corporate social responsibility, and expressed their interest in CSR issues.

The survey was conducted through self-administrated questionnaires sent by email. The major benefits of an email survey included the speed of distribution, quick response time, and lower costs. Seven hundred questionnaires were sent by email and 420 of them replied, allowing a response rate of 60 percent. Twelve of them were not suitable for analysis, since they were not fully completed.

The questionnaire sought the respondents' information level regarding CSR, information sources for social responsibility of a company, and respondents' attitudes toward the CSR of Georgian companies. The final section of the questionnaire gathered demographic information from the respondents, including gender, age, education, income level, occupation, and social category.

A five-point Likert scale, a ten-point Stapel scale, and a seven-point semantic differential scale were used in the questionnaire. After coding the questions, computer software was used to analyze the received answers. The research results were analyzed using MS Excel 2011 and statistic software SPSS 15.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics, frequency analysis, cross tabulation, as well as Oneway Anova were used. Confidence interval was 95%. Finally, the results were visualized with charts.

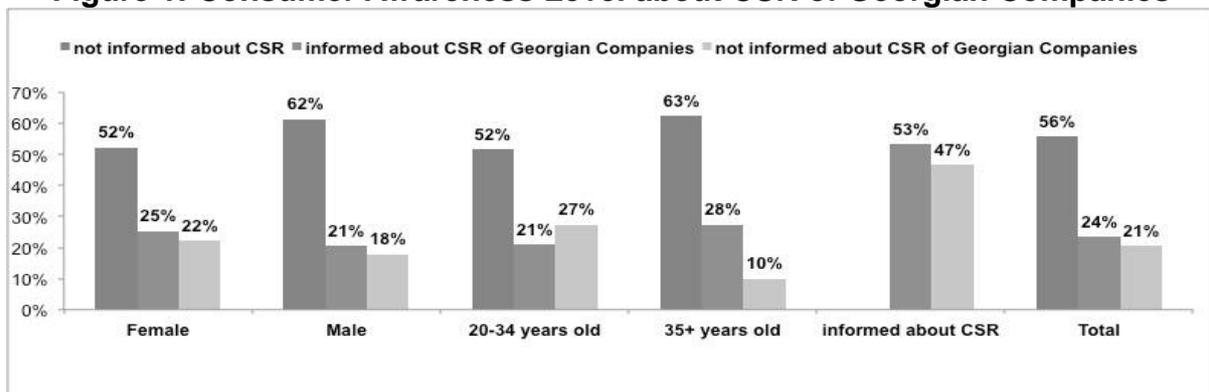
The conducted study has improved the CSR research state in developing countries. One of the contributions of this research is its effect on CSR theory in developing or transitional countries such as Georgia is. In addition, this research can facilitate scientists in their further studies in this field using this research experience.

4. Evaluations and Findings

4.1 Consumer Awareness Level about CSR of Georgian Companies

In order to determine the awareness level of consumers about the CSR of companies operating in the Georgian market, the respondents were asked to answer whether they had ever heard about the corporate social responsibility of Georgian companies. There were only two options offered "yes" and "no". As the results showed, 53% of respondents had heard about the corporate social responsibility of Georgian companies. Most of them were women. As for age category, 35 years old and elder respondents were more informed about it than younger respondents (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Consumer Awareness Level about CSR of Georgian Companies

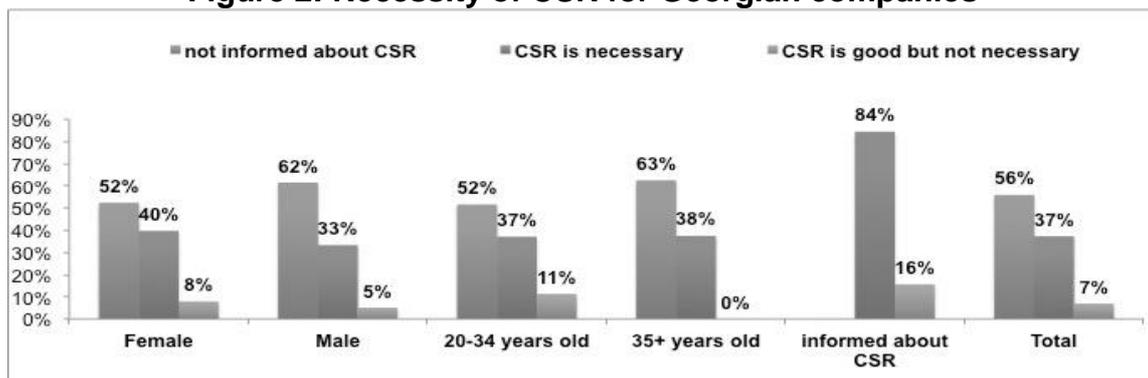


Gigauri

Most respondents (84%) thought that it is necessary that companies operating in the Georgian market should implement CSR. Whereas the insignificant part of them (7%) said that CSR was good, but not a necessity. None of them considered CSR as useless. 40% of women regarded the CSR of Georgian companies as necessary activities, and 33% of men agreed with it.

The results within the age groups were almost the same. 37% of 24-34 years old respondents and 38% of elder respondents shared the opinion that it was necessary that Georgian companies implement CSR. While a small number of 20-34 years old respondents (11%) considered CSR as an unnecessary activity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Necessity of CSR for Georgian companies



In sum, most consumers participating in the survey were of the opinion, that Georgian companies have corporate social responsibility.

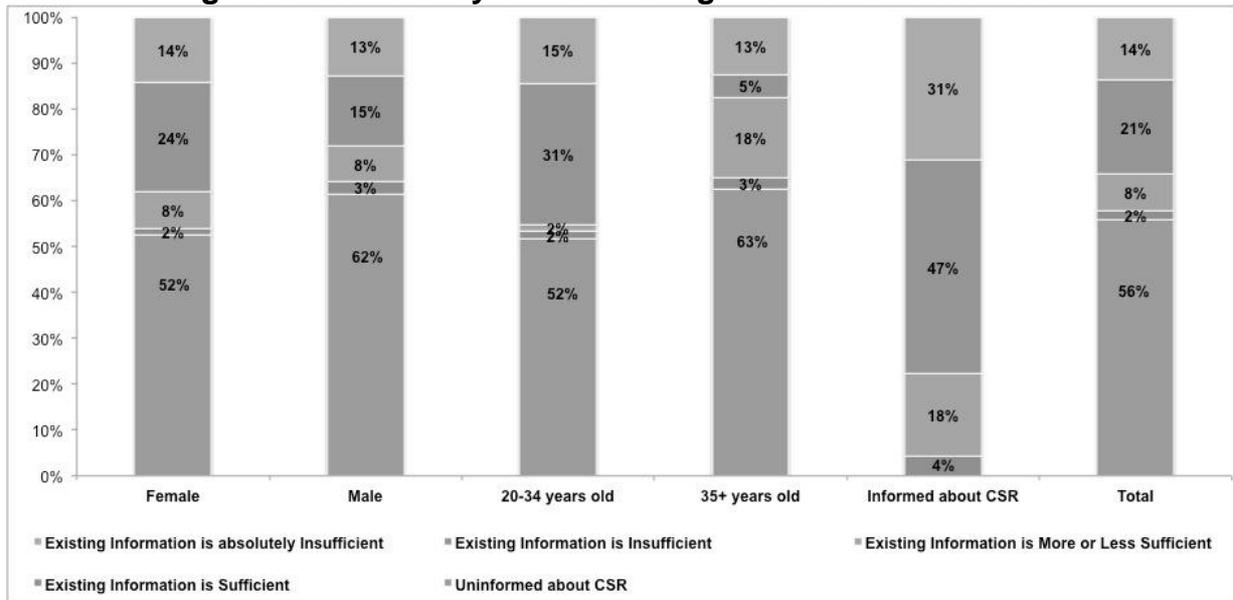
4.2 Sufficiency of the Existing Information on CSR

As the study has demonstrated, the existing information on social responsibility is insufficient or absolutely insufficient. However some respondents still think that the available information is sufficient. Respondent opinions differed in categories of age and sex. 14% of women and 13% of men considered the existing information about CSR as absolutely insufficient while 24% of women and 15% of men thought it as insufficient. Only 2% of women and 3% of men believed that the existing information was sufficient.

15% of the young respondents of 20-34 years old, and 13% of the elder respondents (35+) thought that the existing information about CSR was absolutely insufficient. But 2% of 20-34 years old respondents and 18% of 35 years and elder respondents considered the information on CSR as more or less sufficient. The existing information about CSR is sufficient only for 2% of 20-34 years old respondents, and for 3% of 35 years old and elder respondents (see Figure 3).

Gigauri

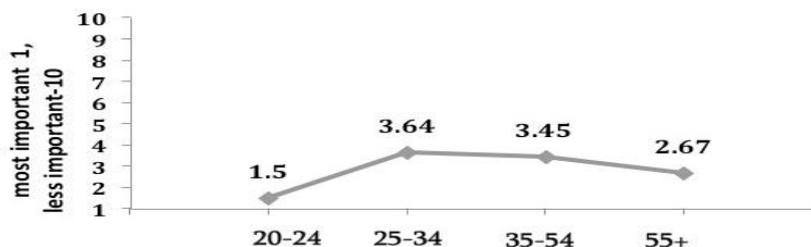
Figure 3: Sufficiency of the existing information about CSR



According to the analysis, information about corporate social responsibility is insufficient or absolutely insufficient. Consequently, there is a need for transferring information through communication campaigns. Georgian companies need to inform consumers about their planned or implemented CSR activities through the information sources they prefer to disseminate such news. Since Georgian consumers demand more information in order to increase their awareness about CSR at a higher level, companies should meet their needs to keep their consumers satisfied.

Furthermore, in order to determine how important is the accessibility of information about CSR of Georgian companies to Georgian consumers, respondents were asked to rate the statement on a 10-point scale, where the most important was rated with 1 and the least important with 10. The results were analyzed through One-way Anova. As the analysis has demonstrated, the accessibility to information about CSR is most important for 20-24 years old respondents. Although analysis has showed the difference among age groups of respondents in perception of importance of information accessibility about CSR, all of them still think that information about CSR of companies must be open and available. The answers of respondents have been distributed in the diagram, below the statistical average, which means that they did not rate this statement above 5 on the 10-point scale (see Diagram 1), and therefore, they considered the accessibility to information about CSR as an important factor.

Diagram 1: Importance of accessibility to information about CSR



Gigauri

In addition, One-way Anova ascertained the importance of information accessibility about CSR, and since chi-square is equal to 0.004 the research is statistically valid. Furthermore, One-way Anova determined whether there were any significant differences between the age groups or sex (see Table 1).

Table 1: ANOVA of Importance of accessibility to information about CSR among groups

Age Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
20-24	4.5	3.307	0.827	2.74	6.26	2	10
25-34	4	2.94	0.294	3.42	4.58	1	9
35-54	3.83	3.497	0.505	2.82	4.85	1	10
35+	7.33	1.969	0.569	6.08	8.58	6	10
Total	4.23	3.178	0.24	3.75	4.7	1	10
ONEWAY ANOVA							
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. χ^2		
Between Groups	129.576	3	43.192	4.537	0.004		
Within Groups	1637.333	172	9.519				
Total	1766.909	175					

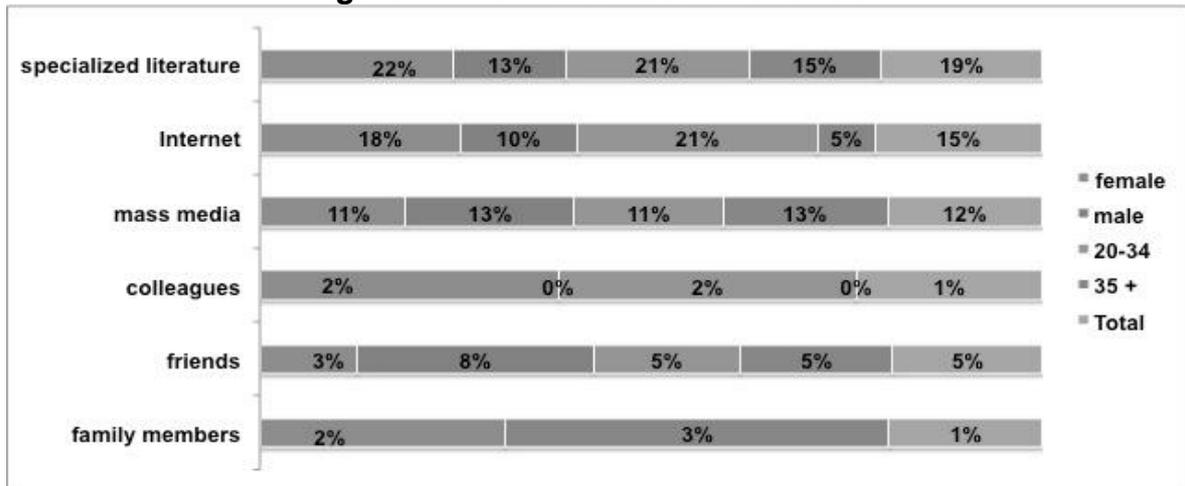
As the research shows, companies operating in the Georgian market need to publish information about their CSR activities openly. Herewith, they should make the information available for consumers of all age groups.

4.3 Communication Channels for CSR in Georgia

According to the research, there is, generally, less information about corporate social responsibility in Georgia. This result suggests that there is a need of more communication about the issues regarding CSR. Therefore, the research was also interested in finding of information sources from which consumers receive information about the social responsibility of a company. Consequently, respondents were asked to name the information sources from which they have learned about CSR. According to the analysis, the majority of respondents named a specialized literature, the next often-named information source was the Internet followed by the mass media. Some respondents noted that they have learned about CSR from friends, colleagues or family members. Besides the specialized literature, the most of female respondents have known about social responsibility from the Internet while males mainly received information from the mass media (see Figure 4).

Gigauri

Figure 4: Information Sources for CSR

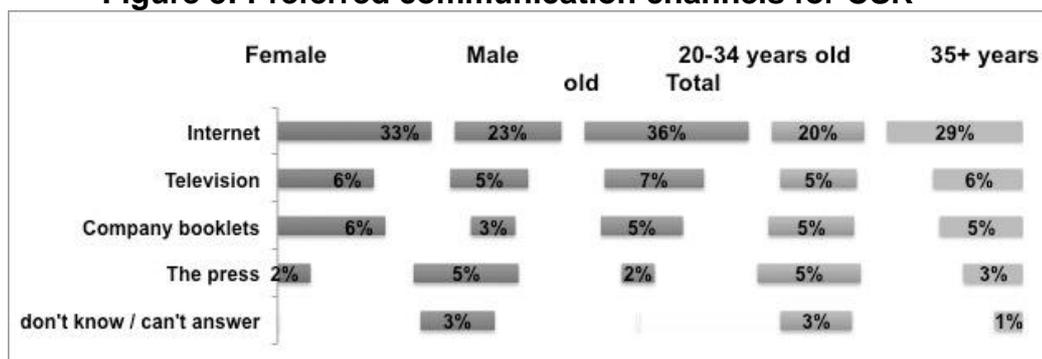


As the research demonstrates, the Georgian consumers use the specialized literature (22%), Internet (18%), and mass media (11%) as the main sources for getting information about CSR. Only few of them mentioned friends (3%), colleagues (2%), and family members (2%) among information sources about CSR. Accordingly, specialized literature including company booklets, the Internet and mass media including television, are the key communication channels to spread information about a company's social responsibility activities.

The research showed that when Georgian consumers look for the information about CSR they trust mostly to the Internet (19%), followed by television (6%) and booklets of a company (5%). The least preferred information channel is the press (i.e. newspapers), which was named only by 3% of respondents.

As for age groups, there are not a big difference between the preferences of young people between 20 and 34 years old and elders. Both of them trust mainly to the Internet (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Preferred communication channels for CSR



5. Conclusion

There is a shift towards social responsible and ethical behavior around the world. Corporate Social Responsibility as a declared strategy contributes to the sustainable development of a company, and prepares it for global competitive advantages. Consumers are more and more concerned about the social and ethical consequences of their purchases. Gradually, both companies and consumers are interested in Corporate Social Responsibility, as well in

Gigauri

Georgia too. However, there is still less awareness of CSR here as in other emerging economies. This research was interested in identifying the level of awareness of CSR among Georgian consumers. The research aimed at studying the need of information about CSR. It ascertained that consumers in Georgia, as in other developing countries, according to Arli and Lesmono (2010), are less informed about CSR, and hence, demand more information. Yet, if companies operating in Georgia develop, implement and communicate CSR, they can gain customer loyalty. Consequently, they can maintain their positions in markets, and achieve a long-term success. Effective communication of CSR can facilitate in product positioning in the market, also.

The study has proven the hypothesis that consumers in Georgia are dissatisfied with their awareness level on CSR issues, and require more communication from companies about it. The results suggest that the society in Georgia is less informed about the corporate social responsibility. Those consumers who are aware about CSR have received information from the specialized literature, Internet or mass media. Among the preferred communication channels for CSR, consumers mainly trust to the Internet, television as well as company booklets. Thus, companies engaging in CSR should undertake communication campaigns in order to increase awareness of the issues regarding social responsibility among consumers. For this purpose, the Internet should be used as an effective and the most preferable communication channel to spread information about the CSR programs implementing by the companies operating in Georgia. Such information can be used instead of a traditional advertising to gain more loyal consumers.

The research findings suggest that Georgian consumers trust the Internet mostly in order to receive information about the CSR programs of companies. Company booklets and television are following it, and the press is named as the less trusty communication channel. It is noteworthy that the preferences in information sources do not differ considerably among age groups or by sex. Thus, as many companies in developed countries mention CSR in their websites, according to Matten and Moon (2008), Georgian companies can also use this tool to communicate CSR and increase corporate self-presentations on the Internet.

According to the research, consumers are dissatisfied with their awareness level about social responsibility, and note that the existing information on CSR is insufficient. However, they believe that companies operating in the Georgian market should implement activities regarding social responsibility, and they consider CSR as a necessity for business. Thus, the study results suggest that Georgian consumers will support companies with CSR more, and effective communication can gain more satisfied customers for business in Georgia. Hence, CSR can be a good strategy for companies operating in Georgia when properly communicated.

This research has conformed to Wagner, Lutz and Weitz (2009) suggesting that communication plays a main role in the implementation of the CSR. Therefore, not only CSR practice is important for companies but also keeping the society informed, as other scientists have proposed as well (Addy, 2006; Dawkins & Ngunjiri 2008; General Electric 2009; World Business Council for Sustainable Development 2001).

Since consumers are less informed about social responsibility, companies need to develop marketing strategies to increase consumers' perception of CSR, and therefore attract more customers that will lead to their success on the market. CSR could help companies operating in the Georgian market in product positioning and differentiation, as well as achieving competitive advantages through CSR communication programs.

Gigauri

Furthermore, companies need to listen and respond to consumers' needs, a company should be constantly in touch with its surrounding society through marketing communication in order to inform them about the CSR programs implemented by the company. Since consumers consider CSR as a necessity for a company, and demand more information about CSR programs, companies should take into account these results, and plan their marketing activities accordingly.

Moreover, CSR might become more important for consumers in case they were more informed through those communication channels that they prefer. As research results show, consumers trust the Internet to be informed about CSR activities, so companies should use their Webpages to communicate with the consumers.

As a result of the research analysis, it is recommended for Georgian companies to develop CSR programs, implement them, and continuously communicate to the customers to increase their satisfaction. Besides, companies should develop CSR communication strategies to spread positive messages about social responsibility for gaining stakeholder loyalty and establishing long-term relationships with them. Additionally, companies should conduct information campaigns about CSR, which will increase both consumer awareness level and loyalty to the company and its products. Finally, companies should put into practice the CSR experience of developed countries in this field.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research Avenues

This study has some potential limitations, so that this research can be extended in many ways. One limitation of this study concerns its limited samples - a convenience sample was used and, consequently, conclusions are based on limited information. In addition, all data were self-reported and may reflect biases. From the demographic viewpoint, the most respondents were women, which could cause a bias in this term too. Besides, the research was related to perception, which means that there might be differences between consumer perception or intention and their real behaviors. These limitations await further research.

A further study can find out which component of CSR is more demanded by customers, as well as develop the most effective communication strategy for CSR. Researchers also might consider the role of the fit of CSR to a particular social group. Moreover, the further research should address CSR from the point of view of business, whether managers of companies operating in the Georgian market take into account CSR in their strategy, product design or marketing activities.

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Gigauri

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Gigauri

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Gigauri

Appendix

Questionnaire used for this research (*translated from Georgian*)

1. Have you heard anything about the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of Georgian companies? (please mark)

yes	
no	

2. What is your attitude towards CSR of Georgian companies?

CSR is necessary	
CSR is good but not necessary	
CSR is unnecessary	

3. How sufficient is the existing information about CSR?

The existing information is sufficient	
The existing information is more or less sufficient	
The existing information is not sufficient	
The existing information is absolutely insufficient	

4. How did you get information about CSR? (please mark)

from friends	
from colleagues	
from family members	
from specialized literature (booklets, reference books, etc.)	
from mass media	
from the Internet	
from other sources (please indicate)	

5. While selecting information about CSR, which communication channels do you prefer?

Television	
The press	
Radio	
Internet	
Company booklets	
don't know/ can't answer	

6. Please rate how important is the following statement for you:
(if it is the most important mark 1, if it is the least important -10)
"Information about CSR is accessible".

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Information about CSR is accessible										

Gigauri

7. Please indicate: your sex

male	<input type="checkbox"/>
female	<input type="checkbox"/>

your age:

20-24	<input type="checkbox"/>
25-34	<input type="checkbox"/>
35-54	<input type="checkbox"/>
above 55	<input type="checkbox"/>