Corporate Social Responsibility, Perceived Customer Value, and Customer-Based Brand Equity: A Cross-National Comparison

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Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts are widely discussed in literature and are often part of organizations' promotion, mission statements and objectives, while gaining increasing awareness in the field of strategic marketing and management. Despite this emphasis, little research has addressed the effect of CSR on important value creating factors such as perceived customer value and customer-based brand equity. This paper discusses the impact of CSR efforts on those two concepts (i.e., perceived customer value and customer-based brand equity), as well as the mediating relation between them based on an experimental questionnaire survey. In addition, the analysis includes a cross-national comparison of the results collected in the United States and Germany. The results of the analysis indicate a significant impact of CSR efforts on perceived customer value and customer-based brand equity, while customer-based brand equity mediates the relation between CSR and perceived customer value. An impact of nationality on the relationship could not be supported. Implications for research and management are included.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR)—voluntary social and environmental efforts of a company—is one of the most discussed and influential strategic business tools in the 21st century (Holstein 2008; Kanter 2010; Karnani 2010; *The Economist* 2009). Although many 20th century managers regarded CSR efforts as charitable activities devoted to a company's external environment, the modern perception of CSR efforts has evolved into recognizing CSR efforts as a value-creating tool embedded in the overall strategy of a company (e.g., Carroll 2008; Lee 2008). Indeed, CSR has become increasingly popular especially within the past decade, which has led to augmented use of CSR as a strategic marketing

(Golob, Lah, & Jančič 2008; Piercy and Lane 2009) and management (Porter and Kramer 2006; Maon, Lindgreen, & Swaen 2008) tool. More and more successful and well-known companies use CSR as a strategic tool for purposes of differentiation and value creation (nexxar 2010), but even small- and medium-sized enterprises have adopted CSR to position themselves (Jenkins 2009; Retolaza, Ruiz, & San-Jose 2009).

Given CSR's increasing relevance from a strategic point of view, a rich body of research exists investigating the influence of CSR on firms' financial metrics (e.g., Economists Intelligence Unit 2008; Godfrey, Merrill, & Hansen 2009; Mackey, Mackey, & Barney 2007; Menz 2010). For example, the Economists Intelligence Unit (2008) found that, on average, firms having a strong CSR commitment experienced profit improvement of 16 percent as well as share price increases of 45 percent within a three-year period, compared with 7 percent and 12 percent, respectively, for companies without strong commitment to CSR. Withal, skeptics question the value of investing in CSR efforts (e.g., Sternberg 1994; *The Economist* 2005), as some tend to embrace Milton Friedman's (1970, p. 122) credo that "[t]he social responsibility of business is to increase its profits." In fact, Menz (2010) concluded that risk premium was higher for socially responsible firms than for non-socially responsible firms.

The corporate business strategy of a company concentrates on the overall purpose and scope of the business to meet stakeholder expectations and is seen as fundamental because it is profoundly affected by business investors and helps guide strategic decision-making throughout a company (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington 2008). CSR efforts should be consistent with a company's corporate strategy to support a successful implementation and to gain consumers trust (e.g., Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill 2006; Deigendesch 2009; Levy 1999; Piercy & Lane 2009; Porter & Kramer 2006; Vlachos et al. 2009).

Although management is under heightened pressure to respond to excelsior demands for improved social and environmental responsibility (Kanter 2010), the overall impact of CSR efforts on a company remains inconclusive (Vogel 2006). In addition, there is a paucity of empirical research that examines the influence of CSR efforts on key *marketing* dimensions. Understanding basic factors underlying and supporting CSR's potential to create value for both customers and companies simultaneously is critical for managers.

Owing to the foregoing situation, as well as the admonition by Peloza, and Shang (2011a) to explore the influence of CSR on consumer perceived value, a study was designed to examine the influence of CSR efforts from a strategic marketing and management perspective. Specifically, the investigation explored two research questions:

1. What impact do CSR efforts have on the value consumers perceive (i.e., perceived customer value—PCV) and customer-based brand equity (CBBE)?
2. Does an individual's nationality influence the impact of CSR efforts on PCV and CBBE?

The current research focuses on CSR efforts in a strategic marketing as well as strategic management domains, thus offering implications for academics, managers, and marketers by showing the value creation potential of CSR vis-à-vis PCV and CBBE in a *cross-national* context (justification for these perspectives is subsequently provided). Accordingly, the study offers insights into how CSR efforts have the potential to create value for both customers and companies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR efforts have been analyzed from diverse perspectives. For instance, finance research has dealt chiefly with the relationship between CSR efforts and corporate financial performance. The linkage between CSR efforts and a company's financial success has, at least in theory, shown a linkage (Lee 2008). Marketing researchers, on the other hand, have focused primarily on the impact of CSR efforts on consumer reactions as well as on optimization of CSR efforts based on customer expectations and

perceptions in the business-to-customer (B2C) (e.g., Golob et al. 2008; Marin, Ruiz, & Rubio 2009; Russel & Russel 2010; Vlachos et al. 2009), as well as in the business-to-business (B2B) (e.g., Lai, Chiu, Yang, & Pai 2010) markets. Also, in other functional areas CSR efforts have gained importance. For example, in the area of human resources management, CSR efforts are viewed as a means for attracting employees as well as for identifying best practice methods to implement CSR in the work force (e.g., Strandberg 2009).

Managers focus on the importance of CSR efforts as a value-creation opportunity, which implies a perceptual change from the "right thing to do" toward the "smart thing to do" (Smith 2003). Porter and Kramer (2006, p. 80) stated that if "…corporations were to analyze their prospects for social responsibility using the same frameworks that guide their core business choices, they would discover that CSR can be much more than a cost, a constraint, or a charitable deed—it can be a source of opportunity, innovation, and competitive advantage." CSR efforts are related to three main areas: company processes, company outcomes, and external outcomes (Network for Business Sustainability 2010). Hence, investing in social or environmental sustainability can be advantageous for a company's environment while simultaneously creating economic value for the firm.

Given that strategic marketing is a tool to make decisions regarding *customer value* and is within the boundaries of corporate and business strategy (Nijssen & Frambach 2001), crucial to understanding CSR efforts in the context of strategic marketing is the identification of opportunities for more effective competitive positioning in key market segments through enhanced customer value (Piercy & Lane 2009). Tying a company's operating objectives and values with its CSR efforts increases the company's reliability by indicating proactive and socially motivated intentions (Becker-Olsen et al. 2006). The perception that a company gets involved because of the desire to help a given cause or to build relationships with customers, rather than for purposes of garnering excessive profits, results in consumers' enhanced willingness to switch to that company (Ellen et al. 2006).

Because of the change in the perception of CSR from a me-too activity toward a value-creating strategic marketing tool, more and more companies try to implement CSR consciously within their strategic positioning process (e.g., Piercy & Lane 2009). CEOs view more demanding customers as an opportunity to differentiate themselves instead of perceiving them as a scourge. Therefore, they spend more on attracting and retaining increasingly prosperous, informed, and socially aware customers by focusing on creating new revenue streams, as well as new strategic competitive advantages (IBM 2008a). Indeed, CSR efforts are said to improve long-term customer loyalty, legitimacy, trust, and brand equity (e.g., Godfrey & Hatch 2007) (see Sen & Bhattachar [2001] and Torelli, Monga, & Kaikati [2012] for exceptions).

CSR and Perceived Customer Value

PCV is the result of a company's activities in meeting or exceeding standards of competition (McEvely & Chakravarthy 2002). Alternatively, researchers (e.g., Piercy & Lane 2009; Zeithaml, 1988) have stated that PCV is a customer's overall assessment of the utility of a product or service based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. Such broader definitions of PCV and its components enable scholars to focus on differing perceptions of value components in consumers' minds. Therefore, this study refers to PCV as the unique offer made to a company's customers, with all its hard and soft dimensions, and therefore as the cynosure of how a company seeks to differentiate itself from competitors (Piercy & Lane 2009).

A company offering superior PCV can create a competitive advantage in the market and hence has the capability to create additional value for the company itself. On the other hand, companies incapable of innovatively combining and leveraging their resources and capabilities to create additional value for customers will likely experience subpar performance (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson 2009). Added customer value can foster a strong bond between the consumer and the company, leading to, for example, repeat or even exclusive purchases, referrals, and reduced effectiveness of competitors' blandishments (Butz & Goodstein 1996).

Although creating customer value is seen as a major aim of strategic marketing, limited knowledge about how CSR efforts affect PCV exists. Companies often show a poor understanding of their customers' real concerns toward social and environmental issues and base their decisions mainly on assumptions. Alternatively, high-performing companies tend to evince deeper understanding of such issues (Pohle & Hittner 2008). Only limited theoretical research exists explaining the impact of CSR efforts on PCV (e.g., Piercy & Lane 2009; Peloza & Shang 2011a) and minimal concomitant empirical research to support these relationships. Nevertheless, existing findings reveal the importance of embedding CSR in strategic decision making. Indeed, Peloza, and Shang (2011b) stated that CSR efforts have the potential to enhance PCV.

H1:   A company with a greater degree of perceived CSR efforts will have higher perceived customer value than will a company with a lower degree of perceived CSR efforts.

CSR and Customer-Based Brand Equity
    Brand equity can be defined as a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds or subtracts from the value provided by a product or service to a company and/or that company's customers (Aaker 1991, 1996; Mudambi, Doyle, & Wong 1997; Srivastava & Shocker 1991). Brand equity is of keen interest to firms. From a marketing point of view, brand equity influences attitudes and behaviors of customers, thus enhancing various metrics of company performance (Dunn 2004; Knowles 2008). From a financial perspective, brand equity involves the ability to generate augmented cash flow (Dunn 2004; Knowles 2008). From an accounting focus, brand equity is of interest as part of "marketing-related assets" (i.e., an umbrella category for brand-related intellectual property) (Knowles 2008). Furthermore, it is seen as a relevant factor of a firm's risk management efforts (Rego, Billett, & Morgan 2009).
    CBBE can be defined as the strength a brand gains or loses based on what value perceptions resides in customers' minds (Aaker 1991). This value is adapted from what customers have felt, learned, seen, or heard about a brand as a result of their experiences over time (e.g., Aaker 1991; Keller 1993; Vázquez, Belén del Rio, & Iglesias 2002). Typical dimensions of CBBE are, for example, brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Yoo & Donthu 1997).
    Placing companies' CSR efforts in the context of brand leadership, Deigendesch (2009) proposed the following:

> If corporate social responsibility is understood to be core competencies, which strengthen intangible and temporarily inimitable assets such as integrity, credibility, reputation, and human or social capital, it enables companies to create innovation, develop new markets, clearly differentiate themselves from competitors, or influence the competitive environment to their benefit […] when it becomes an integral element of a company's strategy […]. In this light, CSR must be viewed from the perspective of successful brands.

    Few researchers have focused on the impact of CSR efforts on brand equity (e.g., Hoeffler & Keller 2002; Lai et al. 2010; Nan & Heo 2007; Torres, Bijmolt, & Tribó 2010), but some evidence supports a positive relationship between a company's CSR efforts and its CBBE.

H2:   A company with a greater degree of perceived CSR efforts will have higher customer-based brand equity than will a company with a lower degree of perceived CSR efforts.

Association between Perceived Customer Value and Customer-Based Brand Equity
    A credible brand signal can foster PCV by reducing perceived risk and information search costs, as well as by creating favorable attitudes (Erdem & Swait 1998). CBBE affects PCV by adding value to or subtracting value from a product or service. If perceived of as credible, the brand signal creates further

PCV by reducing perceived risk and information search costs, as well as increasing favorable attitudes. Accordingly, there likely exists an impact of CBBE on PCV.

H3:   The greater the customer-based brand equity, the higher the perceived customer value.

This study also focused on the possibility that PCV is a mediator of CBBE and that CBBE is a mediator of PCV. This possibility is predicated on the conceptual definitions of the relationship between PCV and CBBE (noted earlier) and on the need to examine the reciprocal relationship between customer value and brand equity, per Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000). Furthermore, based on extant theoretical and empirical support for H1, H2, and H3, CBBE is expected to mediate the relationship between a company's CSR efforts and PCV.

H4:   Customer-based brand equity mediates the relationship between a company's CSR efforts and its perceived customer value.

As an alternative to the foregoing, Aaker (1991) averred that a brand gains or loses strength based on what value perception resides in the customer's mind. That is, CBBE not only affects PCV, but PCV also influences CBBE (Christodoulides & de Charnatony 2010; Swait, Tulin, & Louviere 1993; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee 2008). As such, PCV is expected to have an impact on changes in CBBE based on higher or lower perceived value of the products or services the company offers (Christodoulides & de Charnatony 2010; Swait, Tulin, & Louviere 1993; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee 2008). As Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010, p. 61) concluded: "Understanding brand equity is about understanding customer value within a particular situational context and level of co-producing value."

H5:   Perceived customer value mediates the relationship between a company's CSR efforts and its customer-based brand equity.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Cross-National Comparisons
Culture can have a significant impact on how individuals perceive or react to CSR efforts. For example, Sison (2009, p. 235) averred:

> … Anglo-American culture may be described as individualistic, legalistic, pragmatist and with an understanding of rights as freedom from state intervention. Continental European culture, on the other hand, is more community oriented, more dependent on unwritten laws or customs, less results driven or more appreciative of the intrinsic value of activities and with an understanding of rights as freedom to participate in social goods and decisions.

For instance, the United States is said to be *more reluctant* to accept the view of the company as a socially-embedded institution; in Continental Europe, however, this concept is *embraced* regardless of the situation (Sison 2009). Maignan (2001) stated that the United States seems less willing to actively support responsible business practices compared with France or Germany, thus presumably indicating differences in CSR perceptions across countries. However, Meyer-Larsen (2000) argued that managers in Germany have grown up much more with Anglicized-American management models and sojourns in the United States than did their predecessors and are thus showing a shift in company policies vis-à-vis CSR, among other areas. Given that empirical work has not investigated cross-national influences on CSR since the early 2000s, examining contemporary differences across countries seemingly merits attention owing to the perpetual dynamism in cultural beliefs and attitudes.[1]

H6:   Nationality moderates the relationship between a company's CSR efforts and its perceived customer value in industrial countries.

H7:   Nationality moderates the relationship between a company's CSR efforts and its customer-based brand equity in industrial countries.

METHOD

The Sample
    The sample consisted of individuals from the United States and Germany. These two nations were selected as the sampling frame based on (a) the work of Hofstede (subsequently discussed) and (b) the aforementioned research of Maignan (2001) and Sison (2009). Efforts of these foregoing scholars indicate crucial differences between U.S. and German individuals that might affect their perceptions of CSR efforts.

Potential Differences between U.S. and German People
    Reflecting a complex phenomenon, frameworks or models of culture have been developed to help enhance understanding (e.g., Hall 1977, 1983, 1987; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998). Culture is learned and shared among a group of people. Individuals from a particular culture manifest similar norms and values. One of the most famous studies of culture was performed by Hofstede (2001). It has been replicated many times with diverse samples in different settings (see Hill 2003). Accordingly, the Hofstede framework was used in the present study. Hofstede averred that nations differ on certain key dimensions. The United States and Germany differ substantially on two of them (www.cyborlink.com/besite/hofstede.htm).
    Per Hofstede (www.cyborlink.com/besite/hofstede.htm), the United States is much *more individualistic* than is Germany. In more individualistic-oriented cultures self-interest is paramount, people expect to take care of themselves, and there is an emphasis on individual achievement. However, in *more collectivist-directed* cultures people have enhanced concern with group interests than with individual interests. Interdependence among group members to assure success of the whole is crucial. The impact of CSR typically is long run and directed at being salubrious for society at large (Vogel 2005). Such effects are likely to be more auspicious for a nation (a` la group) as a whole and less likely to benefit any one individual. Therefore, CSR efforts are conceivably perceived more favorably in Germany than in the United States.
    Moreover, per Hofstede (www.cyborlink.com/besite/hofstede.htm), individuals in the United States exhibit relatively lower levels of *uncertainty avoidance* compared with their German counterparts. As such, U.S. individuals have more tolerance for ambiguous situations than those in Germany. In lower uncertainty avoidance cultures, there is greater acceptance of dissent and risk taking. In higher uncertainty avoidance cultures, however, people are threatened by ambiguous situations, and there is a strong need for consensus. German people feel more comfortable with explicitly stated rules and regulations. The government in the United States essentially does not mandate CSR efforts, thus affording equivocality regarding whether companies implement CSR. Governments in Europe (such as in Germany), though, have sought to apply pressure on firms to undertake CSR activities. This pressure has often been in the form of explicit directives or fiats or use of moral suasion (Corporate Sustainability Reporting 2010), thus removing potential ambiguity for companies in Germany regarding CSR efforts.
    Also, as noted earlier, relative to Continental Europeans, individuals in the United States are much less likely to accept the perspective that an organization is a socially-embedded institution (Sison 2009), thus necessitating less of a need to engage in CSR efforts. Indeed, Maignan (2001) found support for this supposition when examining individuals in the United States, France, and Germany. Thus, the influence of CSR efforts vis-à-vis U.S. and German people are likely to vary.

Sample Characteristics
    A total of 397 students participated in the final study; 198 from a southwestern university in the United States and 199 from several universities in southwestern Germany. [2] Students taking part in the pretest phase were excluded from the final data collection. Owing to inconsistency (e.g., incomplete

information, non-fulfillment of sample criteria), 89 responses were excluded from the study. The final sample consisted of 308 participants, with 150 students from the United States—87 males (58%) and 63 females (42%) with an average age of 23—and 158 students from Germany—87 males (55%) and 71 females (45%) with an average age of 24.

Overview of the Study

The design of this study was a 2 (high CSR efforts vs. low CSR efforts) x 2 (United States vs. Germany) between-subject, full factorial design. The independent variables were CSR and nationality. CSR was manipulated; nationality was measured. The dependent variables were PCV and CBBE.

A seven-point Likert-type scale was used in the questionnaire (*reverse coding* ranged from 1 = strongly agree to 7 = strongly disagree). Sample respondents were given either the English or German questionnaire according to their country of residence. In the United States, questionnaires were self-administered to students during class. For the German sample, data collection entailed use of a link to the online questionnaire that was sent via e-mail to students.

Experimental Materials

An English language scenario and English language questionnaire were developed and examined for wording and face validity of the questions by two English-speaking marketing researchers. For the purpose of the cross-national comparison, back-translation procedures as suggested by Malhotra, Agarwal, and Peterson (1996) were utilized for all materials in the cover letter and questionnaire to ensure equivalence of translation. The experimental booklet was first translated from English into German by a bilingual speaker whose native language is German. The translated experimental booklet was then translated back into English from German by another bilingual speaker whose native language is English. (The English version of the scenario and questionnaire booklet appear in the appendix.)

CSR Manipulation

The scenario—a fictional sports apparel and shoe manufacturer—was used as the context of the experiment for two key reasons. First, according to Simon and Sullivan (1993), both sports apparel and shoes are used on a regular basis for functional purposes and as fashion statements. Second, because sports apparel and shoes are visible to others and tend to be relatively expensive, consumers in general consider them as high-involvement products; thus, buyers typically retain details of those purchases (Pride & Ferrell 2010).

CSR was manipulated as either high or low by having subjects read a scenario and then imagine that they were making a purchase decision. CSR is a multi-dimensional construct (i.e., social, environmental, economic) (Network for Business Sustainability 2010). So, the scenario involved two dimensions—social and environmental. These two dimensions were selected, per the work of Peloza and Shang (2011a, 2011b). Furthermore, the scenario included CSR efforts that are connected with public awareness of the efforts, such as social campaigns in connection with popular sporting events.

To create a realistic setting, information in the scenario paralleled *without identifying* the current CSR program of Adidas—a sports apparel and shoe manufacturer. The decision to use Addidas' CSR strategy was based on its solid reputation regarding its CSR efforts (e.g., Dow Jones Sustainability Index for the 11th consecutive time, industry leader in sustainability issues and corporate responsibility for the 8th consecutive time [Adidas 2010], and the 28th "Most Sustainable Corporation in the World 2010 Global 100 List" [*Forbes* 2010]). Except for CSR efforts, the scenario included *no* information about the brand so as to avoid involvement of additional perceptions of the brand in the questionnaire.

Nationality Measurement

Nationality was assessed with two items. The first asked participant's their country of origin. The second, in case the person was born outside of the United States or Germany, queried respondents about how long they had lived in either the United States or Germany, with the criterion that the person must be living in one of the two countries for at least five consecutive years.

Dependent Measures

PCV was defined as the unique offer made to a company's customers with all its hard and soft dimensions (Piercy & Lane 2009). CBBE was conceptualized as a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name and a symbol that adds or subtracts from the value provided by a product or service to a company and/or that company's customers (Aaker 1996). Also, it represents the strength a brand gains or loses based on what value perception resides in customers' minds (Aaker 1991).

PCV Measurement

PCV was measured based on the work of Sweeney and Soutar (2001). The instrument is four-dimensional (emotional value, social value, functional value based on price to value for money, and functional value based on performance to quality) and is assessed using a 19-item scale (PERVAL). Sweeney and Soutar (2001), as well as Walsh, Kilian and Buxel (2008), have demonstrated that the scale is reliable and valid. To provide compatibility with the specific experimental setting and the anonymity of the brand used in the scenario, three scale items were eliminated, and some were slightly modified.

CBBE Measurement

CBBE was measured using Yoo and Donthu (1997, 2001). It included four dimensions: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. The instrument has found support in the work of Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010). The constructs brand awareness and brand association were modified in the present study to cover a broader spectrum of CBBE, per the admonition of Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010).

Pretest Phase

To ensure the adequacy of the experiment and questionnaire, two pretests were performed. The first pretest involved a test of the comprehensibility of the questionnaire. The initial draft of the scenario and the questionnaire were subjected to participants redolent of the sample groups in the United States and Germany. The English language version was given to five students from a southwestern university in the United States; the German language version was given to five students from a university in southwestern Germany. After the students read the scenario and concomitant questions, comprehension of the information in the scenario and of the questions was investigated. Based on the information and insights gained during this pretest, the scenario as well as the questionnaire was modified.

The revised scenario and questionnaire (which included 46 questions) were pretested on a sample of 115 students from the United States. After gathering the data, 98 of the questionnaires were usable. Factor analysis (principal component analysis) and reliability testing (Cronbach's alpha) were employed to classify the items to reflect their underlying construct. Based on the results of the factor analysis and reliability testing, the number of items in the survey was reduced to 29.

FINDINGS

Manipulation Check of CSR

Participants were asked to answer questions about their perceptions of the imaginary company's CSR efforts. These questions were based on the research by Butz and Goodstein (1996), Anderson et al. (2006), and Peloza and Shang (2011a, 2011b). To create two CSR groups (High vs. Low), the median CSR (2.3636) was used as cut-off point. (Shown in Table 1 are subsample sizes for both High and Low CSR groups in the United States and Germany.) Responses to 11 items were totaled to calculate composite scale scores for each respondent. The groups' average composite mean values were used for the manipulation check. One-way ANOVA supported that the CSR split was successful. Subjects in the high CSR efforts group had a mean of 1.68, while subjects in the low CSR efforts group had a mean of 2.94 (Table 2). The two means were significantly different ($F_{1, 307} = 623.92$, $p < .01$)—Table 3. [3] Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient indicated good reliability ($\alpha = .88$).

TABLE 1
HIGH VS. LOW CSR EFFORTS SUBSAMPLE SIZES

	Germany	United States
High CSR Efforts	45	107
Low CSR Efforts	113	43
Total	158	150

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR HIGH VS. LOW CSR EFFORTS

	Mean	S. D.	N
High CSR Efforts	1.68	.43	152
Low CSR Efforts	2.94	.46	156
Total	2.32	.77	308

TABLE 3
CSR MANIPULATION CHECK

ANOVA					
	S.S.	d.f.	M.S.	F	p
Between Groups	122.78	1	122.78	623.92	< .01
Within Groups	60.22	306	.20		
Total	183.00	307			

Effects of CSR on CBBE and PCV

H1 posited a positive relationship between perceived CSR efforts and PCV. H2 proposed a positive association between CSR efforts and CBBE. Two ANOVAs were performed to test these hypotheses.

CSR had a main effect on PCV ($F_{1, 308}$ = 40.84, p < .01). The mean PCV in the low CSR group was 3.17 compared with 2.36 in the high CSR group. Accordingly, H1 received empirical support. Also, results indicated a main effect of CSR on CBBE ($F_{1, 308}$ = 11.33, p < .01). In the low CSR group, the mean response was 3.80; in the high CSR group, 3.24. Thus, a significant difference in CBBE owing to CSR was found, thus lending support for H2. Mean PCV and CBBE values are presented in Table 4, and the univariate results of a MANOVA are shown in Table 5. Multivariate results of MANOVA also provided evidence supporting H1 and H2 (Table 6).

TABLE 4
MEANS OF CBBE AND PCV

Source	CBBE			PCV		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
High CSR Level	3.24	1.15	152	2.36	1.02	152
Low CSR Level	3.80	1.19	156	3.17	0.98	156

TABLE 5
MANOVA FOR CBBE AND PCV—UNIVARIATE RESULTS

Source	CBBE			PCV		
	F	p	η^2	F	p	η^2
Intercept	2218.38	< .01	.879	1886.35	< .01	.861
CSR	11.33	< .01	.036	40.84	< .01	.118
Country	.96	.33	.003	.00	.99	.000
CSR*Country	.82	.37	.003	.26	.61	.001
Corrected Model	6.50	<.01	.060	16.78	< .01	.142

TABLE 6
MANOVA FOR CBBE AND PCV—MULTIVARIATE RESULTS

Source	d.f.	Wilk's Lambda	F	p	η^2
Intercept	1	.10	1415.546	< .01	.903
CSR	1	.88	20.505	< .01	.119
Country	1	1.00	.607	.55	.004
CSR*Country	1	1.00	.416	.66	.003
Error	303				

Effects of CBBE on PCV

H3 asserted that the greater the CBBE, the higher the PCV. The effect of CBBE on PCV was tested with regression analysis. Regression findings were significant ($F_{1, 307} = 97.966$, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .24$), and the regression equation was PCV = 1.22 + .44CBBE ($t = 9.90$, $p < .01$). Accordingly, these results indicated that PCV increases with augmented CBBE, thus lending support for H3.

Mediation Analysis

A mediation analysis was conducted to assess whether there exists some kind of mediating relationship between CBBE and PCV based on the effects of CSR efforts (H4, H5). A similar approach has been used in extant work in management (e.g., Kwon, Trail, & James 2007) and marketing (e.g., Dahl, Chattopadhyay, & Gorn 1999). According to Baron and Kenny (1986), to test the hypotheses that PCV and CBBE have a mediating relationship based on CSR efforts, three conditions must be satisfied.

First, the level of perceived CSR efforts (the independent variable) has to significantly influence CBBE (the mediator). This was supported by the main effect of CSR on CBBE ($F_{1,\,308} = 11.33$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .036$), as shown in the univariate results in Table 5. Second, the level of perceived CSR efforts must significantly influence PCV (the dependent variable). This was satisfied by the main effect of the level of perceived CSR on PCV ($F_{1,\,308} = 40.84$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .118$), as shown in the univariate results in Table 5.

Third, when the effect of the mediator is significant, the effect of the level of perceived CSR (the independent variable) on PCV (the dependent variable) reduces to either non-significant (perfect mediation) or reduces in effect size (partial mediation) when the analysis incorporates CBBE (the mediator) as a covariate. Shown in Table 7 are results of an ANCOVA in which the level of perceived CSR was the independent variable, PCV was the dependent variable, and CBBE was a covariate. As shown in Table 7, CBBE, the mediator, was significant ($F_{1,\,308} = 76.49$, $p < .01$). Though still not insignificant ($F_{1,\,308} = 28.65$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .086$), the effect size of the level of perceived CSR on PCV was reduced when compared to the effect size of the perceived CSR efforts on CBBE ($\eta^2 = .118$), as shown in Table 7. These results suggest that CBBE partially mediated the relationship between the level of perceived CSR efforts and PCV. Thus, H4 is supported.

TABLE 7
ANCOVA RESULTS—CBBE AS A MEDIATOR

	PCV		
Source	**F**	**p**	**η^2**
Intercept	74.73	< .01	.198
CBBE	76.49	< .01	.202
CSR	28.65	< .01	.086
Country	.26	.61	.001
CSR*Country	.01	.91	.000
Corrected Model	34.84	< .01	.315

The same procedure was used to test the second conceptual framework with PCV as the mediating variable (H5). The first two conditions of mediation effects were satisfied, as indicated by the main effect of the level of perceived CSR efforts on CBBE ($F_{1,308} = 11.33$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .036$) and by the main effect of the level of perceived CSR efforts on PCV ($F_{1,\,308} = 40.84$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .118$) (Table 5). However, the third condition was not satisfied. Though CBBE was significant as a covariate (i.e., mediator) ($F_{1,\,308} = 76.49$, $p < .01$), the main effect of the level of perceived CSR efforts on CBBE was insignificant ($F_{1,\,308} = .27$, $p = .60$) (Table 8). Therefore, H5 was not supported.

TABLE 8
ANCOVA RESULTS—PCV AS A MEDIATOR

Source	CBBE		
	F	**p**	**η^2**
Intercept	131.98	< .01	.303
PCV	76.49	< .01	.202
CSR	.27	.60	.001
Country	1.22	.27	.004
CSR*Country	.58	.45	.002
Corrected Model	25.21	< .01	.250

Moderating Effect of Nationality

The *insignificant* interaction effects of CSR x Country (Table 9) did not support the predicted moderating influence of nationality on the relationship between CSR and PCV (H6) and CSR and CBBE (H7). The influence of the level of perceived CSR on PCV was weaker for German subjects ($\overline{X}_{\text{High CSR}} = 2.31$, $\overline{X}_{\text{Low CSR}} = 3.19$) than for subjects from the United States ($\overline{X}_{\text{High CSR}} = 2.38$, $\overline{X}_{\text{Low CSR}} = 3.13$), as shown in Table 9. The influence, however, was insignificant ($F_{1, 308} = .26$, $p = .61$). Similarly, although the influence of the level of perceived CSR on CBBE was weaker for German participants ($\overline{X}_{\text{High CSR}} = 3.24$, $\overline{X}_{\text{Low CSR}} = 3.88$) than for their U.S. counterparts ($\overline{X}_{\text{High CSR}} = 3.23$, $\overline{X}_{\text{Low CSR}} = 3.60$), the influence was not significant ($F_{1, 308} = .82$, $p = .37$).

TABLE 9
MEANS OF CBBE AND PCV WITH NATIONALITY

	CBBE		PCV	
	Germany	**United States**	**Germany**	**United States**
High CSR Level	3.24 (45)	3.23 (107)	2.31 (45)	2.38 (107)
Low CSR Level	3.88 (113)	3.60 (43)	3.19 (113)	3.13 (43)

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

The objective of this research was to investigate the impact of CSR efforts on PCV and CBBE, as well as the impact of nationality on those factors. Thus, this study focused on two main questions: first, what impact do CSR efforts have on PCV and CBBE; and second, does an individual's nationality influence the impact of CSR efforts on PCV and CBBE.

CSR and PCV

The data analysis supported that, if customers perceive the level of a company's CSR efforts as high, the positive impact on PCV is higher than if customers perceive the level of CSR efforts as relatively low. These results thus lend support to previous propositions stated by Piercy and Lane (2009) and Peloza and Shang (2011a) asserting a positive impact of CSR efforts on PCV. Also, if CSR is perceived as relatively low, the impact on PCV is still positive, but significantly less so than if CSR efforts are perceived as high.

CSR and CBBE

The results of this study provided support to previous propositions and findings that CSR efforts influence the level of a company's CBBE (e.g., Hoeffler & Keller 2002; Lai et al. 2010; Torres, Bijmolt, & Tribó 2010. The findings indicate that if a customer perceives the CSR efforts of a company as high, the positive impact on CBBE is higher than if a customer perceives such efforts as relatively low. In addition, if CSR is perceived as relatively low, the impact on CBBE is still positive, but less than if CSR efforts are viewed as high.

CBBE and PCV

The data analysis confirmed that as CBBE increases, so does PCV. These results support Aaker's (1996) as well as Erdem and Swait's (1998) view that CBBE is a set of assets and liabilities that add or subtract from a value provided by a product or service to a company or that company's customers.

Mediation Effect

The analysis revealed a mediating role of CBBE on the relationship between a company's CSR efforts and its PCV. The perceived CSR efforts directly influenced CBBE and indirectly influenced PCV through CBBE.

Cross-National Comparison

Findings indicated that there exists no moderating impact of nationality on CSR efforts' impact on CBBE and PCV—at least vis-à-vis the United States and Germany (highly industrialized countries). These findings possibly infer an increasing acceptance of the concept of CSR on a *global* level when compared to previous findings (e.g., Maignan 2001). Those erstwhile results revealed a lower willingness to actively support CSR-oriented businesses in the United States compared with those in Germany. Nevertheless, there seem to be differences in the perception of CSR, although the results here did not significantly differ.

Theoretical Implications and Contributions

This study adds to the existing normative and performance-oriented research of the impact of CSR efforts on a company's success by focusing on two important marketing variables—PCV and CBBE. Results of the study provide empirical support for propositions and findings about the positive impact of CSR efforts on the level of CBBE (e.g., Hoeffler & Keller 2002; Lai et al. 2010; Torres, Bijmolt, & Tribó 2010). Specifically, if the level of CSR efforts is perceived as high, the level of CBBE is also affected more positively than if the CSR efforts are perceived as relatively low. Nevertheless, both perceptions lead to a positive impact on the level of CBBE. Furthermore, results offer support for the existing impact of CSR efforts on PCV with all its hard and soft dimensions, as previously proposed by researchers (e.g., Piercy & Lane 2009; Peloza & Shang 2011a). As such, if the level of CSR efforts is perceived as high by a customer, the positive impact on the level of PCV is higher than if the CSR effort viewed perceived as relatively low. Also in this case, both perceptions lead to a positive impact on the level of PCV. These results enhance the extant theoretical knowledge in the field of CSR by adding to the variety of existing tests of the presence of CSR efforts' impact on firm value and company success by augmenting the knowledge about how CSR efforts support positive changes in business outcomes vis-à-vis CBBE and PCV.

In addition, the findings of this study add to theoretical knowledge about the interacting relationship between PCV and CBBE. Comparing the two conceptual frameworks, the study indicates that the level of perceived CSR efforts directly influences CBBE and indirectly affects PCV through CBBE. Hence, investments in CSR efforts result in returns for both CBBE and PCV, but PCV is augmented even further by an increase in CBBE.

Moreover, study findings lend new conclusions to previous results that CSR efforts lead to different outcomes when comparing across countries (e.g., Maignan 2001). Unexpectedly, the study indicates that there exists no moderating impact of nationality on CSR efforts' impact on PCV and CBBE, at least between the United States and Germany. Considering that previous findings supported the impact of nationality on the effect of CSR efforts (Maignan 2001), the increasing popularity of the concept of CSR on a global level might have supported this unanticipated finding. Moreover, when compared with previous results—which indicated a lower willingness to actively support CSR- oriented businesses in the United States compared with Germany (Maignan 2001)—more recent literature indicates an ongoing shift in attitudes toward CSR (Lee 2008).

Managerial Implications

One managerial implication of the study is that CSR efforts can lead to increased CBBE. As stated earlier, CBBE affects customer retention, acquisition, preference, and propensity to purchase, as well as alternate business performance metrics (Knowles 2008). CBBE can enhance the overall business success in a variety of ways. Because CSR efforts lead to increased CBBE, managers should assert the relevance and possibilities of CSR efforts within their firms. Not doing so could mean ignoring opportunities, and thus acceptance of avoidable pressures and risks in the market. Also, findings support the strategic significance of CSR efforts. Hence, substantially embedding CSR in a company's corporate business strategy appears to be a worthwhile investment.

A second managerial implication is that CSR efforts increase PCV. From a marketing point of view, creating PCV is the foundation of creating value for a company. So, managers could use CSR efforts to increase their competitiveness in the market. Fostering superior PCV based on CSR efforts might offer an effective means for companies to differentiate themselves successfully in the marketplace. By linking CSR efforts with increases in PCV or developing new sources of PCV, firms could gain a competitive advantage. Managers should understand how CSR efforts affect PCV. Simply outspending competitors on CSR endeavors or presupposing that greater investments in CSR efforts always lead to higher PCV would be misleading and could even be harmful to financial performance when (Wang, Choi, & Li 2008). Therefore, managers should focus on garnering superior PCV for specified targeted audiences of interest to ensure enhanced return on investment from CSR efforts.

Another managerial implication is that the impact of CSR efforts on PCV and CBBE shows no significant difference in the cross-national comparison between the United States and Germany. (However, there seems to be some divergence in the perception of CSR efforts.) PCV and CBBE showed similar increases in both samples where CSR efforts were perceived as high. If CSR efforts were perceived as low, the reaction of the German sample was more negative regarding CBBE and PCV than in the U.S. sample. This implies that to reach the level of superior PCV for German consumers, companies seemingly need to foster a higher standard compared with consumer expectations in the United States. Recognizing the value of CSR expectations of customers and other stakeholders is an important part of CSR promotion.

Managers should also be cognizant that some CSR activities might only lead to a low value creation for consumers if they only pertain to an expected normal level in that business or industry. As stated previously, customers often expect a certain level of socially and environmentally responsible behavior of companies, and as a result, not being involved in such activities can lead to adverse consequences for the company. Customers' expectations might also differ, for example, based on the customer group itself or the industry of the company.

One final managerial implication pertains to the previously stated axiom of Friedman (1970, p. 122): the social responsibility of businesses is to increase their profits "…[but firms should] make as much money as possible while conforming to their basic rules of the society, both those embodied in law and those embodied in ethical custom." This statement basically reflects currently accepted perceptions of CSR efforts: doing good for the society while simultaneously improving the value creation for the company. Incorporating CSR in the business strategy and strategic decision-making processes, as well as the alignment in a company's operating functions, can play an important role in a company's success.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. Future research addressing its weaknesses is needed. One limitation is that the sample consisted of solely students. Students are part of the consumer group for the study's product category; nevertheless, they might not be sufficiently representative of consumers in general. As a result, their responses might differ from the overall consumers' responses. An extension to this study would entail use of alternative kinds of consumers. Doing so would allow examination of the generalizability of the student sample utilized here.

A second limitation is that only one product category (sports apparel and shoes) was examined. The results, though, may vary across product categories. Therefore, future work should include other product categories to discern whether the results are consistent with those obtained here.

A third limitation is that CSR, PCV, and CBBE were analyzed as unidimensional, not multi-dimensional, constructs. Therefore, the study did not consider the effects of different facets of these factors. Doing so would enable focusing directly on such aspects as customers' willingness to pay premium prices or manifest strong loyalty.

Finally, the study is limited to the comparison between only two countries—the United States and Germany. Findings from the United States and Germany may not be generalizable across other cultural and economic circumstances. Therefore, the analysis could be expanded to other countries.

ENDNOTES

[1] The study sample consisted of individuals in the United States and Germany. Justification for using these two countries is provided in the Method section.

[2] In regard to the cross-national comparison, a student sample was most appropriate for this study to ensure the comparability of the samples from the United States and Germany. In a cross-national study, matched samples (in this case two student samples) allowed more exact theoretical predictions and lessen the confounding effects of further factors (Hofstede 1991; Yoo & Donthu 2001). Moreover, students have been valuable surrogates for non-students in a variety of empirical studies (e.g., Yavas 1994; Cox, Wogalter, Stokes, & Murff 1997).

[3] Recall that all scale items were reverse scored. Therefore, reverse scoring of items means that the *lower* the mean value, the *greater* the perceived CSR efforts, PCV, and CBBE.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE BOOKLET

Company of Interest: A major sports apparel and shoe manufacturer

Scenario Memory Box 2010 – Example Activities
- Fair Play 2010 campaign for the FIFA World Cup South Africa (global worker rights)
- Co-operation with Greenpeace (protecting rainforest)
- Resource savings (e.g. water 11.8%, paper 17.7%)
- Financially supported 965 community oriented projects, donated 269,509 units of products, 16,469 volunteer hours
- Long-term engagements in civil society (e.g. International Labor Rights Forum)
- ISO 14001 cert for environmental management systems

Scenario Memory Box 2011/12 – Example Activities
- Fair Play 2012 campaign for the Olympic Games (global worker rights)
- 'Workplace Standards' for suppliers (safeguarding workers, fulfilling social and environmental standards)
- Supporting charities (e.g. SOS children villages, human rights groups)
- Consolidating colors: 20% in apparel, 40% in footwear
- Resource savings (e.g. increased goals for all sites, e.g. water 17.5%, paper 37.7%)
- Fostering corporate culture (performance, passion, integrity, diversity)

– Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) includes social (caring for the society) and environmental responsible behavior (caring for the environment) of companies. –

Please mark the answers that feel most accurate to you and if applicable fill in the blanks.

1. Born in the U.S.? ☐ yes   ☐ no, living in the US since _____ years (min. 5 yrs)
2. Your age: _____
3. Your Gender: ☐ male   ☐ female
4. Your field of study: _____

The following statements describe the company in the scenario.

Regarding the information given, the company at hand…

	Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree
5. … seems to be environmentally oriented.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
6. … seems to be socially oriented.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
7. … seems to be financially oriented.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
8. … seems to act in a corporate social responsible (CSR) manner.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
9. … demonstrates CSR activities which meet my expectations.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
10. … demonstrates CSR activities which exceed my expectations.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
11. … demonstrates CSR efforts which are of high interest to me.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
12. … seems to be charitably involved.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
13. … seems to care for the community.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
14. … seems to support employee volunteerism.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
15. … would reduce its profits to ensure a clean environment.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
16. … seems to offer safe products for users.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
17. … seems to offer products safe for the environment (e.g. easy to dispose).	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
18. … seems to use environmental protection practices.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
19. … seems to emphasize employee relations.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
20. … seems to support diversity.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)

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The knowledge of these activities supports my perception of the company to offer products…

	Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree
1. … that I would enjoy.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
2. … that would make me want to use them.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
3. … that I would feel relaxed about using.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
4. … that would make me feel good.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
5. … that would give me pleasure.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
6. … that would help me feel accepted by peer groups.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
7. … that would improve the way I am perceived.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
8. … that would make a good impression on other people.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
9. … that would give me social approval.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
10. … that offer value for money.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
11. … that have consistent quality.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
12. … that are well made.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
13. … that have an acceptable standard of quality.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
14. … that are likely to have high quality.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
15. … that are likely highly functionally.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)

The knowledge of these activities supports that…

	Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree
16. … I consider the likelihood that the brand would be reliably very high.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
17. … I know what the brand of this major sports apparel and shoe manufacturer looks like.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
18. … I can recognize the brand of this major sports apparel manufacturer among other competing brands.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
19. … I am more aware of this major sports apparel and shoe manufacturer.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
20. … some characteristics of the company's brand come to my mind quickly.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
21. … I perceive the company as a good company.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
22. … I think the company has a good image.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
23. … I'd feel good when using products of the company.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
24. … I consider myself to be loyal to the company.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
25. … the company would be my first choice.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
26. … I would not buy other brands if products of this brand were available at the store.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)

Thank you for your participation!