


Corporate Social Responsibility Application in the Healthcare Sector: A Bibliometric Analysis and Synthesis

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the literature to understand the current state of corporate social responsibility (CSR) application and communication in the healthcare sector. First, the authors provide a bibliometric analysis that quantifies the number of scientific publications regarding CSR in healthcare of the last ten years (2007-2016). Then, they present the theoretical framework. Starting from a brief summary of CSR literature, the authors explain peculiarities of the healthcare sector and contextualize the CSR debate in the healthcare context, identifying its current application and gaps. The authors review not only the application of CSR in healthcare but also analyze the topic of CSR communication, as well as the tools adopted by healthcare organizations to communicate their CSR activities in this sector.

KEYWORDS

Communication Tools, Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, CSR and Healthcare, CSR Communication, Healthcare Communication, Healthcare Organisations, Healthcare Systems, Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept that has many different meanings, interpretations and definitions. The European Commission (2011) defined it as “The responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society (p. 6)”. However, the way CSR is understood and implemented is different across companies, sectors and countries (Tehemar, 2012).

CSR should be a subject of interest to organizations across all sectors, not only for business-oriented organizations, but also public and not-for-profit ones (Kakabadse & Rozuel, 2006). CSR is an issue of key importance for healthcare organizations, due to several challenges that they are facing

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nowadays (technological advances, economic and financial crisis, sustainability, and social pressures) (Collins, 2010; Tomaselli et al, 2015, 2018). Moreover, they are required to provide optimal quality and cost-effective patient care with the limited resources allocated or available to them (Fottler & Blair, 2002). Health sector organizations should therefore pay special attention to CSR and the extent to which they make it visible and accessible to their stakeholders.

Thus, CSR is a key activity for today's organizations (Tomaselli et al, 2016). CSR in healthcare also concerns health education, promotion and prevention. Governments are spending enormous amounts of money in promoting healthy lifestyles and in launching health campaigns. For example, the US Government is spending over 13 billion US dollars per year on HIV/AIDS, as well as huge amounts of money being spent to combat the problems of obesity, drug addiction, and alcoholism (Avert, 2007). Chronic illnesses are by far the leading cause of mortality in the world, representing 60 per cent of all deaths, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2016). In Italy, chronic diseases are responsible for 7 out of 10 deaths each year, and they account for 84% of Italy's health care costs (CDC, 2015). Likewise, for Malta, diseases of the circulatory system account for 45% of all deaths and, therefore, higher than the EU15 average, while diabetes mellitus accounts for 3.4% of all deaths, also higher than the EU15 average (Azzopardi Muscat et al., 2014). Therefore, CSR has a significant impact on healthcare organizations and can help them reduce the costs of disease, in particular chronic diseases, in the long run through the dissemination of prevention information and health promotion, as part of the healthcare CSR communication strategy.

Furthermore, the importance of CSR in healthcare lies in the fact that it could help healthcare organizations to improve their image, reputation and credibility. To this regard, public opinion does not trust organizations whose efforts are not directed in observing social responsibilities (Watts & Holme, 1999). Moreover, CSR is important also to strengthen stakeholders' relations (Tehemar, 2012).

The purpose of this paper is to systematically review and synthesize existing literature on the application of CSR in healthcare and CSR communication in the healthcare sector.

The authors focused on three main research questions: i) how important is CSR in the healthcare sector and how is it applied?; ii) are healthcare organizations communicating their CSR and how?; and iii) to what extent have these topics been treated in the literature?

This work is structured as follows: first, the authors discuss about the literature review method; second, a brief summary of CSR literature is provided; third, the authors summarize the main peculiarities of the health sector; and then, they focus on the general application of CSR in the healthcare context, highlighting a lack of literature in this field; a final section is devoted to CSR communication in healthcare in order to conclude the review.

METHODOLOGY

According to Webster and Watson (2002), a literature review is an effective methodology to build foundations for advancing knowledge, since it contributes to the development of theories with particular regard to those topics where research is needed. Moreover, literature reviews are effective tools to track the state of the art and research gaps of topics whose findings are incomplete or at an initial state (Short, 2009).

In this paper, the authors analyzed how the topic of CSR application in healthcare was developed in recent academic literature. A bibliometric analysis (systematic literature review) was then developed considering a period of ten years (from the 1st January 2007 up to the 31st December 2016). Articles were selected and extracted from ELSEVIER-ScienceDirect database. This choice was based on its consolidated reputation among the research community.

Research was conducted by inserting the keywords “corporate social responsibility” and “healthcare” on the ScienceDirect (ELSEVIER) database. There was a net total of 1.740 publications on CSR application in healthcare between 2007 and 2016, among journal articles, books and reference works. Records were screened based on field and document types. The authors included only records

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