Chapter 13
The Antecedents of Consumer Engagement in CSR Communication in Social Media:
A Study on Omani University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the ways in which targeted consumers engage with corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities on social media platforms, specifically when discussing their opinions and experiences regarding the CSR activities of their favorite brands. Therefore, the variable moral norms were integrated in the theory of reasoned action. The study data about consumers' engagement (CE) in corporate social responsibility communication (CSRC) over social media (SM) platforms—electronic word of mouth, or e-WoM—was collected from 290 actual engaged consumers in online ordering and involved in social media groups. The findings confirmed that the antecedent factors (consumers' attitudes, subjective norms, and moral norms) have a positive influence on consumers' intention to use e-WoM, while no effect was found on CE in CSRC in SM. Furthermore, e-WoM was found to have direct significant impact on CE in CSRC in SM as it mediates the relationship between the antecedent factors and CE in CSRC in SM.

INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms are increasingly becoming an important part of our life for all generations, particularly young people. In the near future, young consumers are expected to be the most important and influential consumer group (Schmeltz, 2017). Firms from all industries engaging in actions of corporate

social responsibility (CSR) has increased drastically (refer to appendix A: all used abbreviations). In addition, companies occupying a range of industries have significantly expanded their CSR deployment (Ettinger, Grabner-Kräuter, & Terlutter, 2018). In summary, "CSR encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has of organisations at a given point in time" (Carroll, 1979, 1991). According to the European Commission, the definition of CSR has been simplified as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society and … what an enterprise should do to meet that responsibility" (The European Commission, 2011). Therefore, to garner maximum benefits from CSR, businesses should communicate their initiatives with all stakeholders (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). Customers - as one of the most important stakeholders - are increasingly more socially aware and exigent for CSR adoption (De Grosbois, 2012). Therefore, they should be engaged in such initiatives and CSR activities (Ettinger et al., 2018). The dissemination of information pertaining to CSR can be achieved through a variety of channels and platforms. As a result, communication of CSR online possesses huge scope in its multifaceted engagement with consumers through (Du & Vieira, 2012) corporate websites and social media platforms (Mkono & Tribe, 2017; Wong, Leung, & Law, 2015).

WoM communication, which typically refers to the notion of person-to-person conversation among consumers (Sen & Lerman, 2007), has been recognised as affecting and shaping consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Word of mouth communication is also regarded as more effective, and as providing more reliable information compared with other methods of communication (Park & Lee, 2009). However, the huge advance and spread of information and communication technology (ICT) over the globe has reduced the occurrence of direct in-person communication, and increased drastically the indirect personal form of WoM communication: electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) communication. This advance in ICT, and more specifically, the advance in social media and the availability of many different social media platforms, has become an important environment for such communications (Li & Du, 2011), through which everyone can share, read, and discuss their opinions and experiences with others, regardless of social background, geographical location, and potential anonymity (Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008). Therefore, e-WoM has recently been considered a significant factor that influences consumer behaviour (Farzin & Fattahi, 2018). E-WoM on social media, through consumers' comments on products and companies, directly exposes their opinion, and as a result holds greater influence among other consumers as a non-bias, trustworthy source (Sen & Lerman, 2007; Zhou, Zhang, Tan, Tseng, & Zhang, 2020). Moreover, social media plays a vital role in the communication and transmission of information, and further facilitates consumer engagement in brand-related e-WoM (Lin & Wang, 2020), which has recently become an incredibly important tool to engage targeted consumers in different company activities, as well as in shaping and influencing their attitudes and behaviours (Ahmad & Laroche, 2017).

Engaging consumers is a mechanism by which companies directly or indirectly add value (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). This engagement has shifted to social media through viewing, reacting to, creating, and sharing information about the CSR activities of a company or one of its brands. CSR positively increases consumer trust in a company or brand, and thereby strengthens their relationship (Giakoumaki & Krepapa, 2020).

As a result of the preeminence of social media platforms as a mechanism by which companies directly engage with consumers, companies are facing increasing legal and societal pressure to communicate their CSR commitments (Schmeltz, 2017). In this regard, few research works have studied the antecedents of consumers' engagement in CSR communication in social media (CE in CSRC in SM) (e.g. (Chu, Chen, & Gan, 2020)). Recent research also demonstrates that the e-WoM is a very important tool used

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