



College Students' Perceptions toward the Moral Responsibility of Corporate Sustainability

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Sustainability is growing in importance worldwide and has come to be considered a specifically challenging issue in both economic and managerial objectives (Chouinard, Ellison, & Ridgeway, 2011). Corporate sustainability has been defined as 'the ability of a firm to meet the needs of its direct and indirect stakeholders without compromising its capability to satisfy their needs in the future' (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002, p. 131). In addition, Ha-Brookshire (2015) argued that companies have moral responsibilities to be sustainable, and therefore, corporate sustainability must be embedded in all corporate activities as they are right things to do. Yet, this theory has not been tested in corporate settings and we know little about what college students think in terms of moral responsibility of corporate sustainability. Consequently, this question inspires us to implement this research.

The purpose of this research was to assess college students' perceptions toward different moral duties of corporate sustainability activities to promote more companies consider morality and sustainability to be their propriety not just profits. There were two steps that we used to develop this research. First, we gathered a list of corporate sustainability activities perceived by college students by online research and interviewed 3 college students face to face. Second, we created an online survey through Qualtric based on the list we generated in step one. After IRB approval, we shared the survey link on social media platform and sent group emails via blackboard, therefore we collected 54 responses. We qualitatively analyzed our data and extent our results in general business types.

In total, there are 6 questions and 10 real business events related to corporate moral responsibilities are asked in question 4. The first three questions were about demographic characteristics, including age, gender, and academic year. Next, the 10 real events reported by the media were presented and asked them to rate perception as to each of the event is something that corporations must fulfill as their moral responsibilities. The real events were as following: E1: Macy's provides paid training and offers employees' discounts for new employees; E2: Mizzou Campus Dining Services purchase eggs from Santon Brothers Eggs (a Columbia, MO based local company); E3: H&M destroys and throws out perfectly good unworn clothing to remove the unsold inventory; E4: Coca-Cola Public Space Recycling Bin Grant Program Awards 4,518 Recycling Bins to 37 Communities and 25 Colleges; E5: As early as 1981, EXXON knew the dangers of man-made climate change. Rather than starts a low carbon economy, the company chose to fund organizations to claim "climate change is normal."; E6: Yahoo confirmed a massive security breach that saw hackers steal personal information for over 500 million accounts; E7: In 2015, Fendi's couture show used a lot of real animal fur; E8: In 2013, Walmart

began a smartphone trade-in program at more than 3,600 U.S. stores and Sam's Clubs; E9: According to the Federal Trade Commission, Snapchat lied to us about our photos disappearing forever; and E10: BMW earned particularly high marks for "efficient use of water, energy, and lack of waste. Finally, their willingness to pay more for sustainable products/project and, if so, how much.

The results showed that the most of our participants were junior and their average age was 21 years old. Among these participants, 68% of my participants were female, 30% were male, and the other 2% did not want to answer this question. Among the ten business events, the following four were rated as the most extreme activities. Most people selected the examples of H&M (E3) and EXXON (E5) were not morally responsible at all. And the examples of Mizzou CDS (E2) and Coca-cola (E4) were ranked as extremely morally responsible. Almost 54.9% of participants would like to spend more on products with sustainable labels. 72% of them can accept 5% - 20% more, and there are also 20% of participants chose "don't want to pay more on sustainable products". Based on the interview process in step one.

This research contributes to our understanding on college students' perceptions toward the moral responsibility of corporate sustainability. First, we found out most people have clearer attitudes on immoral events than moral events. They can easily state they think examples of H&M, EXXON, Fendi, and Snapchat are not morally responsible, but a lot of them prefer to choose "neutral" for other moral examples. It shows the public react more actively on corporate negative/immoral/irresponsible activities than moral/sustainable events, which means corporate should prevent immoral events happened in corporate supply chain first then work on develop effective sustainable projects. Second, there are many types of activities involves in the 10 events, such as employee well-being, society/community, energy, recycle, environment, and information security. Among these types, energy was a topic that most people concerned. Third, my participants are college students, who do not make a lot of money, but most of them would like to support sustainable and pay more for these products, which is a good sign for sustainable companies whose target customers are college students. We hope our research can popularize the concept of "Moral responsibility of corporate sustainability" to our audience. The findings will also help more corporate companies to realize the importance of sustainability as college students perceive them. The results could also build a clear goal and actionable structure to pass the sustainable companies' value to every employee correctly.

Reference

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