

International CSR: Challenges of implementing corporate responsibility programs across the globe

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Recent studies in corporate social responsibility (CSR) have identified its role in positive outcomes for employees (Aguinis & Glavas, 2017; Kim, H., Lee, M., Lee, H. & Kim N., 2010; Turban & Greening, 1997), financial indicators (Cheng, Ioannou, & Serafeim, 2014), and corporate reputation (Kim, 2014; Kim & Yang, 2009). Research suggests CSR can help a company rebuild after a crisis (Haigh & Dardis, 2012; Sohn & Lariscy, 2015) and maintain its legitimacy in society (Bachmann & Ingenhoff, 2016); and this happens most effectively when CSR programs have a strong fit with corporate mission (Aksak, Ferguson, & Duman, 2016; Zhou & Ki, 2018). While these studies provide practitioners with important guidelines on the impact of CSR, most studies of CSR are conducted within the United States. Studies conducted internationally tend to focus on just one country. As the number of multinational corporations grows, so does the need for literature that addresses cross-cultural challenges of developing and communicating CSR initiatives.

This special issue resulted from a call for grant proposals from the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication. These five articles are published to start the discussion of multinational CSR.

The articles in this issue cover a broad range of countries including China, South Korea, U.A.E, and Slovenia, some in comparison with U.S. audiences. One article surveyed corporate executives of multinational corporations to gain a broad perspective from those who conduct business in more than one country. Most of the researchers employed surveys and others conducted interviews to provide a descriptive view of practices in CSR across borders.

Two studies looked specifically at differences in the ways audiences in China and the US perceive CSR and the practice of creating social value (CSV). Xiao and Overton (2018) look at the difference in cultural values between the two countries and how values predict CSR expectations and communication. They argue that understanding the values of a culture can help an organization make good decisions in CSR design and implementation. Along a similar line, Hung-Baesecke, Chen, Stacks, Coombs, and Boyd (2018) look at the perceptions of CSV among U.S. and Chinese residents. Using both surveys and interviews, the researchers found that when companies create social value then also strengthen trust in business. How individuals access information and the type of information preferred differs between countries. These findings offer useful practical insights for corporations.

Rim (2018) compares CSR skepticism among residents in the U.S., U.A.E, and South Korea. She finds complex differences between how audiences perceive management, motives, communication, and CSR outcomes in these countries. The degree to which the participants intend to support the CSR program varies by country. Corporations need to consider the ways in which audiences in different cultures feel skeptical about CSR programs.

Stumberger and Sriramesh (2018) examine the perspectives of CSR practitioners in Slovenia. They looked at the perceived challenges of creating and maintaining CSR programs; and more importantly, assesses the how practitioners view the economic and ethical contributions of CSR to a company and to society. Corporations operating in this country will find the challenges identified by these authors insightful.

And finally, White and Fitzpatrick (2018) report on a survey of corporate executives and communication leaders that offers insight into how public diplomacy influences corporate standing. CSR and diplomacy can assist corporations in their missions, and yet corporate leaders are rarely invited to participate in diplomacy.

These articles offer a range of insights into how CSR is implemented and perceived across the globe, but this is only the beginning of this important work. The field still needs to answer many important questions about how multinational corporations can implement corporate responsibility programs across national boundaries. We need to extend the findings in the current CSR literature around stakeholders benefits, reputation, product intentions, etc. to a broader context, taking into consideration cultural differences and business environment.

We would like to thank the editor, Hilary Fussell Sisco, for the opportunity to publish this special issue. And, we are grateful to the authors for their efforts and patience as we worked through the revisions to develop this cohesive group of articles. We hope you enjoy the research we included here.

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