

EFFECT OF SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT ON CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENSION

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined the effect of sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) on consumers' purchase intension. Specifically, the study determine the extent to which SSCM practice that are socially and environmental sustainable create self brand connection compare to SSCM practices which are not socially or environmental sustainable. It also investigates the extent to which supply chain management practices that are socially and environmental sustainable reduces dissonance compare to supply chain management practices that are not socially or environmentally sustainable. The study adopted quantitative research approach while the population consists of staff and major dealers of Dangote cement PLC who have made official purchase for an upward of five years. Data used for the study was collected using structured questionnaire while data analysis was done using linear regression. The study reveals that sustainable supply chain management practices is capable of connecting customer with the product of firms. The coefficient of determination (R^2) obtain reveal that 91.70% of customer loyalty was as a result of sustainable supply chain management. It was recommended that firms that are eco-friendly should educate members of the public by indicating it on their labels in order to adequately distinguish it from those firms that are not environmentally friendly. This will clear any negative feeling from customer which may increase dissonance in them.*

KEYWORDS: Sustainability, Supply Chain, Purchases Intension, Cognitive Dissonance.

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, supply chains activities have become increasingly global and as such both practitioners and consumers have placed greater emphasis on supply chain management's (SCM) ethical consequences (Ferrell et al., 2013). From a practitioner perspective, considerable benefits of sustainable SCM practices on firm bottom lines have emerged; suggesting sustainable SCM may strengthen buyer–seller relationships, increase perceptions of product quality and improve business to business brand equity (Vurro et al., 2009).

In contrast, consumers tend to focus their attention on the harm that may be done by supply chain activities and the environmental consequences of production and sourcing of products (Ferrell et al., 2013 Ferrell) This growing consumer awareness of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has led firms to incorporate CSR into marketing communications (Smith et al., 2010).

Interestingly, consumer criticisms of organizations for CSR failures and negative consequences of supply chain activities are often unpredictable (Palazzo & Basu, 2007). Little effort has been made by previous researchers in extant literature to foster understanding of how and why

consumers develop opinions about firms' sustainable SCM practices. This study attempt to empirically examine the impact of socially and environmentally sustainable SCM practices on consumer patronage intention of firm.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Supply Chain Management

As supply chains have become globalized and stakeholders have become increasingly vocal critics of unsustainable activities, an area of research has developed examining responsible and sustainable SCM as a critical area of CSR (Maloni & Brown, 2006). The supply chain function is an obvious one for influencing ethics initiatives simply because the supply chain has the ability to influence virtually all the activities that would typically affect socially responsible behaviors

Owing to the fact that sustainable SCM is a relatively new field, widely accepted, clear, and rigorous definitions of sustainable SCM are in flux. Terms such as responsible SCM, environmental SCM, sustainable global SCM, and socially responsible SCM can be found in the extant literature (Reuter et al., 2010). The difficulty in establishing a clear definition of sustainable SCM grows from several sources. First there is a lack of a clear definition of SCM. A comprehensive study by Stock and Boyer (2009) found 173 definitions of SCM in academic literature and proposed the following consensus definition:

The management of a network of relationships within a firm and between interdependent organizations and business units consisting of material suppliers, purchasing, production facilities, logistics, marketing, and related systems that facilitate the forward and reverse flow of materials, services, finances and information from original producer to final customer with the benefits of adding value, maximizing profitability through efficiency, and achieving customer satisfaction.

However, most definitions of SCM ignore an assessment of responsibility for the consequence of how profits may be maximized and consumer satisfaction created (Ferrell et al., 2013). This highlights the growing need for consideration of ethical and sustainable consequences of SCM. Second, interest in this area of SCM can be found in numerous fields, including corporate responsibility, marketing, industrial marketing, and SCM itself, with each area viewing the importance and definition of both SCM and sustainability differently (Hoejmose et al., 2014). Third, efforts are being made to incorporate both the environmental and social consequences of supply chains into the overall concept of supply chain sustainability with the result that sustainability can be linked to ethical behavior and CSR by considering the organization's ability to deliver economic, environmental, and social benefits—also known as the triple bottom line (Carter & Rogers, 2008).

Markley and Davis (2007) point out that “another way to describe the sustainable organization is to say that while pursuing profit, enlightened companies should take care to protect the environment and uphold the rights of workers and other stakeholders as well”. However, numerous authors have recognized that environmental consequences have received a great deal more attention in SCM literature than social consequences (Adrien-Kirby, 2012).

However, for the purposes of this research we define the sustainable supply chain management defined as the strategic, transparent integration and achievement of an organization's social, environmental, and economic goals in the systemic coordination of key inter-organizational business processes for improving the long-term economic performance of the individual company and its suppliers

Achieving competitive advantage through Sustainable Supply Chain Management

It has become increasingly difficult for organizations to sustain competitive advantage based on product and price as competitor access to similar raw materials, customer focus on price, and rapid technological advances continue. In addition, as supply chains continue to expand globally, the number of stakeholders affected by supply chain activities has greatly increased (Reuter et al., 2010, Hartmann, & Blome, 2010). As such, the supply chain is becoming an area searched for sources of competitive advantage as sustainability, stakeholder approval, and efforts to avoid negative consequences become more important (Markley & Davis, 2007).

The interest in the consequences of sustainability efforts in supply chains continues to grow as discussed earlier and is often based on an assumption that efforts to become more sustainable will result in financial benefit. However, the results of efforts to document this assumption are mixed, even though the majority of studies show a positive relationship between sustainability and performance (Perrini et al., 2011). There is also growing evidence that strong buyer–seller relationships generate benefits through the supply chain (Vurro et al., 2009).

Positive benefits of sustainable SCM practices include the ability to encourage consumers to perceive higher product quality and an improvement in business-to-business brand equity due to environmental and social practices (Lai et al., 2010; Lai, & Chiu, 2010). More so, responsible management of social and environmental issues may strengthen shareholder relationships and a presumed license to operate (Perrini & Tencati, 2006). Sustainable upstream supply chain practices result in lower production costs and gains in productivity may be generated by sustainable practices (Wagner, 2010 & Wagner, 2010).

Sustainability efforts are complicated because, even though many organizations sincerely work to develop sustainable SCM, it is not uncommon for many to make sustainability claims to encourage consumer purchase although not actually engaging in sustainable actions (Hunter, 2012 & Hunter, 2012). Much of this concern is propelled by the role marketing plays in driving unsustainable supply chain activities in global environments as efforts to offer lower prices, shortened lead times, and shortened product life cycles result in environmental pollution, questionable labor practices, and corruption throughout the supply chain (Palazzo & Basu, 2007). Interestingly, the link between marketing and sustainability is strengthening as “growing numbers of companies are looking to emphasize their commitment to sustainability in an attempt to help to differentiate themselves from their competitors to enhance their corporate brand and reputation” (Jones et al., 2008).

However, the evidence regarding the effect of sustainable SCM on consumer perceptions and behavior, including a clear understanding of how ethical supply chain behaviors affect consumer opinions, is lacking. Shaw et al. (2006) noted that an increasing number of consumers are seeking to engage and influence the suppliers of products and services through their actions in the market place. Further, a growing number of consumers consider the effect of their consumption choices on society (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003).

We therefore endeavor to outline these consumer responses by proposing and empirically testing a theoretical model connecting sustainable SCM to consumer evaluations and behaviors.

Self-Brand Connections → Purchase Intentions

Evidence exists that indicates self-brand connections influence purchase behaviors (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Specifically, congruity between an individual's self-concept and a brand's image influence purchase motivation such that the effect is strongest when these congruencies are between positive aspects of an individual's self-concept and the brand image (Sirgy, 1982). We therefore expect, as it relates to sustainable SCM, greater levels of self-brand connections will result in increased purchase intentions.

Theoretical Background for the Study

This study is anchored on cognitive dissonance theory. This theory was originally theorized as a state under which an individual simultaneously possesses two or more cognitions acting in opposition to one another (Festinger, 1957). Festinger (1957) posited that dissonance is similar to other drive states like thirst or hunger and that individual will seek to diminish the associated discomfort. Considerable extant research has examined this theory, exploring antecedents to dissonance, outcomes of dissonance, and dissonance reduction techniques (Aronson, 1968 & Aronson, 1968). Dissonance theory considers cognitive dissonance a multistep process beginning with inconsistencies between an individual's internal beliefs and actions (Stone & Cooper, 2001). These differences arouse dissonance in the individual, resulting in psychological discomfort (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). On the motivational nature of cognitive dissonance, dissonance motivation is then activated as a desire to relieve the discomfort, resulting in adjusted attitudes or future behaviors (Elliot & Devine, 1994).

The source of dissonance arousal and motivation can be either internal or external to the self (Aronson, 1968 & Aronson, 1968). Self-consistency theory, for example, posits that individuals possess a set of internal expectancies for their own ethical or competent behaviors and dissonance is therefore aroused after engaging in a behavior inconsistent with an individual's own perceived competence or moral code (Aronson, 1968). In contrast to these internal sources of the self, extant research has indicated sources outside the self also result in psychological discomfort and the same dissonance-based outcomes (Cooper & Fazio, 1984).

In connection to this current work, we posit that one area where ethically acceptable behaviors may influence dissonance is sustainable SCM. Specifically, although cognitions regarding firms engaging in ethically and morally *acceptable* practices will be consistent with consumers' preexisting cognitions, cognitions regarding firms that engage in ethically and morally *unacceptable* practices will be inconsistent with these same preexisting cognitions. In other words, we expect that although exposure to socially and environmentally responsible companies will not arouse dissonance, exposure to socially or environmentally *irresponsible* companies will arouse dissonance and the subsequent psychological discomfort.

Dissonance → Purchase Intentions

Individuals have also been shown to modify behaviors to reduce psychological discomfort. (Spangenberg et al. 2003). Grohmann & Smith (2003) for example, demonstrated that under an induced state of psychological discomfort, individuals modified behaviors in the form of

increased time donated to charitable organizations. Although this suggests that dissonance results in individuals actively seeking out cognitions to reduce psychological discomfort. Jonas et al (2003) originally proposed that dissonance would result in individuals actively avoiding cognitions to reduce discomfort. In furtherance, the authors found support for this prediction, as individuals in a dissonant state were not only more likely to actively seek out consonant information but also avoided dissonant information. We expect dissonance avoidance to continue in relation to SCM such that greater levels of psychological discomfort will lead to decreased purchase intentions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study was conducted using a quantitative research approach. Quantitative analysis enabled the study to collect, group and categorize data to allow for statistical analysis.

Population of the Study

A research population, according to Cooper & Schindler (2003) constitutes the total number of people or study subjects in a particular research setting. The study population included all management staff and major dealers of Dangote Cement who have made official purchase for an upward of five years. The management staffs were 28 whilst the customers were three hundred and eighty seven.

Sample

The position is held by Britton & Garmo (2002) that a research sample size constitutes a selection of a small researchable unit of a given population using methods that enable representation and generalization. A respondent sample of 184 respondents made up of 176 customers and 8 management staff were sampled to respond to the data collection instrument. since only customers who had made purchase for an upward of 5 years were targeted, the study sampled all the customers whose details were in the company record for the periods under consideration in that way, statistical formulations like Cochran (1988) sample size formula for categorical data was not needed to achieve a representative sample since the sample size was already pre-determined by the number of customers in the company's record.

Sampling Technique

According to Oso and Onen (2005), sampling refers to the process of selecting subsets from a population of research interest to enable detailed study for further generalization of research results. Creswell (2009) defines sampling as the selection of subgroups from statistical populations to enable estimation of characteristics for the whole population. There are two major types of sampling: probability and non-probability. A probability sample is one in which each element of the population has an equal chance of being selected as part of the sample whilst in a non-probability sample, elements of the population are chosen in a non-random way. Non-probability sampling helps researchers to select elements of a population that are seen by the researcher to possess desirable traits and knowledge vital to the achievement of the study. A non-probability sampling method called convenient sampling

was used. Yin (2005) posits that convenient sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher.

Since customers may live and work in diverse places in and could be hard to reach, the study adopted convenient sampling techniques to enable sampling of customers who could be reached physically or by phone. A convenient sample according to Yin (2005) is one where the units that are selected for inclusion in the sample are the easiest to access.

Sources of Data Collection

The study sourced data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data consist of first-hand data sources. Primary data source can include data collected through questionnaires, interviews (structured, semi-structure and unstructured), observations, discussions, etc. The study utilized questionnaires as the data collection instrument.

Data Analysis

The hypotheses proposed in the study were tested using simple linear regression.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Supply chain management practices that are socially and environmentally sustainable will be more likely to create self-brand connections than supply chain management practices that are not socially or environmentally sustainable.

Table 1 F-calculated for testing the significant of overall influence of Sustainable SCM on self Brand-Connection

SV	SS	DF	MS	F-CAL	SIGN
Regression	0.234	1	0.234	23.082	0.010
Residual	0.021	3	0.007		
Total		4			

Table 2 T-calculated for testing the influence of Sustainable SCM on self Brand-Connection

Predictors	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient Beta	T-calculated	Sign
	B	Std.error			
Self-Brand Connection (x)	2.314	0.402	0.958	5.752	0.010
Constant	3.285	0.089		36.991	0.0000

Table 3 Coefficient of determination for determining the overall contribution of Sustainable SCM on self Brand-Connection

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard error of the estimate
0.958	0.917	0.889	0.084

Interpretation and Discussion of results

The tables 1 to 3 above presented the results of the test statistics computed for the null hypothesis one. In table 1, the p-value of the F-statistics calculated for determining the overall significant of null hypothesis one of 0.010 was less than the critical value of 5%. This revealed that the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between Sustainable SCM and consumer brand-connection was rejected. It could be asserted that there was a significant relationship between Sustainable SCM and consumer brand-connection. Sustainable supply chain management practice is capable of connecting customers with the products of firm.

Also, in table 2, the p-value of the t-statistics calculated for consumer brand-connection of 0.010 was less than the critical value of 5%. This implied that the null hypothesis which stated that Sustainable SCM has no significant influence on consumer brand-connection was rejected. The regression coefficient computed for product quality of 2.314 indicated an existence of a positive relationship between Sustainable SCM and consumer brand-connection. The implication of this is that a unit increase in Sustainable SCM of firms lead to more than a unit improvement in consumer brand-connection and patronage intention. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R²) obtained for the test of hypothesis in table 3 of 0.917 revealed the fact that 91.70% of consumer brand-loyalty was as a result of Sustainable SCM of firms.

Hypothesis 2: Supply chain management practices that are socially and environmentally sustainable will likely reduce dissonance than supply chain management practices that are not socially or environmentally sustainable.

Table 4 F-calculated for testing the significant of overall hypothesis two

SV	SS	DF	MS	F-CAL	SIGN
Regression	0.183	1	0.183	124.310	0.0000
Residual	0.006	4	0.001		
Total	0.189	5			

Table 5 T-calculated for testing Sustainable SCM on Dissonance

Predictor	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	T-cal	Sign
	B	Std.Error			
Dissonance (X)	4.883	0.438	0.984	11.149	0.0000
Constant	3.020	0.075		40.066	0.0000

Source: Researcher's computation, 2017

Table 6 Coefficient of determination (R²) for verifying the overall contribution of Sustainable SCM on Dissonance

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard error of the estimate
0.984	0.969	0.961	0.038

Interpretation and Discussion of the results

The tables 4 to 6 above presented the results of the test statistics computed for hypothesis two. In table 4, the p-value of the F-statistics calculated of 0.0000 was less than the critical value of 5%. This implied that that null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between Sustainable SCM and dissonance among customers was rejected. It could be asserted that there is a significant relationship between Sustainable SCM and dissonance since the null hypothesis was rejected. The imperative of Sustainable SCM on dissonance among customers had been observed by many scholars. Majority of these findings found out that there was a significant relationship between Sustainable SCM and dissonance among customers toward the products of firms.

Furthermore, in table 5, the p-value of the t-statistics calculated for dissonance of 0.0000 was less than the critical value of 5%. This indicated that the null hypothesis which stated that Sustainable SCM had no significant effect on dissonance among customers was rejected. The regression coefficient obtained for dissonance of 4.883 was positive. This revealed that there was an existence of a positive relationship between dissonance and Sustainable SCM. The resultant effect of this was that a unit increase in Sustainable SCM of firms might lead to a more than a unit decrease in dissonance among customers.

Also, the coefficient of determination computed for the test of 0.969 indicated the fact that 96.90% of dissonance was due to Sustainable SCM of firms.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

As supply chains are becoming globalized and stakeholders are becoming increasingly vocal critics of unsustainable activities, an area of CSR research has developed examining responsible and sustainable SCM (Maloni & Brown, 2006). For example, Maloni, & Brown (2006) recognize the role of the supply chain as “an obvious one for influencing ethics initiatives simply because the supply chain has the ability to influence virtually all the activities that would typically affect socially responsible behaviors”. Social and environmental concerns have therefore become a key component of sustainable SCM for organizations interested in maintaining positive reputations with consumers (Perrini et al., 2011)

Although efforts are being made to incorporate both the environmental and social consequences of supply chains into the overall concept of supply chain sustainability, little research has directly measured the impact of sustainable SCM on consumer behaviors and purchase intention.

Results indicated considerations of social and environmental responsibility in the supply chain simultaneously affect individuals' connection to the brand and activate psychological discomfort associated with cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, increased self-brand connections positively affected consumers' brand evaluations and purchase intentions, controlling for cognitive dissonance. In contrast, increased cognitive dissonance resulted in less favorable brand evaluations and lower purchase intentions, controlling for self-brand connections.

These results appear to be consistent with considerations of the self and the myriad goals associated with the self-concept. Recognizing that individuals are motivated to maintain and present a positive self-concept (Aronson, 1968).

Our study offers multiple implications for both supply chain managers and marketing practitioners. First, engaging in socially and environmentally responsible behaviors is valued by consumers as it results in favorable brand evaluations and increased intent to purchase products. This indicates that investments in sustainable SCM may not only offer positive social and environmental returns but also positively affect financial returns through increased sales.

Second, individuals participating in the study reported greater connections to the fictitious firm when they believed the firm engaged in socially and environmentally sustainable practices. In contrast, unethical SCM practices resulted in consumer psychological discomfort. Therefore in response to negative consumer reactions to unethical supply chain practices, practitioners may benefit from marketing campaigns directed at minimizing individuals' discomfort, including explaining steps taken to fix unethical practices or justifying unethical behaviors in a manner that addresses and attempts to minimize this discomfort.

Recommendations

- Practitioners interested in increasing firm perceptions should promote sustainable SCM to increase sales, although firms that do not actively engage in sustainable SCM practices should avoid drawing attention to their supply chain. Using a credible, external source to describe and praise (or criticize) the fictitious firm's sustainable SCM behaviors resulted in a successful manipulation of consumer perceptions of the firm. This indicates firms interested in promoting sustainable SCM practices should seek external sources of praise such as public relations campaigns and sustainability awards and similar recognition.
- Firms that are eco-friendly should educate members of the public by indicating it on their labels in order to adequately distinguish it from those firms that are not environmentally friendly. This will clear any negative feelings from customers which may increase dissonance in them

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