

The Effects of International New Ventures' Social Responsibility Engagement on Local Customer Loyalty: A Perspective of Relationship Marketing in Emerging Economies

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Abstract

Research addressing international new ventures' social responsibility activities is scarce. Specifically, researchers have little account for the effects of an international new venture's social responsibility efforts on the outcomes of relationships with local customers in emerging economies. Against this background, we attempt to extend the boundaries of an understanding of the effects of international new ventures' social responsibility engagement on local customers' loyalty through customer trust and customer identification in emerging economies. Based mainly on the stakeholder theory and the relationship marketing theory, our study conceptualize two facets of international new ventures' social responsibility efforts: ethical and philanthropic corporate social responsibility engagement. In addition, we identify positive customer relationship-building mechanisms for each facet. Furthermore, our study presents an empirically testable propositions that would explain how international new ventures' social responsibility efforts influence the outcomes of relationships with local customers in emerging economies. Finally, this manuscript provides a discussion of the present study' implications for theory and practice and limitations that naturally lead to future research on international new ventures' social responsibility activities in developing economies.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Customer Loyalty, Emerging Economy, International New Venture, Relationship Marketing

JEL Classifications: F23, M16, M31

I. Introduction

An economic transformation has been occurring in the rapidly emerging countries of Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

This transformation has been providing international new ventures (hereinafter referred to as INVs) with an opportunity to compete in these countries. Concurrently, many INVs have confronted pressures for

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corporate social responsibility (hereinafter referred to as CSR) in developing economies.

Nevertheless, research addressing INVs' social responsibility activities is scarce. In particular, researchers have little consider the effects of an INV's social responsibility efforts on the outcomes of relationships with local customers in emerging economies. In effect, INVs often rely substantially on relationships with local customers in order to achieving competitive advantage and superior financial performance (Skarmeas and Katsikeas, 2001). In addition, INVs' customer relationships in developing economies can be a key driver of attaining their global goals (Hada, Grewal and Chandrashekar, 2013). Moreover, business customers are often a key partner of the INV's value creation process in the sense that they can conduct crucial functions to convey its market offerings to local economies (Wu, Sinkovics, Cavusgil and Roath, 2007). Thus, INVs' social responsibility engagement is an issue in regard to all business customers (Oh, 2014; Vaaland, Heide and Grønhaug, 2008).

Against this backdrop, it is essential to investigate how an INV's social responsibility engagement influence its relationship outcomes for several characteristics. First, often justifying their decisions to INVs, local customers can try to rationalize their actions. Second, a local customer's failure often results from choosing an unreliable INV in that the customer's own business operations depend critically on the INV's reliability (Mitchell, 1995). Third, an INV's reliability is crucial to local customers because it is vital for

the INV to establish many long-term relationships with local customers (Mitchell, 1995). Although these characteristics build a significant international business environment, in which an INV's social responsibility engagement may lead to its superior financial performance in emerging economies, extant studies little present the effectiveness of INVs' stakeholder-directed actions in the form of CSR activities.

We attempt to address the issue mentioned above and contribute to literature on international business and CSR research in important ways. First, combining the stakeholder theory and the relationship marketing theory, we establish a theoretical ground for research on the effects of INVs' social responsibility engagement on the outcomes of relationships with local customers in developing economies. Second, based mostly on the stakeholder theory, we conceptualize two facets of INVs' social responsibility efforts: ethical CSR and philanthropic CSR engagement. Third, in accordance with this conceptualization, our study aims to identify distinct relationship-building mechanisms for each CSR facet. Fourth, drawing prominently on the relationship marketing theory, our study examines the effects of an INV's social responsibility activities on relationship outcomes, including customer trust in and customer identification with the INV, and customer loyalty. Finally, we present an empirically testable propositions that would explain how INVs social responsibility efforts influence the outcomes of relationships with local customers in emerging economies. These propositions provide INVs with a

justification for their active commitment to CSR engagement.

II. Theoretical Background

1. Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory views a firm as a nexus of groups and/or individuals who may affect or may be affected through the attainment of firm's objectives (Freeman, 1984). The theory distinguishes between primary and secondary stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). On one hand, primary stakeholders are regarded as those who work in market exchange with a firm. Without primary stakeholders' sustainable participation, the firm cannot survive (Clarkson, 1995). Customers and employees are considered critical primary stakeholders in the sense that the treatment of customers and employees often considerably influences the firm's outcome (Berman et al., 1999; Maignan, Ferrell, and Ferrell, 2005). On the other hand, secondary stakeholders are deemed those who may influence or may be influenced by the firm but are little engaged in transactions with the firm (Clarkson, 1995). The community and nonprofit organizations are representative examples of secondary stakeholders (Lankoski, 2009). A key tenet of the stakeholder theory is that firms should create stakeholders' value in order to enhance performance (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Freeman, 1999).

2. Relationship Marketing Theory

There have been various perspectives of relationship marketing. Berry (1983) clarified relationship marketing as attracting, keeping, and improving customer relationships. Berry and Parasuraman (1991) suggested that relationship marketing involves attracting, developing, and maintaining customer relationships. Gummesson (1991) stated that relationship marketing is marketing viewed as relationships, networks, and interaction. Sheth (1994) viewed relationship marketing as understanding, explaining, and managing the ongoing cooperative relationship between a customer and a supplier. Morgan and Hunt (1994) indicated that relationship marketing represents all marketing directed developing and maintaining successful relationship exchanges. Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) proposed that relationship marketing aims to concern and combine customers, suppliers, and other parties into a firm's developmental marketing. Grönroos (1996) proposed that relationship marketing is identifying, developing, retaining, and improving relationships with stakeholders, at a profit, to meet all parties' objectives through a mutual exchange and the fulfillment of promises. Grönroos (2000) suggested that relationship marketing is marketing regarded as managing relationships with customers, suppliers, distributors, financial institutions, and other parties. One common perspective of relationship marketing is that firms should be competing by developing relatively long-term relationships with stakeholders including customers, employees, suppli-

ers, and competitors.

III. Conceptualization

1. CSR Engagement

Drawing crucially on the stakeholder theory, we differentiate two aspects of INVs' social responsibility engagement: ethical and philanthropic CSR activities. On one respect, ethical CSR engagement represents an INV's social responsibility activities directed toward such primary stakeholders as local employees and customers with whom an exchange occurs. Ethical CSR engagement involves ethical obligation. Ethical obligation reflects INVs' attention of societal and ethical norm in daily business (Carroll, 1991). On the other respect, philanthropic CSR engagement represents an INV's social responsibility activities directed toward such secondary stakeholders as the community, nonprofit organizations, and entities outside the INV's core business. Philanthropic CSR engagement corresponds to philanthropic obligation. Philanthropic obligation includes INVs' activities facilitating goodwill and human welfare in emerging economies (Aguilera et al., 2007; Godfrey, Merrill and Hansen, 2009; Peloza and Shang, 2011).

2. Relationship Outcomes

The relationship marketing theory advocates that successful relational exchanges stem from specific characteristics of a relationship (Mehta et al., 2006).

Representative relationship characteristics are as trust (Sivadas and Dwyer, 2000; Smith and Barclay, 1997; Weitz and Bradford, 1999) and customer identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2007; Homburg, Wieseke and Hoyer, 2009; Lichtenstein, Drumwright and Braig, 2004).

2.1 Customer Trust

In the context of an INV, customer trust is defined as comprising local customer's expectancy that the INV is competent and reliable or credible and their belief that the INV possesses beneficial intentions and motives such as integrity or benevolence (Caldwell and Clapham, 2003; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Greenwood and Van Buren, 2010; Homburg, Stierl and Bornemann, 2013; Kumar, Scheer and Steenkamp, 1995). Trust in an INV can constitute a benefit for local customers by reducing exchange uncertainty and by lowering transaction costs related to reaching, adapting, and enforcing reciprocally content agreements (Kollock, 1994). It is often easier to trust within a relationship between an INV and local customers when prediction is plausible and when the local customers are able to anticipate the INV's behavior (Huemer, 2004).

2.2 Customer Identification

Identification with an INV can be formed by comparing personal values with organizational ones, bring on a state of self-categorization, and offer an expressive benefit by satisfying people's self-definitional needs (Hogg and Terry,

2000; Lawler, Thye and Yoon, 2000). In the context of an INV, customer identification is defined as a local customer's psychological attachment to the INV on the ground of an overlap of the customer's self-concept with his or her perceived attributes defining the INV (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Customer identification provides local customer with satisfaction and functions as an added mediator within the value chain.

3. Customer Loyalty

The main objective of an INV's social responsibility engagement is to create long-term, reciprocally beneficial relationships with local stakeholders (Bhattacharya, Korschun and Sen, 2009). Indeed, local customers' loyalty is as a key outcome of an INV's relationship marketing. Local customers' loyalty can be defined as encompassing their expressive preference for an INV, their intention to continue to

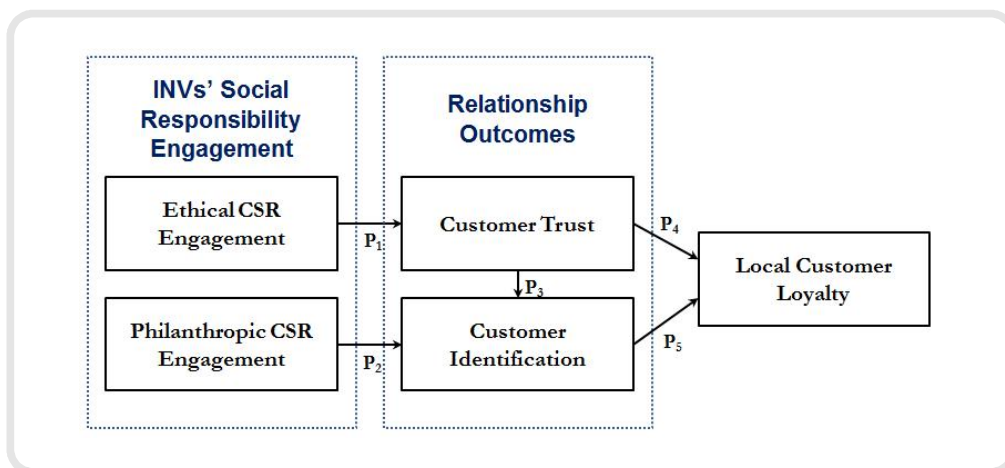
buy from the INV, and/or their intention to increase business with it (Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1996).

IV. Propositions

Using the stakeholder theory and the relationship marketing theory as underlying frameworks, we attempt to develop propositions of explaining INV success through CSR efforts in emerging economies. Figure 1 presents a propositional model of the effects of INVs' social responsibility engagement on local customer loyalty through relationship outcomes.

INVs can activate a signal to deliver unobservable organizational attributes that indicate its trustworthiness into local customers in emerging economies (Connelly et al., 2011). An INV's vigorous social responsibility activities, in a developing economy, can play a role of a signal for the INV's positive characteristics. In ef-

Fig. 1. A Proposed Model



fect, an INV's social responsibility support may create a reputation of the INV's reliability, honesty, benevolence, and/or integrity in an emerging economy (Bhattacharya, Korschun and Sen, 2009; McWilliams and Siegel, 2001). These factors can be crucial elements of trust.

Specifically, an INV's ethical CSR in a developing economy can provoke its trustworthiness. In fact, high signal fit is critical to an informational cue's effectiveness (Connelly et al., 2011). Local customers often search for signals of an INV's reliability and integrity toward them. Accordingly, INVs' ethical CSR engagement in an emerging economy may comprise a high signal fit and a high signaling value for trustworthiness targeting local customers. Therefore, it is posited that:

P1: An INV's ethical CSR engagement positively influences local customers' trust in the INV.

An INV's CSR engagement in an emerging economy can be a main driver of local customers' identification with the INV in the sense that a firm's actions in the CSR domain can truly disclose its values, soul, and/or character constituting the firm's identity (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2007; Lichtenstein, Drumwright, and Braig 2004). In the event that a local customer perceives some values reflected through an INV's CSR activities to be congruous with his or her own values, identification with the INV would increase (Sen, Bhattacharya and Korschun, 2006).

Specifically, an INV's philanthropic CSR engagement in a developing economy can

trigger local customers' identification with the INV in that this CSR facet deals with community stakeholders, who primarily have normatively legitimate claims but lack both the urgency and power to insist these claims. Philanthropic CSR activities are often more likely to be regarded as voluntary actions of social beneficence than ethical CSR activities (Godfrey, Merrill and Hansen, 2009). Accordingly, an INV's CSR aiming at community stakeholders in an emerging economy should offer an expressive benefit by enhancing local customers' identification with the INV. Thus, it is posited that:

P2: An INV's philanthropic CSR engagement positively influences local customers' identification with the INV.

Trust in an organization is a key antecedent of organizational identification (Lavelle, Rupp, and Brockner, 2007). Local customers can identify with trustworthy INVs in order to communicate their self-definition and to improve their self-esteem. In a developing economy, local customers often identify with a trusted INV and consider competent, benevolent and honest INVs to be trusted. A local customer may link his or her self-identity to an INV when he or she distrusts the INV is difficult to imagine (De Cremer, Van Dijke and Bos, 2006; Keh and Xie, 2009). The extent to which local customers perceive an INV identity as trustworthy could determine their response to it (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Therefore, it is posited that:

P3: Local customers' trust in an INV positively influences their identification with the INV.

In an emerging economy, local customers' trust in an INV can positively influence their loyalty to the INV through uncertainty reduction (Doney and Cannon, 1997). In effect, INV-local customer relationships often display asymmetric information on others' motivations and the quality of what is exchanged (Kollock, 1994). In particular, in these relationship with information asymmetry on the local customer side, uncertainty reduction is crucial in the sense that local customers' own business relies heavily on the INV's reliability and integrity (Mitchell, 1995). Likewise, it is natural to confine one's exchanges to those who have revealed themselves to be trustworthy (Kollock, 1994). Thus, it is posited that:

P4: Local customers' trust in an INV positively influences their loyalty to the INV.

In a developing economy, local customers' identification with an INV can positively influence their loyalty to the INV. In effect, being loyal to an INV can validate and reinforce the feeling of belongingness to the INV (Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen, 2005; Homburg, Wieseke and Hoyer, 2009). Therefore, it is posited that:

P5: Local customers' identification with an INV positively influences their loyalty to the INV.

V. Discussion

Our study can contribute to literature on both international business and CSR research in some ways. First, our study is the first to postulate that an INV's CSR engagement leads to positive relationship outcomes. Second, combining the stakeholder theory and the relationship marketing theory, we developed a holistic framework that explains and predicts how local customers account for INVs' social responsibility engagement in emerging economies. Third, unlike prior marketing research conceptualizing CSR globally or designating a specific activity as CSR, our study demonstrated the two distinct facets of INVs' social responsibility engagement. We differentiated INVs' ethical CSR engagement from their philanthropic CSR engagement. Fourth, drawing crucially on the stakeholder theory and relationship marketing theory, we provided an empirically testable model for a concurrent examination of the results of distinct CSR facets in the INV context. Finally, we derived conditions under which the two facets of INVs' social responsibility can create favorable outcomes of relationships with local customers.

The results of our study provided managerial implications for INVs in emerging economies. First, INVs should note distinct benefit mechanisms regarding their social responsibility engagement in developing economies. The results of our study showed that whereas INVs' ethical CSR engagement derives local customer loyalty through trust, INVs' philanthropic CSR leads to local customer loyalty through customer identification. Second,

the management of an INV should highlight that CSR engagement is worthwhile in order to establish relationships with local customers in emerging economies. An INV should raise customer trust and identification, both of which can reinforce local customers' loyalty to the INV by taking a fine-grained approach to CSR activities. Third, INVs' managers should develop an effective CSR engagement in developing economies. On one respect, if the primary aim is to enhance customer trust, then INV managers should emphasize the ethical CSR engagement. On the other respect, if the primary goal is to intensify customer identification, INV managers should prioritize the philanthropic CSR engagement. Finally, INVs' managers monitor local customers' perception of the CSR activities. Local customers may recognize disparate facets of CSR when they assess an INV's social responsibility engagement. Accordingly, INVs can develop their CSR reputation with positive engagement by corresponding to each CSR facet. In addition, INVs should proactively concern CSR issues in their business strategy, continue to implement CSR activities, and articulately communicate their CSR efforts in emerging countries.

Our study contains certain limitations; therefore, future research is naturally suggested. First, although several proposi-

tions were developed in our study, any empirical test was not conducted. Therefore, a next step is to test the propositions empirically. Second, we little captured the dynamic nature of INVs' relationships with local customers in developing countries. Thus, future researchers might investigate, in detail, INVs' social responsibility engagement in various relationship life cycles. Third, we did not consider various types of CSR factors in the present study. These factors could be accessible through financial, legal, physical, human, organizational, relational, and informational resources. If an INV is prosperous in these resources, local customers loyalty to the INV could be enhanced. For example, local customers' CSR awareness and extrinsic CSR attribution could affect relationship outcomes or customer loyalty. Therefore, a further study is necessary to examine how many types and combinations of CSR factors influence INVs' performance in emerging countries. Finally, even though we proposed important relational factors, there could be other factors potentially affecting INVs' performance in developing countries. Thus, further research should identify other relational factors. Potential candidates are role clarity, perceived fairness, opportunism, and dysfunctional conflict.

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