CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN RETAIL SECTOR: ARE EMPLOYEES AWARE OF WHAT THEIR EMPLOYERS ARE DOING?

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is the adoption of responsible business practices concerning economic, environmental, and social CSR, is an important topic among marketers aiming to develop market value with various stakeholder groups, including employees. Previous research is limited to developed market economies and has focused mainly on external stakeholder groups. This study explored South African retail employees' awareness of their organizations' CSR initiatives. The sample size was 229 South African retail employees, from lower-level employees up to middle and senior management. The study made use of a computer-aided self-administered survey, distributed via LinkedIn. The results indicated that lower-level employees are less aware of economic, environmental, and social CSR initiatives implemented by their organizations than those in middle and senior management, but that there was no significant difference between middle and senior managements' levels of awareness of their organizations' CSR initiatives. The results also indicated that employees have higher levels of awareness when it comes to internal economic CSR, external economic CSR, and external social CSR, as opposed to internal environmental CSR, external environmental CSR, and internal social CSR initiatives. The findings of the study can assist organizations to customize internal CSR communication strategies.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility (CSR); employees; retail

JEL: M21;M30;M31;M52

1. Introduction

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (1999) defines corporate social responsibility "CSR" as the "commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve quality of life." CSR ultimately has three dimensions: people, profit and the planet, known as the triple bottom line approach, which refers to an organization's financial responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility towards the communities it serves (Grafstrom *et al.*, 2008, p. 283). In 1971, Kotler and Zaltman introduced societal marketing as a framework for implementing social change by applying marketing techniques to promote social objectives such as family planning or safe driving (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, p. 3). The 1970s also saw CSR emphasizing environmental issues and increased awareness of realities such as human rights violations and climate change. In addition, pressure from society, activists, governments, investors, and other stakeholder groups prompted organizations to look beyond themselves as the primary beneficiary and beyond customers as the only focus of marketing activities (Bode & Singh, 2018; Smith *et al.*, 2010). Ignoring stakeholder demands for a triple bottom line approach can have negative organizational outcomes, such as reputational damage (Nguyen & Oyotode, 2015; Falkenberg & Brunsael, 2011).

In the 1980s, complementary concepts such as business ethics, stakeholder theory, and corporate social performance – in addition to new definitions of CSR – were established and attracted attention from various stakeholder groups because of a research focus on the relationship between CSR and profitability (Carrol, 1999). The 1980s also saw a shift in organizations' CSR approach from philanthropy to participation (Kashikar-Rao 2014, p. 191). In the 1990s, John Elkington

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developed the triple bottom line approach, a holistic framework that measures an organization's performance beyond economic gain to include non-economic gains such as environmental and social organizational initiatives (Elkington, 1998). The triple bottom line approach, which is internationally recognized, reiterates that an organization's economic success should never occur at the cost of environmental or social factors (Van der Westhuizen 2019, p. 24).

2. Economic, environmental and social CSR

Although profitability is fundamentally and arguably the most important aspect of any organization, organizations incorporate other economic CSR principles into their long-term strategies, including the responsibility to enable economic progress within communities (Van der Westhuizen 2019, p. 21). Economic CSR includes ethical labor practices in not only complying with the law, but also in implementing initiatives such as paying wages above market level (Schaefer *et al.*, 2020; Malik, 2015). The environmental principle of CSR refers to an organization's efforts to preserve and protect the environment from damage inflicted on it and to promote environmental sustainability (Pitt 2012, p. 25). Environmental efforts include reducing an organization's carbon emissions and improving issues regarding climate change and waste management; biodiversity efforts involving the protection of ecosystems and animals; promoting energy conservation; and investing in environmental research and development (Forney, 2018; Chand, 2018; Lin, 2016; Pitt, 2012). Customers are continuously demanding eco-friendly products and putting more pressure on organizations that are polluting the environment, which results in organizations striving to create brands that are environmentally friendly (Joshi, 2019; Bercea, 2012). Social CSR requires that organizations take greater responsibility for social work and local issues in communities in which they operate, as well as assisting in solving identified non-business social problems in communities (Freeman & Dmytriyev, 2017; Allen, 2016; Behrad, 2014).

Some authors distinguish between external and internal CSR, where external CSR refers to assisting individuals and communities (outside of the organization) in need, such as through HIV/AIDS or poverty alleviation initiatives, while internal CSR (also known as workplace CSR) refers to, for example, social justice and equality in the workplace, employee training, day care programs or diversity policy programs (Cavazotte & Chang, 2016; Pitt, 2012; Dawkins & Ngunjiri, 2008). Internal CSR aims to benefit employees, whereas external CSR targets external stakeholders (Kroh 2014, p. 4).

3. CSR in South Africa

In 1977, the Sullivan Principles, drafted by Dr Howard Leon Sullivan, were established. These required American organizations operating in South Africa to treat all employees fairly and to allocate some of their profits to community development (Kabir *et al.* 2015, p. 283). Many organizations, such as Liberty, De Beers and Gencor, started formalizing CSR initiatives in the 1970s and proceeded to establish trust funds (namely the Liberty Foundation, De Beers Chairman's Fund and the Gencor Development Fund) with the aim of contributing to social causes by allocating some of their profits to impoverished communities (Kabir *et al.* 2015, p. 283). In South Africa, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (BBBEE) are seen as key drivers of the development of CSR programs and regulations (Kabir *et al.* 2015, p. 287). In terms of the BBBEE Act of 2003, it is a legislative requirement to promote socioeconomic development. Because of this Act, many organizations are forced to implement CSR initiatives if they wish to tender for public entity tenders and to meet minimum BBBEE requirements set for suppliers of private sector clients (Skinner & Mersham, 2016; Fredericksz, 2015). The JSE Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) Index, launched in 2004, has seen a major shift from financial sustainability only, to the triple bottom line principles of environmental, social, and financial sustainability in South Africa (Van der Kooy 2014, p. 18). This index plays a prominent role in terms of CSR growth in South Africa and provides incentives for compliance as a benchmark for organizations that incorporate triple bottom line best practices into their operations (Skinner & Mersham 2016, p. 120).

The current trend in South African CSR is a strategic, formalized approach, with most organizations' CSR initiatives being in line with core business strategies and many South African organizations having established a dedicated CSR department, foundation or trust to drive CSR initiatives (Skinner & Mersham, 2016; Sahu & Pratihari, 2015). Alternatively, organizations' CSR expenditure has been directed towards specialized non-profit organizations to implement strategic CSR initiatives (Trialogue 2021, p. 27).

4. CSR in the retail sector

CSR is a topic of growing importance in the retail sector (Marek, 2018, p. 44). CSR spend in South Africa grew significantly in the last few years, reaching R10.3 billion in 2020 ($673 105 000 at an exchange rate of R15.30 per 1 US dollar), with retail and consumer services, mining, water, forestry and chemicals, and financial services being the top contributing sectors (Trialogue Business in Society 2019, p. 26). The most supported CSR development sectors of 2020 included education, social/community development, health, food security, and agriculture (Trialogue Business in Society 2021, p. 26). South African retail organizations such as Woolworths, Famous Brands, Mr Price Group, and Pick n Pay are investing significantly in CSR initiatives (Trialogue Business in Society 2019, p. 36).

5. Benefits of CSR for internal stakeholders

CSR has its roots in the stakeholder theory, which implies that the long-term value of an organization depends as much on its relationship with consumers, investors, and other external stakeholders as on its abilities and commitment to its internal stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). "Stakeholders" were originally defined by Freeman (1984) as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievements of the organization's objectives." Internal stakeholders include individuals or groups within the organization, such as shareholders, employees and managers, whereas external stakeholders include customers, suppliers, local communities, competitors, and governments (Gondivan 2018, p. 8). Employees – the key stakeholder group under investigation in this

study – have regularly been cited as a key stakeholder group (Freeman, 2010; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Lam, 2015; Slack *et al.*, 2015; Doyle, 2019). Organizations are increasingly focusing on employees as a key internal stakeholder group and using CSR as a marketing strategy to align social impact initiatives with business objectives, as employees have been pressuring organizations to undertake CSR initiatives (Shepard, 2019; Nguyen & Oyotode, 2015). CSR ultimately affects employees' perceptions of an organization and can largely influence their relationship with the organization (Adámek & Bernatík, 2014; Habib & Wahid, 2016; Van der Kooy, 2014; Dincer & Dincer, 2012).

A substantial amount of literature has investigated the consequences of organizations' CSR initiatives on employee attitudes and behaviors. CSR has been linked to a motivated workforce, organizational pride, job satisfaction, increased morale and productivity, increased commitment, and improved recruitment, as organizations with CSR initiatives are more attractive to employees (Schaefer *et al.*, 2020; Hejjas *et al.*, 2019; Ramdenee, 2019; Tapang & Bassey, 2017; Glavas & Kelley, 2014; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Coombs & Holladay, 2011). Yet despite the link between CSR and organizational advantages relating to employees, limited attention has been paid to the analysis of CSR at an internal organizational level (Hejjas *et al*. 2019, p. 319). Most CSR research focuses on the organization itself, as opposed to the employee, or on customers' and external stakeholders' perceptions of CSR (Hejjas *et al*., 2019; Burns, 2019; Roeder, 2019; Pratihari & Uzma, 2018; Deng & Xu, 2017; Brunton *et al*., 2017; Hwang & Kandampully, 2015).

On the other hand, some organizations might be engaging in CSR initiatives, but their employees are simply unaware of these initiatives; in this case, organizations will not benefit from the potential positive effects on employee behavioral outcomes (Curt & Bjorneseth 2017, p. 23). Schaefer *et al*. (2020) agree that many employees have little or no knowledge of their organization CSR initiatives. Therefore, it is important that employees understand why their organizations have CSR initiatives, and what the objectives of such

initiatives are, as employees' awareness and understanding of CSR initiatives are important for an organization's longevity (Forney 2018, p. 1). Awareness of CSR initiatives is created through communication tactics and advertising efforts, and it is enhanced through strong internal CSR communication (Doyle, 2019; Andreu *et al.*, 2015).

Internal communication of CSR helps to shape an organization's corporate identity, affects employees' attitude towards the corporate brand and is evident in employees' brand commitment (psychological attachment to the organization), brand identification (alignment with the organization's brand promise and values), brand loyalty (affective commitment), and brand behavior, such as through word of mouth (Sriyothin 2016, p. 38).

6. Research methodology

A quantitative approach was followed in this study. Descriptive research was deemed appropriate as the intention was to test selected demographic subgroups' awareness of CSR. The data were collected through a computer-aided self-administered survey, which was shared as an online hyperlink on the social media platform LinkedIn.

The target population included the employees from any South African retail organization. According to South African Market Insights (2019), the retail sector in South Africa had approximately 894 966 employees; therefore, this was considered the target population.

The sample size for the study, with a 95% confidence level (associated with a Z-score of 1.96), 0.5 standard deviation and a margin of error of 5%, was 385 respondents. A factor analysis aimed at ensuring that all the survey items measured a specific construct or factor and tested for underlying dimensions (Malhotra 2019, p. 607) did not produce any problems as part of a pre-test, which indicated that all the survey questions contributed to the constructs of the survey.

7. Discussion

The findings are based on 229 completed and workable questionnaires. The final baseline of 229 responses was less than the 385 anticipated responses. However, the formula used to determine the sample size for this study did not include the size of the target population, but rather focused on the process used for the selection of the actual sampling units to ensure representativeness (Hair *et al*, 2019, p. 196).

To determine employees' awareness of their organizations' CSR initiatives, the respondents were asked to rate statements regarding their organization CSR initiatives on a 5-point Likert scale. The 5-point Likert scale was converted into a 3-point Likert scale by combining "disagree" and "strongly disagree" to form the "disagree" scale, as well as by combining "agree" and "strongly agree" to form the "agree" scale.

With regard to economic CSR initiatives, 93.0% of the respondents agreed that their organizations have a comprehensive code of conduct as part of its economic CSR initiatives, and 91.3% agreed that their organizations care about the well-being of their customers, which indicates a focus on stakeholders beyond profit maximization only.

Only 66.4% of the respondents indicated that their organizations encourage their employees to undergo ethics training as part of their economic CSR, which indicates either the lack of awareness of ethics training or that retail organizations do not implement ethics training.

Table 7.1. *Frequencies: Employees' agreement with statements about their organization economic CSR initiatives (n=229)*

Survey question	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total	SD
My organization encourages its employees to undergo ethics training.	17.9% n = 41	15.7% n = 36	66.4% n = 152	100.0% n = 229	1.167
My organization has a comprehensive code of conduct.	2.2% n = 5	4.8% n = 11	93.0% n = 213	100.0% n = 229	0.708
My organization cares about the well-being of its customers.	1.7% n = 4	7.0% n = 16	91.3% n = 209	100.0% n = 229	0.757

Source: Authors' own work

Table 7.2 *Frequencies: Employees' agreements with statements about their organization environmental CSR initiatives (n=229)*

Survey question	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total	SD
Environmental policies are put into practice in the daily operations of my organization	13.1% n = 30	20.5% n = 47	66.4% n = 152	100.0% n = 229	1.017
My organization is dedicated to decrease damage done to the environment.	9.2% n = 21	21.8% n = 50	69.0% n = 158	100.0% n = 229	0.973

Source: Authors' own work

Table 7.3 *Frequencies: Employees' agreements with statements about their organization social CSR initiatives (n=229)*

Survey question	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total	SD
My organization encourages its employees to participate in voluntary activities, e.g. , helping at a soup kitchen for the needy.	18.3% n = 42	16.6% n = 38	65.1% n = 149	100.0% n = 229	1.127
My organization implements policies to provide a good work–life balance for its employees.	22.7% n = 52	22.3% n = 51	55.0% n = 126	100.0% n = 229	1.222
My organization gives adequate contributions to charities.	3.1% n = 7	12.2% n = 28	84.7% n = 194	100.0% n = 229	0.835

Source: Authors' own work

With regard to the respondents' feedback on their organizations' environmental CSR initiatives, the respondents agreed with all the statements, but did not strongly agree with any of the statements. The statement that the most respondents disagreed with was the question, "Environmental policies are put into practice in the daily operations of my organization," where a total of 13.1% respondents disagreed, indicating a higher variance in responses (SD =

1.017), while 20.5% of the respondents were neutral towards the statement. This seems to imply that retail employees either perceive their organizations not to implement environmental CSR initiatives in their operations, or that employees are simply unaware of their organizations' environmental CSR initiatives. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents indicated that they perceive their organizations to be dedicated towards decreasing damage done to the environment, which indicates that retail organizations can do more to communicate their dedication to protect the environment to their employees. This is especially true for South African retail organizations that spend a significant amount on environmental CSR and aim to be recognized for offering environmentally friendly products and practices. Only 65.1% of the respondents agreed that they are encouraged to participate in their organizations' voluntary social CSR initiatives, even though 84.7% of the respondents acknowledged that their organizations contribute adequately to charities. Engaging retail employees more in voluntary initiatives could increase their awareness and improve their perceptions of their organizations' social CSR initiatives. As part of their organizations' internal social CSR initiatives, only 55.0% of the respondents indicated that their organizations

have policies in place for good work–life balance. The respondents were also asked whether they perceived their organizations as informing their employees about their CSR activities: 65.9% of the respondents agreed, to some extent, that they receive too much information about their organizations' CSR initiatives. Most respondents agreed that, to a large extent, their organizations communicate the importance of their CSR initiatives to employees, that the messages of their organizations' CSR initiatives are not biased (i.e. biased in favor of or against any activities) (M = 3,48), and that they receive sufficient and regular information on what they would like to know regarding their organizations' CSR initiatives. In comparison with the other statements, high variances occurred in response to the question, "Corporate Social Responsibility communication in my organization is a two-way platform – employees are allowed to give feedback and suggestions on our organization's Corporate Social Responsibility activities." (SD = 1.265). Even though the employees acknowledged that they received regular and sufficient CSR communication, there might not be a collaborative two-way platform for employees to engage in the communication.

Table 7.4 *Frequencies: Employees' perceptions as to the extent to which their organizations inform employees about its CSR activities (n=229)*

Survey question	To no extent	To some extent	Total	SD
My organization communicates the importance of its Corporate Social Responsibility activities to employees.	2.2% n = 5	97.8% n = 224	100.0% n = 229	1.036
The messages of my organization's Corporate Social Responsibility activities are not biased (i.e., biased in favor of or against any activities).	7.0% n = 16	93.0% n = 213	100.0% n = 229	1.138
I receive sufficient information on what I would like to know about my organization's Corporate Social Responsibility activities.	3.9% n = 9	96.1% n = 220	100.0% n = 229	1.149
I receive regular information on my organization's Corporate Social Responsibility activities.	4.4% n = 10	95.6% n = 219	100.0% n = 229	1.102
I receive too much information about my organization's Corporate Social Responsibility activities.	34.1% n = 78	65.9% n = 151	100.0% n = 229	1.090
Corporate Social Responsibility communication in my organization is a two-way platform – employees are allowed to give feedback and suggestions on our organization's Corporate Social Responsibility activities.	19.7% n = 45	80.3% n = 184	100.0% n = 229	1.265

Source: Authors' own work

7.1 Respondents' levels of awareness of their organizations' CSR initiatives

All respondents who participated in the survey had some level of awareness of their organization CSR initiatives, and the aim of the study was to determine the extent of their awareness by evaluating the mean score for each of the subconstructs. Higher mean scores indicate higher levels of awareness, whereas lower mean scores indicate lower levels of awareness.

The results indicated that the respondents have higher levels of awareness when it came to internal economic CSR (M = 4.14, SD = 0.649), external economic CSR (M = 4.31, SD = 0.670) and external social CSR (M = 4.03, SD = 0.752), as opposed to internal environmental CSR (M = 3.88, SD = 0.868), external environmental CSR (M = 3.96, M = 0.819) and internal social CSR (M = 3.82, SD = 0.846).

Table 7.5 *Economic, environmental and social CSR mean scores and standard deviation*

Constructs	Subconstructs	Mean	SD
Economic CSR	Internal economic CSR	4.14	0.649
Economic CSR	External economic CSR	4.31	0.670
Environmental CSR	Internal environmental CSR	3.88	0.868
Environmental CSR	External environmental CSR	3.96	0.819
Social CSR	Internal social CSR	3.82	0.846
Social CSR	External social CSR	4.03	0.752

Source: Authors' own work

The data for internal and external environmental CSR awareness are more widely distributed than those for internal and external economic CSR awareness, which are more clustered around the mean (SD = 0.649 and 0.670 respectively), and for external social CSR (SD = 0.752), which are slightly more distributed. The SD for internal and external environmental CSR therefore indicates higher uncertainty among the respondents.

7.2 CSR awareness among different demographic subgroups

One-way ANOVA was used to investigate if variations occurred in the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable to determine CSR awareness among different demographic subgroups, namely lower-level employees, middle, and senior management. One-way ANOVA was used by comparing mean scores, and the data had normal sampling distributions because of the central limit theorem (Pallant, 2016, p. 125).

According to this theorem, the sampling distribution of the mean will be normally distributed, subject to a large enough sample size, which is usually defined as a sample size greater than 30 (Field 2018, p. 111). The senior management agreed more with statements about economic CSR (M = 4.31, SD = 56) and environmental CSR (M = 4.03, SD = 0.69) than did the middle management and lower-level employees, indicating that they are more aware of economic and environmental CSR than the middle management and lower-level employees.

The middle management agreed more with statements about social CSR (M = 4.03, SD = 0.69) than did the senior management and lower-level employees. The lower-level employees agreed less with statements about economic CSR (M = 4.03, SD = 0.68), environmental CSR (M = 3.64, SD = 0.95) and social CSR (M = 3.64, SD = 0.83) than did the middle and senior management, indicating that the lower-level employees are less aware of economic, environmental and social CSR than the middle and senior management.

CSR strategy is typically driven by management, which could explain why the lower-level employees were less aware of their organizations' CSR initiatives.

Table 7.6 *Mean scores for one-way ANOVA: Subgroup level of CSR awareness*

		n	%	Mean	SD
Economic CSR	General worker/lower/operating level	61	26.6	4.03	0.68
	Middle management	121	52.8	4.28	0.55
	Senior management	47	20.5	4.31	0.56
Environmental CSR	General worker/lower/operating level	61	26.6	3.64	0.95
	Middle management	121	52.8	4.02	0.75
	Senior management	47	20.5	4.03	0.69
Social CSR	General worker/lower/operating level	61	26.6	3.64	0.83
	Middle management	121	52.8	4.03	0.69
	Senior management	47	20.5	4.02	0.67

Source: Authors' own work

To determine the statistical significance of the differences in the CSR awareness levels among the demographic subgroups, the size of the effect had to be considered. Further post hoc tests were conducted by means of multiple comparisons, using Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) test, which is a commonly used test for multiple comparisons (Pallant 2016, p. 296). HSD was used to determine the significant differences between the various subgroups' awareness of CSR, based on the assumption of equal variances.

Table 7.7 *Multiple comparisons: Subgroups' levels of awareness*

Dependent variable	Position within organization	Position within organization	Mean difference	Std error	Sig
Economic CSR	General worker/lower/operating level	Middle management	-.25335	0.09226	0.018*
		Senior management	-.27511	0.11403	0.044*
	Middle management	General worker/lower/operating level	-.25335	0.09226	0.018*
		Senior management	-0,02176	0.10098	0.975
	Senior management	General worker/lower/operating level	.27511	0.11403	0.044*
		Middle management	0.02176	0.10098	0.975
Environmental CSR	General worker/lower/operating level	Middle management	-.38647	0.12528	0.006*
		Senior management	-.39196	0.15485	0.032*
	Middle management	General worker/lower/operating level	.38647	0.12528	0.006*
		Senior management	-0,00549	0.13712	0.999
	Senior management	General worker/lower/operating level	.39196	0.15485	0.032*
		Middle management	0.00549	0.13712	0.999
Social CSR	General worker/lower/operating level	Middle management	-.39080	0.11405	0.002*
		Senior management	-.38280	0.14096	0.019*
	Middle management	General worker/lower/operating level	.39080	0.11405	0.002*
		Senior management	0.00801	0.12483	0.998
	Senior management	General worker/lower/operating level	.38280	0.14096	0.019*
		Middle management	-0.00801	0.12483	0.998

Mean difference significant at the 0,05 level
Source: Authors' own work

The p-value indicates a statistical significance at a 95% confidence level, with a p-value less than 0.05. The p-value indicated that there is no statistically significant difference at a 95% confidence level between the middle management and senior management's level of awareness of economic, environmental, and social CSR initiatives. However, for the retail general/lower-level employees, there is a statistically significant difference between the level of awareness for all types of CSR (economic, environmental, and social) compared with the middle management and

senior management level of awareness. This shows that the lower-level employees were the least aware of their organizations' CSR initiatives. The findings are in line with the study conducted by Adámek and Bernatik (2014), which found that managers have the most positive impressions of their organizations' CSR initiatives because management has the strongest sense of ownership of CSR initiatives and is responsible for CSR decision-making.

8. Limitations of the study

As the researchers could not obtain permission from top-spending CSR retail organizations in South Africa to participate in the study (as listed in the *Trialogue business in society handbook* 2021), the study was made available to all South African retail employees. The selection of employees to participate in this study was based on their availability and willingness to participate, while the respondents were limited to those who had access to LinkedIn. The numbers of lower-level employees, middle management, and senior management responding to the survey were unequal and the selected demographic subgroups are therefore not balanced or representative. However, this study was exploratory in nature and the findings were used to establish areas for future research.

9. Conclusion

One of the key findings in existing research is that retail organizations utilize CSR initiatives as a tool to attract and retain employees. However, this means that current and prospective employees need to be aware and informed of such CSR initiatives. From the research, it was clear that the employees had higher levels of awareness of internal economic CSR, external economic CSR, and external social CSR as opposed to internal environmental CSR, external environmental CSR, and internal social CSR. According to the findings, in the South African retail sector there were no statistically significant differences between the senior and middle management level of awareness of their organizations' economic, environmental, and social CSR initiatives. However, for lower-level retail employees, there was a statistically significant difference

between the levels of awareness of economic, environmental, and social CSR initiatives compared with those of the middle management and senior management. The reason for this could be that the middle and senior management are more actively involved in the strategic planning of CSR initiatives and, therefore, more aware of the different types of CSR.

As this study was exploratory in nature, further research is needed to determine why there is a discrepancy between the level of awareness of the lower-level employees and that of the middle and senior management. Furthermore, future research could distinguish between CSR awareness of the employees of JSE-listed versus non-JSE-listed retail organizations in South Africa.

10. Recommendations

South African retail organizations should ensure that employees at the lower level of the organization hierarchy are better informed of CSR initiatives and their benefits, as this would improve these employees' attitudes and behaviors. Internal CSR communication strategies should therefore be adjusted to reach more lower-level employees, for example by incorporating CSR feedback in meetings or providing feedback and opportunities for engagement on digital platforms. CSR training could also become an integral part of onboarding new lower-level employees, thereby creating awareness of an organization's CSR initiatives among new employees and encouraging them to participate in CSR initiatives.

It is also recommended that South African retail organizations involve their lower-level employees more in CSR initiatives, such as volunteering, to improve their awareness and perceptions of CSR initiatives, as well as their participation in such activities. Increasing employees' engagement with an organization's CSR initiatives, such as encouraging participation in outreaches, climate change or culture workshops, would allow organizations to leverage the positive effects that CSR can have on employees.

Consistent communication to employees regarding CSR initiatives is also important. However, too much CSR communication can have a negative effect on employees' perceptions of CSR initiatives. Marketers or organizations should therefore streamline their CSR communication to employees by providing constant feedback and means for engagement to employees, while not overcommunicating in this regard.

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