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Graduate School of Global Studies Research Grant Report

Research Theme

Do donation activities improve organizational performance by increasing corporate reputation or sales when faced with public health issues? This research aims to explore this question specifically in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. CSR and CRM (cause-related marketing) are not only ways for companies to demonstrate social responsibility, but also ways for companies to improve corporate reputation and sales. During COVID-19, many Chinese companies donated money and materials. For different reasons, some companies chose to use marketing strategies to promote their donation campaigns, while others did not. There are relevant studies in CSR research area, but few focused on COVID-19. In a theoretical sense, my research aims to contribute to the transformation of marketing practice in the face of a pandemic. We can study the conflicts and solutions between marketing practices and CSR content in special times. There is also the pandemic of different times, the development of marketing, and the newly required corporate social responsibility.

Research Grant Expense

According to the original plan, my research grant included travel expenses of about 40,000 yen as the cost of my field trip to Kyoto. However, due to the COVID-19, the company thought it would be safer to switch to online interviews, so the rest research grant—about 80,000 yuan is used to purchase books that are not available in the

Sophia Library, marketing reports related to my research topic, and some software for analyzing text and data, including qualitative analysis software and software for analyzing accounting data for SMEs.

Research Methodology

I plan to conduct interviews with three Chinese companies based in China or Japan who donated money or goods for different purposes during the COVID-19 period and use interview information to develop a case study. COVID-19 requires all interviews to be conducted via Zoom or Tencent Meeting due to the circumstances. The people who receive interviews include managers and staff. For each company, I will interview about 3-4 people and synthesize their answers. Before the interview, I will make sure that they have a basic understanding of the concept of corporate social responsibility. At the same time, the three companies I have selected also have differences in the direction of corporate social responsibility measures and a comparative analysis can be done.

Research Results and Application

Employee feedback indicates that the object and purpose of donation will have a significant impact on donation activities, especially on the promotion and marketing of donation activities. According to feedback from employees in the small retail industry and the medium and large manufacturing industry, the retail industry has a relatively large degree of freedom for publicity activities after donation, and whether it is an internal employee who received care from the company during the epidemic, or customer groups who accepted a donation (the retailer chose to hand out free masks at the store), there has been positive feedback. In contrast, during the epidemic period, in

addition to distributing medical materials (such as masks, disinfectants, etc.) to employees, since most of its customers are state-owned enterprises, the company also chose to use part of the materials to donate and maintain the relationship with the local government. What is certain is that CSR is becoming the goal pursued by every company. Whether it is becoming an environment-friendly enterprise through the SDGs or enhancing employee welfare, it is a part of CSR measures. CSR behavior of some companies is highly compatible with marketing promotion behavior, such as the service industry and retail industry, which can have a positive impact on performance. The study found that during epidemic periods, the CSR behavior of enterprises with close ties to the government or those with a goal of maintaining government relations is unlikely to have positive effects on businesses. Because of the grant, my research has more literature and books for reference on the basis of the original research, and the qualitative analysis further supports my research results. This gave me a more solid foundation for my further research.

As for the application of research, I believe that the CSR measures of the small and medium- sized service industry and retail industry should focus on internal employees, external customers and the local community. External donations can be properly combined with the main business to bring more significant positive effects to the enterprise. Meanwhile, when small and medium-sized enterprises carry out CSR initiatives, they mainly rely on word-of-mouth in their communities and work with self-media. For some large-scale manufacturing industries, a more straightforward form of donation can be adopted, such as a formula "a few percent of the profits are donated".

In terms of marketing, it is possible to cooperate with the state media and newspapers.

I organized a small offline discussion meeting and shared my research results with several people in charge of marketing-related in Japan and discussed with them the future prospects and feasibility of my research. From it, I also learned about the limitations that still exist in my research.

Acknowledgement

I am very grateful to the Global Studies Graduate School of Sophia University for giving me this research grant, which has given me more solid analysis as a theoretical basis for my research. At the same time, I have also learned the latest insights of this research field from the books and reports I purchased. The thinking of many scholars has also brought me new ideas and made me think more seriously about academics. I feel sorry that due to the COVID-19, I was not able to go to the company based in Kyoto for field visits, which made me miss the opportunity to discover many things that are meaningful for research. In general, the financial help, support from office and the new experience brought to me during the research process, I have benefited a lot.