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Multinational corporations' role in developing Vietnam's public relations industry through corporate social responsibility

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ABSTRACT

The paper argues that multinational corporations (MNCs) are best placed to progress public relations (PR) practice in Vietnam through significantly expanding their corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. While there are many MNCs in Vietnam that warrant analysis regarding their CSR efforts, American coffee giant Starbucks is an instructive starting point as it is generally renowned for its strategic CSR efforts in the United States and other developed markets. The authors believe there is a need to examine whether there is a spillover effect in Vietnam, due to Starbucks' recent establishment in the country, to further CSR and PR research. Using content analysis, the authors investigated content relating to Starbucks Vietnam's CSR efforts on Starbucks' Facebook page and website, and in the mainstream media in Vietnam.

The authors found a remarkable lack of strategy and sophistication regarding Starbucks Vietnam's CSR efforts and the communication of these efforts, resulting in unfocused, ad hoc and short-term CSR activities with limited stakeholder engagement, including with media stakeholders. The authors' paper recommends clear identification of beneficiaries of CSR, and more strategic, sophisticated and long-term activities promoted with more engaging communication that would enable MNCs such as Starbucks to expand CSR in Vietnam and steer the country's emerging PR industry in a socially responsible direction.

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1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a relatively new concept in Vietnam, mostly driven by multinational corporations (MNCs), development agencies of Western donor countries and other international organizations (Hamm, 2012). Following sweeping economic reforms in 1986 that saw Vietnam open its doors to the world, the United States' cancellation of its embargo and Vietnam's inclusion in the World Trade Organization in 2007, Hamm (2012) contends Brammer et al's (2012) proposal to view CSR as an institution of transnational governance is relevant to Vietnam because CSR is pushed by international and transnational actors. Hamm (2012) argues that despite the potential for CSR to help further develop Vietnam as an export-oriented market economy, the country lacks a public CSR policy and the Vietnamese government's responsibility needs to be clarified in light of challenges Vietnam faces including the lack of a legal foundation and weak law enforcement:

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It seems there is a rather pragmatic reception of CSR in Vietnam because Western buyers ask for it, funding is being provided to enhance the topic at the political level and as a research focus, and furthermore an overall competitive advantage in the global economy is expected. Up to now, however, there is no clear responsibility for CSR within the government. More or less parallel and scarcely linked is a traditional focus on philanthropy or community investment . . . this is typical for developing countries and often goes hand in hand with a mere superficial adaptation of CSR as a marketing strategy. (p.7)

A 2012 survey by the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences investigating socially responsible practice among Vietnamese businesses revealed that many local companies have not adhered to minimum standards of CSR (Ha Noi moi, 2012). Business misconduct, lack of basic employee benefits and deliberately causing environmental damage were identified as the most common offenses.

Meanwhile, MNCs have played a central role in pushing both CSR and public relations (PR) in Vietnam, with American and European MNCs introducing “modern” PR practice to Vietnam in the 1990s through Western practices adapted to the country’s business setting and knowledge transferred to local employees (Mak, 2009). As international companies conducting business in Vietnam, MNCs can clearly benefit from knowledge of international and local markets, and insight into extensive international and local CSR and PR understanding. Therefore, the authors argue that MNCs are in a position better than that of other organizations to advance CSR and PR in Vietnam. While the authors acknowledge that CSR and PR are not the same thing, they believe more investment in, and promotion of, CSR would help further develop Vietnam’s emerging PR industry in a favorable direction.

While there are many MNCs in Vietnam that warrant analysis regarding their CSR efforts, we contend American coffee giant Starbucks is an instructive starting point as it is renowned internationally for its CSR efforts, and coffee is an integral part of Vietnamese culture and resonates with the Vietnamese. Starbucks is well known for its strategic approach to CSR in the USA and developed markets (Brown, 2008). Has there been a spillover CSR effect in Vietnam, due to Starbucks’ recent establishment in the country that justifies further CSR and PR research in this underexplored context?

The way to becoming a world-renowned socially responsible company has not been entirely smooth for Starbucks. The company was embroiled in a serious two-year long dispute with the Ethiopian government over the trademark of the country’s coffee regions (Adamy & Thurow, 2007) which resulted in a settlement under which Starbucks would further promote Ethiopian coffee and assist local farmers. The human rights group Global Exchange has accused Starbucks in the past of not purchasing enough ethically sourced Fair Trade coffee, while Starbucks has also come under fire about the use of genetically modified dairy ingredients (Koehn, Besharov, & Miller, 2008).

Despite numerous controversies, Starbucks has continued to be a CSR forerunner (DePass, n.d.). Brown (2008) contends Starbucks is considered to be in the civil phase of CSR development, meaning it has developed a competitive advantage “through the strategic development of social responsibility as their brand” (p.6). In its 2013 Starbucks Responsibility Report, Starbucks states it focuses on three areas: ethical sourcing, environmental stewardship and community involvement.

As Starbucks, which entered Vietnam in February 2013, is well known globally for its CSR efforts, the authors suggest it is ideal for analysis and among the best placed of MNCs to lead by example and promote sustainability and other CSR practices in Vietnam. Koehn et al. (2008) have hinted that because of Starbucks’ phenomenal growth, there is potential for the company to continue to expand on a strong financial trajectory while remaining true to its core values: “The potential impact that Starbucks . . . could have was enormous . . . at a time when most governments around the world lacked sufficient resources to tackle public problems” (p.26). The authors suggest that Starbucks warrants analysis as a case study of simultaneously building CSR and PR in Vietnam.

Unlike other Starbucks franchise stores at least partially owned by locals, Starbucks’ Vietnamese operations result from a franchise contract signed between Starbucks and Coffee Concepts, a subsidiary of the Hong Kong company Maxim’s Group (Starbucks Vietnam, 2013). Starbucks opened its first Vietnamese store in Ho Chi Minh City, the country’s economic hub, in February 1, 2013; Vietnamese queued down the street to buy coffee and other products. Three months later, Starbucks’ CEO Howard Schultz told the media that sales at the first store had exceeded revenue expectations (Hookway, 2013). Starbucks’ presence has since mushroomed across Ho Chi Minh City, totaling eight stores at the time this case study was written in 2014. The first three Starbucks stores in Vietnam’s capital Hanoi opened simultaneously on July 23, 2014, also attracting long queues, with the coffee giant announcing more stores would appear in the future. However, the Vietnam Institute of Management’s Director told the media that despite the initial interest in Starbucks, Starbucks Vietnam was “disillusioned” as it was out of touch with a vibrant local coffee culture because Vietnamese preferred local coffee with a stronger taste. The Vietnamese media have more recently commented that Starbucks needs to consider whether it is going against its traditional values of choosing local partners and adapting to local tastes (Unknown, 2013).

2. Literature review

CSR has generally been defined as an organization’s responsibility to its society(ies) and stakeholders, with consideration of its impact upon them (Tench & Yeomans, 2009). Peach’s (1987, cited in Tench & Yeomans, 2009) analogy of corporate social responsibility entails three levels of impact illustrating a ripple effect to encapsulate the impact of business upon its environment. These levels range from basic, whereby a company obeys society’s rules and regulations, to societal, when organizations significantly contribute to improving the societies in which they operate.

However definitions of CSR are increasingly being questioned in a more globalized context due to numerous variables including, for example, MNCs adhering to laws in various jurisdictions (Sharfman, Shaft, & Tihanyi, 2004). Chapple and

Moon (2005) contend CSR is further being recognized for its underlying strategic purpose (such as competitive advantage and legitimacy), its drivers (including markets and government regulations), and its manifestations (for example, economic and ethical manifestations). Hamm (2012) highlights that among differing institutional settings and cultures the linkage between CSR “as a globally travelling concept and its domestic embeddedness” is questioned, and that philanthropy remains the most common form of CSR globally.

2.1. CSR in the Asian context and Vietnam

In response to the focus of the majority of CSR research on the United States, Western Europe, Australia and Japan, with relatively little research conducted in the rest of Asia, Chapple and Moon (2005) analyzed website reporting of CSR by the top 50 companies in seven Asian countries (not including Vietnam), and found that CSR varied dramatically among Asian countries but that these differences were “not explained by development but by factors in the respective national business systems . . . MNCs are more likely to adopt CSR than those operating solely in their home country but the profile of their CSR tends to reflect the profile of the country of operation rather than the country of origin” (p.415). In an analysis of corporate websites from emerging countries including Vietnam’s neighbors Thailand and China, Wanderley, Lucian, Farache, and de Sousa Filho (2008) found that while both country of origin and industry sector have major influence on CSR information disclosure on the web, the country of origin had a stronger influence.

Vietnamese culture is steeped in Confucianism. Morality, sound social relationships, sincerity and justice are pillars of Confucian philosophy, which has not only made its presence felt in Vietnam but also in China, Japan and Korea. As Low and Ang (2012) argue, Confucian leadership lends itself to CSR because it brings “much peace, learning and economic growth for both the organizational growth and communal well-being in the region” (p. 92). Huang (2000) studied Confucianism’s impact on Taiwanese PR practice; findings indicate several parallels that can be drawn with Vietnam. Amid globalization and the establishment of MNCs in Taiwan, Huang (2000) argues a culturally-appropriate philosophy is rooted in the original culture but also adapts notions from other cultures that helps manage changing conditions, and should reflect the traditional Confucian value of the extended family to be broadened to a family of society at large. Such a view is inextricably linked with CSR, with Huang purporting “a more socially constructive force of advancing PR to the status of being a good corporate citizen should be urged so that PR would function in a socially responsible manner” (p. 231). The authors also argue that CSR is an excellent way to advance PR in Vietnam, and that MNCs are well placed to lead by example to help increase awareness of CSR and build on the Vietnamese people’s increasing expectations for organizations to do the right thing by society.

A survey about CSR in Vietnam found 90 percent of respondents misunderstood the concept and related issues, with the media in Vietnam, like media in other parts of the world, sometimes also suspicious of CSR, misperceiving it as simply a branding tool used to increase profits (Pham, n.d.). The biggest challenge for CSR in Vietnam and in many other Asian countries is the improper understanding of its scope and parameters, leading to limited development of the field (Thanh, 2014). While misperception of CSR still exists, there is plenty of scope for further CSR activity on the back of increasing demand from the Vietnamese people for companies to help improve their communities. According to a study of CSR perceptions among consumers in South East Asian countries, Vietnam and the Philippines had the highest proportion of respondents willing to pay more for products and services by companies with commitments to improving the community and environment, with almost 70 percent of Vietnamese respondents having purchased a product from a company claiming to practice CSR within the three months leading up to the survey (AC Nielsen, 2013). The media have been urging Vietnamese companies to embrace the concept of CSR to stay more competitive and relevant (Nguyen, 2014; Minh, 2013; Truong, 2013; Thu, 2012)

Coupled with international pressure for better CSR practice within Vietnam, the Vietnamese people’s increasing expectations of companies, particularly of foreign MNCs who are seen to reap high profits from Vietnam, stem from a spate of scandals. For example, a public outcry recently ensued after authorities revealed Coca-Cola has never paid income tax despite increasing sales since its operations in Vietnam began in 1994 (Thanh nien News, 2012). Vietnam’s General Taxation Department has told the media many foreign direct invested (FDI) companies are involved in sophisticated systems of avoiding tax, involving transfer pricing, overpricing their contribution to a joint venture, declaring fake profit loss and inflating tax depreciation claims (Anh and Huong, 2014).

The country’s top tax inspector also stated that of the 870 FDI companies investigated in 2013, almost 83 per cent had breached tax laws in some way. The Vietnamese media and public were also incensed upon learning of Taiwanese monosodium glutamate (MSG) manufacturer Vedan discharging toxic waste through hidden pipes into the Thi Vai River for 14 years (Tran, 2008). Nike made international headlines when, on International Women’s Day in 1997, 56 women employed to make Nike shoes were forced to run around a factory located in Dong Nai province under the hot sun until 12 workers collapsed (Herbert, 1997).

2.2. CSR and communicating CSR

While the importance of CSR has been discussed widely in academia, communicating about CSR efforts is also a challenging yet less explored issue. Morsing and Schultz (2006) point out that it is difficult to deliberately communicate a company’s CSR activities and make stakeholders aware of them. At a higher level, Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010) argue CSR communication needs to be just enough to “minimize stakeholder skepticism” (p.9). Yet DiStaso (2014) highlights reporting CSR efforts can

positively influence stakeholders and society's perceptions but that an accurate and complete depiction of an organization is necessary. In addition, companies need to pay attention to message content, channels, and other factors such as corporate reputation, CSR positioning, stakeholder type, issue support and social value orientation (Du et al., 2010). Wanderley et al. (2008) point out that the Internet enables companies to publicize CSR information in a less expensive and swifter manner.

Use of social media enables organizations to have frequent conversations with stakeholders that were not previously possible, helping to humanize an organization with Facebook and Twitter deemed most suitable social media platforms to generate dialogue and engagement (DiStaso, 2014). While using social media exposes companies to criticism, negative comments should be considered as opportunities to resolve problems and improve (Deakey, 2012, cited in DiStaso, 2014).

With the rapid rise of the Internet in Vietnam, and in turn the seemingly ubiquitous presence of social media, there are now many more platforms Vietnamese can use to communicate their frustration about perceived business misdeeds, such as the Facebook page “Phản đối Coca Cola trốn thuế” (Protesting against Coca-Cola avoiding tax) (Unknown, n.d.) Curtin and Gaither (2007) contend that “in the digital world, the roles of producer and consumer collide” (p. 146) and that “if shared norms are challenged strongly enough, the group holding them often feels empowered to act, even in the face of corporate power and clout” (p. 47). Such arguments are of crucial importance to MNCs such as Starbucks operating in Vietnam and in other developing markets across the globe. With the onset of the internet and social media, the borders of countries are increasingly transcended and MNCs' operations in various markets are much more open to scrutiny. MNCs such as Starbucks need to consistently follow their own values of being socially responsible actors in all markets instead of acting only when subject to activism that damages their corporate reputations.

In Vietnam, most PR clients are MNCs, which benefit most from Vietnam's PR practice (Doan & Bilowol, 2014). PR in Vietnam is predominantly media relations and product PR, emphasizing these organizations' immediate, profit-driven focus on promoting consumption as the country's middle class steadily grows. Vietnamese companies hardly carry out PR activities due to their limited understanding of PR, attributed to the industry's relatively young age, confusion with advertising and marketing, and an “envelope culture” encouraging companies to perceive PR as “media buying” only requiring an in-house media buyer with a lack of CSR activity (Doan & Bilowol, 2014). As key players in an increasingly globalized world, MNCs' focus on predominantly product PR and media relations in Vietnam supports Munshi and Kurian's argument (2005):

A postcolonial look at PR . . . exposes attempts by PR theory and practice to communicate corporate goals that coincide with a dominant, largely Western, model of economic growth and development. Such a model is invariably used by powerful Western or West-based multinational organizations and their strategic publics in the market, trade, finance, and high-technology sectors. The views, needs, aspirations, and social, cultural, economic, and political contexts of a vast majority of the global population – publics that are not seen to be strategic – are ‘marginalized or ignored’ (p. 631).

And Vercic (2003) has called for “descriptive studies documenting the everyday practice of transnational corporate public relations and analyses of empirical data from individual case studies” (p. 882).

3. Methodology

Using a content analysis approach, this article scrutinizes Starbucks' Vietnamese Facebook page and Vietnamese website. Each post on the Facebook page was analyzed, together with its comments, number of likes and shares. Starbucks Vietnam launched its Facebook page on January 24, 2013 and started posting updates on January 29. As of July 21, 2014, it had almost 87,000 likes, and posted updates on a daily basis.

However, given the scarcity of information about CSR on these two official channels, the authors expanded their analysis to news concerning Starbucks Vietnam's CSR efforts published online by Vietnam's two most prominent news outlets, Tuoi Tre and vnexpress.net over a 17-month period, and also looked into Starbucks' reports on CSR globally and in the region. Both Starbucks controlled and external communication (in the media) were analyzed to see if there were any differences in the reporting of the company's CSR activities.

3.1. Research questions

- (1) How did Starbucks Vietnam communicate about CSR efforts via its Facebook and website pages?
- (2) How were Starbucks Vietnam's CSR efforts reported in the Vietnamese media?

4. Findings

Despite Starbucks being renowned globally for its CSR efforts, an analysis of Starbucks Vietnam's website (www.starbucks.vn) and Facebook page (www.facebook.com/starbucksvietnam) found a lack of communication about strategic and sophisticated CSR activity. The website's homepage features a prominent “Responsibility: Ethical, Local, Global” tab that takes the viewers to links about Starbuck's international efforts to protect the environment and ethically source coffee and other products. However, there is no information about local efforts to protect the environment nor about whether

coffee and other products are sourced ethically locally despite Vietnam being the world's third largest coffee producer (World Bank, 2004) and Starbucks Coffee China and Asia-Pacific Group President John Culver's commitment to use more high quality Arabica coffee from Vietnam (Starbucks Vietnam's Facebook page; Thuy, 2013). Also on the website, the tab features a small section stating: "Community Involvement: We're inspiring partners (employees) and customers to get involved in their communities" without providing any further information.

Similarly, Starbucks Vietnam's Facebook home page highlights its "human approach to business" as differentiation, but an overwhelming majority of posts revolve around products and store openings. Only a small number of posts feature CSR activities, and they are only visible after a Facebook user "likes" Starbucks Vietnam's page. Since its inception on January 31, 2013 to July 07, 2014, there were only 11 posts about Starbucks Vietnam's CSR efforts, though the page administrators have been posting updates on a daily basis.

Date	CSR-related content
4/2/2013	John Culver, Group President Starbucks Coffee China and Asia-Pacific, confirms Starbucks' commitment to source more high quality Arabica coffee from Vietnam in the future. He also says Starbucks' ultimate goal is to become the global coffee leader, to share knowledge and skills about responsible coffee growth with local farmers and enhance locally grown Arabica coffee
2/4/2013	"Do you know April is Starbucks Global Month of Service? To find out more about this activity at Starbucks, please visit http://community.starbucks.com/index.jspa . Starbucks Vietnam will soon update you about our activity this month in Ho Chi Minh City. . .coming soon!!!"
22/4/2013	Global Month of Service Activities—some pictures of our employees repainting the library of the May 15 School. Give us a hand in renovating the library. You could donate books and toys at Starbucks. We will bring the gifts to the school this Thursday April 25
25/4/2013	Some pictures of Starbucks' community activities in April. The Starbucks team finished the library project for May 15 School today. Thank you for donating books for the library
30/5/2013	Bring your children to Starbucks this weekend for face painting, lemonade, balloons, and cakes on Children's Day. The activities start at 3pm Saturday June 1
19/6/2013	Bring your own cup to save VND10,000 on your favorite drink at Starbucks and help save the environment
29/6/2013	Community activities with Ga Saigon Shelter. Starbucks Vietnam continues its community activities. As we are opening the second store, our Starbucks staff organized some activities with kids from the Ga Saigon Shelter. Here are some pictures
18/10/2013	This is how we spent a day off with our team. The barista team had a fun morning with games and storytelling at the May 15 School
3/4/2014	Did you know you can ask for coffee in a ceramic mug at Starbucks? Not only will it help save the environment but it also feels nice to cup your hands around a warm mug, doesn't it?
24/4/2014	Starbucks will have more activities, more places to go and will do more for the community in April, the Global Month of Service. Thank you Dep (a fashion magazine) for the article (and link to the article)
25/4/2014	Did you know that April is Starbucks Global Month of Service? These are some of the pictures of our Starbucks team joining the Pham Ngu Lao ward team to clean up the September 23 Park

Among the few posts, one – an April 2, 2013 update – stated: "Do you know April is Starbucks Global Month of Service? To find out more about this activity at Starbucks, please visit <http://community.starbucks.com/index.jspa>. Starbucks Vietnam will soon update you about our activity this month in Ho Chi Minh City. . .coming soon!!!" But the link has not been updated, and only features USA-based projects. On April 15, without any reference to its Global Month of Service, Starbucks Vietnam's Facebook page says its employees visited a school for the disadvantaged, called Ngay 15 Thang 5 (May 15), helping to paint the school and build its library, as well as delivering books and toys. Taking a different approach in 2014 for the Global Month of Service initiative, Starbucks employees cleaned up a park.

To coincide with the second Hanoi store's opening, a Facebook update captures employees helping orphans at Ga Saigon Shelter wear recycled materials for a fashion show. The update does not state that the proceeds of the opening morning's transactions were donated to the shelter, despite some media coverage (VNS, 2013) about this. For the opening of the third store in Hanoi, a Facebook update says employees again visit the school that benefitted from employee philanthropy and have a "fun morning" with the children, and includes a photo of a check being donated to the school without any further information about the donation. In the lead up to the Lunar New Year 2014, the Facebook page encouraged customers to purchase products from a "market corner" in the stores with "a part" of proceeds going to the May 15 school.

As more stores have opened, there have been no additional CSR promotions on the web. Just looking at the Facebook page alone, it would appear CSR activities are in decline, rather than being ramped up as the company expands. In addition, the engagement with CSR posts on the Facebook page (the number of likes and comments) is considerably lower than that of product/store promotion posts. The posts are for information sharing purposes rather than for engagement or to prompt dialogue. Additionally, these posts are about Starbucks Vietnam's involvement in some social issues, rather than about the social issues themselves.

In Starbucks' Global Responsibility Report (Starbucks, 2013b), there was no mention of Vietnam. In the company's China-Asia Pacific Regional Overview 2013 (Starbucks, 2013a), Vietnam was named as one of Starbucks' markets, but again no CSR activities for the country were outlined as they were for some of the other countries listed.

In the media, the authors found minimal news about Starbucks Vietnam's CSR activities, and none in Tuoi Tre and vnexpress.net. In fact, news about Starbucks in Vietnam has mostly focused on store openings, particularly the company's first stores in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. There were some short news articles on other media channels (Vietnamnet, Dep magazine), reflecting the same information that has been published on the Facebook page.

5. Discussion

These findings support the argument that the difference in Starbucks's CSR efforts in Vietnam, compared to more sophisticated efforts in neighboring markets such as Thailand, can be explained by MNCs being more likely to adopt CSR to reflect the profile of the country of operation rather than the country of origin (Chapple & Moon, 2005). CSR has been introduced to Vietnam by MNCs and international NGOs, but is not widely practiced among Vietnamese companies (Minh, 2013). In 2012, Vietnamese companies generally did not undertake CSR for numerous reasons, including beliefs that CSR was largely the responsibility of large organizations with export markets and “a luxury of the developed world”.

Meanwhile, Starbucks has been operating in Thailand for 16 years. Its Thailand Facebook page has garnered almost 700,000 likes, though the number of posts about CSR activities is, as in Vietnam, limited (only 11 CSR posts in the last two years). However, the CSR projects featured are much more strategic in vision and scope. For example, Starbucks' first community store was launched in Langsuan, Bangkok to raise money for a learning center for health, education, and irrigation projects in Chiang Mai. Starbucks has also partnered with iCare Thailand to help boys learn to read.

While MNCs have driven the PR industry's development in Vietnam and underpin Vietnamese PR practice, there is potential for PR to further develop in Vietnam if the industry recognizes that the boundaries of PR extend beyond selling products (Doan & Bilowol, 2014). The authors contend that MNCs should take the lead in progressing Vietnam's PR profession in its early stages by further investing in CSR to set strong examples. One of 12 senior Vietnamese PR practitioners interviewed for an exploratory research project that looked at Vietnam's PR industry, a managing director of a joint venture PR agency says that for the PR industry in Vietnam to mature, what is required is proper “engagement with the public”: “When I use the word ‘engagement’, we should involve them right from the beginning, right from the start. It's not like... when everything is ready, PR just jumps in for amplification” (Doan & Bilowol, 2014).

The authors believe, given Starbucks' global expertise in CSR, that Starbucks Vietnam's CSR activities could be much more sophisticated and prolific. Local CSR activities should not stop at individual ad hoc activities implemented on special occasions (such as store openings, executive visits etc.). Rather, these activities should be extended to be strategic development initiatives to benefit stakeholders in the long term. The authors concur with Frynas (2005) that while making charitable donations to an orphanage or school may make staff feel better about themselves, donors need to make sure such donations actually have developmental benefits that are sustainable. Sustainable developmental priorities, such as training and education, should be the CSR priorities of the donor companies as well as those of the local community.

Starbucks Vietnam is already in a greatly advantaged position, having identified its key stakeholders (partners, suppliers and customers). It is now a matter of developing strategies to involve stakeholders on a more consistent, long-term and proactive basis, ultimately allowing the beneficiaries of CSR programs to initiate and take control. The authors believe that long-term developmental benefits for stakeholders are the key to sustainable CSR.

One might argue that Starbucks Vietnam may be undertaking more CSR efforts than have been communicated by the organization itself or through the media. There is always a dilemma between how much CSR a company does and how much it should communicate to the public; it sometimes seems companies that engage in CSR activities are also those who get criticized the most and vice versa (Morsing, Schultz, & Nielsen, 2008). While any CSR efforts are of course welcome, we argue that Starbucks Vietnam's CSR efforts and its communication of such efforts can be more sophisticated and strategic, to set an example to increase awareness about CSR among its stakeholders, its competition and the wider community, and to prevent skepticism about CSR intentions. The authors warn Starbucks and other MNCs against relying on their brand names to excel in the Vietnamese market. Undertaking CSR activities in Vietnam to further advance corporate CSR activities attuned to local communities will benefit both the MNCs themselves and the emerging PR industry.

6. Conclusion

Organizations such as Starbucks Vietnam require a more consistent and strategic approach to CSR that results in a more lasting impact to the community. These MNCs earn significant financial profits from Vietnam and therefore have an obligation to seriously invest in the Vietnamese society through long-term CSR initiatives. MNCs have many avenues available to further contribute to Vietnamese society. In the case of Starbucks, for example, CSR initiatives linked to the coffee industry could include supporting sustainable farming practices in Vietnam. MNCs can also further support Vietnam's large and varied NGO sector helping the developing nation's most disadvantaged people. They can focus on major issues pertinent to Vietnam and the South East Asian region including helping the disabled, homeless and those most vulnerable to human trafficking. They can also further contribute to infrastructure development and increase employee engagement and development.

Anecdotal evidence suggests Starbucks Vietnam's case of less focused CSR efforts in Vietnam compared to other markets is not isolated to Vietnam or to Starbucks. The authors suggest further research into other MNCs' CSR efforts in other regions and countries.

The authors did not approach the management of Starbucks Vietnam or its employees to try to analyze Starbucks Vietnam's CSR efforts from that internal point of view. For a full picture, interviews with the management team, employees and beneficiaries of Starbucks Vietnam's CSR projects need to be included. Or alternatively, a comparison of the existing perception of Starbucks Vietnam's customers now and a few years into the future regarding CSR might also prove useful for the discussion of CSR activities in a host country.

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