Aspects Relating the Influence of Spirituality on CSR in Online Organizations

Sonia Budz[1], Doru Alexandru Pleşea[2], Ioana Bucur-Teodorescu[3] and Vanesa Mădălina Vargas[4]

[1)2)3)4)] The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: sonia.budz@gmail.com; E-mail: pleseadoru@gmail.com
E-mail: ioanna.teodorescu@gmail.com; E-mail: vanesa.vargas@fabiz.ase.ro

Abstract

In the last years, the emphasis on the concept of "Corporate Social Responsibility", abbreviated as (CSR) is increasing due to the influence of the digital era and competition. The access to information is instantaneously, thus, it is difficult for companies to maintain a positive identity without involving themselves in social causes.

Spirituality could lead to a level of awareness that could direct towards more social responsibility and strong relationships. Spiritual individuals are responsible human beings, who take into consideration their actions in general. Therefore, it could be a powerful correlation between CSR and spirituality.

This article analyzes the influence of spirituality on CSR in organizations that operate also online. The scope of this research is to see whether there are interdependencies between CSR and spiritual responsible behaviour. Does spiritual awareness or spirituality could change the approach regarding corporate social responsibility, and respectively be included in CSR norms.

To verify these aspects, two questionnaires have been applied to a sample of 217 people who are employees and entrepreneurs. All have responded from proper initiative. The number of questions was 9 in each questionnaire. As well, the same questions were asked, but adapted to each category.

The questionnaires have been used to establish several indicators related to the social corporate responsibility. This research is useful to all parties involved in CSR.

Keywords

social media; e-Commerce; spirituality; responsibility.

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Introduction

Nowadays, the society is increasingly focusing on responsibility and transparency. The interest with regards to the impact of corporations on communities and the environment has widen the number of researches related to "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR). Due to the fact that more and more companies started to be more transparent towards their employees and the communities around them (Nijhof and Jeurissen, 2010), they are still involving in programs related to online social responsibility in order to use this as an indicator for growth. Being more responsible towards others and the environment means that companies have to be more responsible with themselves and employees.

Technology and the internet are not enough to help communities grow and evolve, for they are just a facet of the whole. The other facet is the human being (Owusu et al, 2021). By unifying these two facets, responsibility could record a drastically increase in general. Responsible individuals act in a conscious manner with regards to the outer and inner worlds. Therefore, they have a higher degree of empathy. The physical world is just a reflection of the spiritual realm. At the time, individuals will not have any more the desire of possession for the self-alone, the opportunity to share and evolve as a community will increase (Adhia, 2010).

In the present when our smartphones have introduced a culture of disconnection and isolation, this same innovative technology is glimmering with sparks of promise due to the capacity to bring the masses closer than before toward the collective good of the users. Through sharing and connection with each other on a level deeper than screens and emoticons (Boyd and Ellison 2007), it can increase the peer-to-peer connection and create a more valuable and dynamic world for everybody.

This study analyzes the influence of spirituality on CSR in organizations that operate online. Does spirituality or spiritual awareness could change the approach regarding CSR, and respectively be introduced in CSR norms. The structure of the paper is as follows: revisiting the literature review concerning concepts like CSR, spirituality, social media and online enterprises; and analyzing data from a questionnaire with the scope to check whether there are interdependencies between CSR and spiritual responsible behavior. The last part of the paper concludes with evidence that employees and entrepreneurs believe there is a strong connection between spirituality in correlation with success and self-development.

1. The relationship between CSR, spirituality, leadership, and online enterprises

Very few publications and studies have acknowledged the relationship between the mentioned variables. Even though the link between spirituality, CSR and leadership in online organizations is not so clear at first, it may be surprisingly deeper and strong. At their roots, spirituality and CSR tend to be slightly different. While spirituality is more an inner process that involves the self-enquiry, where one strives for a better good, humanity, God or nature, the CSR is more about the interest of the stakeholder's organization (Bubna-Litic, 2009). CSR is outward looking due to its organizational vision on long term, whereas spirituality is inward looking. Still, the link between the indicators is very strong and the study will demonstrate the linkage towards them. Another well-known research study on the spiritual CSR is based on Fry's three level model. Firstly, a leader creates a view "that gives organizational members a sense of meaning and purpose." Moreover, a person with the characteristics of a leader aims for the development of the specific environment and organizational culture "based on the value of altruistic love whereby leaders care for others and endeavor to create a sense of community where individuals feel understood and appreciated." A leader's actions in relation with his vision, encourages faith and hope among the employees. In Figure no 1, according to Fry's spiritual leadership intrinsic motivating causal model, an organization receives love in an altruistic manner to erase negative emotions such as worries, anger, feelings of failure, and developing a culture with a sense of mutual membership.
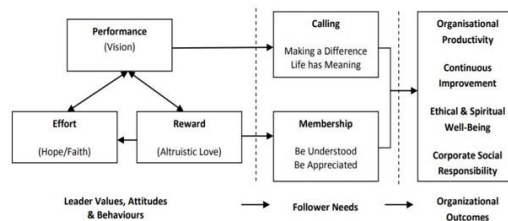

Figure no. 1. Fry's Causal Model of Spiritual Leadership
Source: Adapted from Fry's Causal Model of Spiritual Leadership, 2003, 2005

1.1. Corporate Social Responsibility

The society and the business surroundings are interdependent. Businesses could not exist in isolation. In our progress as a society, the social responsibility encourages the enterprises to become responsible, conscious citizens in a dynamic changing world (Eckhaus, 2021). Recently, the notion of social responsibility in organizations became an important factor of the corporate environment (Uka and Prendi, 2021) and is an integral part of the business. In today's literature, there is a vast variety of connotations and definitions, from the corporate philanthropic activities to strategic repositioning of enterprises in society. This concept is used to sketch out how organizations implement the social responsibility going beyond economic criteria. The Commission Green Paper stands for the fact that corporations must voluntarily integrate environmental and social issues into their business operations and interactions with stakeholders, knowing that this behavior will contribute to the development of their businesses on long term. Moreover, it is a premise for businesses to invest more in human capital, stakeholder relationships, and environment.

1.2. Spirituality in leadership

Many researchers associate spirituality with seeking for a purpose, for a greater meaning and towards a source beyond everything visible (Ashar and Lane-Maher, 2004). Delbecq (1999) made reference to this energy at the moment he was defining spirituality as one's "life experience of the transcendent", "whether that would be God, Buddha, Tao or the Force" (Leigh-Taylor, 2000). In addition, other experts (McCormick, 1994) talked about the "beyond," and (Conger, 1994) remarked that spirituality "lifts us beyond ourselves and our petty self-interests... it is the most humanistic of energies," tied to spirituality's transcendental component. It allows us to perceive our deeper ties to one another and to the world around us." According to Pandey and Gupta (2008), academics have never been wholly blind to the spiritual viewpoint on labor. Nicholls (1994) emphasized the subject by highlighting the importance of spirituality in business as a reward soul seeking in the workplace rather than simply hushing it up or avoiding it. In the opinion of Pandey and Gupta (2008) a brief spiritual literature review could influence employees, behaviours as incentive, commitment, learning organizational performance like financial, quality orientation results. In terms of employee behavior and performance, the impact of spirituality on corporate organizations has been investigated. The perception on the conceptual extension of the notion of spirituality at work and its relation to leadership is still in its early stages (Dent, Higgins and Wharff, 2005). According to some study, firms with notable levels of spiritual behavior outshine those without them that in term on progress have remarkable financial indicators. Being spiritual does not require that you believe in a deity. It is possible to exhibit spirituality via labor when work is done with a feeling of significance that transcends the job's instrumentalities. "Spirituality in the workplace" is defined by Neal (1997) as "people perceiving their employment as a spiritual journey, as a chance to grow individually and make a meaningful contribution to society." It's about becoming more compassionate and empathic toward coworkers, bosses, subordinates, and customers. It's all about being honest, staying true to oneself, and telling the truth to others. Spirituality in the workplace can refer to a variety of things like a person's efforts to live out his or her principles more completely at work. It can also relate to the methods in which businesses organize themselves to promote their workers' spiritual development."

Many challenges of the business world, bring extended work hours and overload to employees. This conducts to job burnout and mental stress amidst managers. Conceivably this is derogatory to perfect the triple bottom line (organizational performance, employee wellbeing, and main environmental stakeholders). Ashar and Lane-Maher (2004) stated that an increasing number of discontent employees complained about feeling deprived of purpose at their jobs. The employment practices of corporations are based on charisma and intellectual skills, and their advancement criteria on clever corporate politics and short-term incomes. Ethical decision-making and emotional intelligence are visionary concepts for individuals who are both interested in accountable and comprehensive progress. Likewise, business schools rarely encourage universities to center on spirituality topics. The revealing business scams and crises have unfolded the leadership critical point in organizations. The present leadership practice is incapable to solve the important issues confronting businesses. Moreover, this has brought to the forefront the important roles of spirituality, as well moral and ethical values regarding all facets of the society, especially business. There is an increasing interest among educators, practitioners, and researchers on the wide issue regarding spirituality and its part in business.

1.3. Social media

Social media became an important lead for spreading and acquiring information in different fields, such as business, entertainment, politics, science and crisis management. Social media is so popular due to the opportunity to create, receive and share public messages at free or low costs at any time (Stieglitz et al. 2018).

Social media is a tool that allows people to share various sorts of information and publish it in various formats; as a result, it may be used for marketing purposes that require continual updating. It is an instrument to be utilized for gaining the most limited resource or attention from the users which is a point for achieving the business end-goals. There are some challenges with regards to technology linked to the new trends of utilization of social media. The shift in the economic media is obvious when groups of users are addressed in an individualized way. There is a continuous change with regards to the technological basis and content, which creates a challenge for organizations to continuously check for trends in the content use. Through social media, companies get the chance to collect information, and monitor different opinion of users, imply the targeted audience in a discussion about the services, products, or other related topics. The COVID 19 had a huge influence on all aspect of life, inclusively on CSR and online businesses. Due to the corona virus, many online businesses emerged, and the existing ones had to adapt themselves to the online

environment quickly. In terms of CSR, the fact that most employees have started working remotely or hybrid, has helped corporations reduce overall consumption and be more sustainable. As well, employees showed more efficiency and performance.

Individuals may establish a semi-public or public profile on the platform, create and follow a list of other people with whom they want to be connected, and also navigate or browse their list of friends to check those added by others (Grizanea and Jurgelane, 2016). This is the primary actor of globalization with its hyper textual, convergent, complex, digital and interactive nature. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of online outcomes increased dramatically. This leads to a higher level of interconnectedness and complexity in human interactions and society (Chen and Zhang, 2010). The growing usage of social media in the past years is based on features in technology advancement, autonomy, privacy, social presence, playfulness and personalization (Goncalves, Kostakos and Venkatanathan, 2013). Still, like every other adoption of technology, it has also negative aspects. The easy and quickly communication tool, social media, caused privacy issues, false information, offensive contents and mind distraction (Siddiqui and Singh, 2016). On the other side, this instrument has the potential to radically alter an individual's interpersonal structure and create a new sort of spiritual connection.

1.4. Online enterprises

Access to knowledge, as well as the ability to share, it has never been easier thanks to modern technology, and in theory is endless in today's dynamic world. Attracting potential clients over the internet is entirely dependent on the speed with which service providers react and respond (Onete, Pleșea and Budz, 2018). These days, companies unavoidably face huge challenges in their businesses, such as high competition, the unpredictable changes in trends with regards to consumption and more refined customer demands. Unquestionably, the capability of firms to generate and support customer satisfaction is the key element which can firmly determine the success of the business. In order to create and maintain competitiveness to perform better rivalry, it is needed for the companies to struggle to deliver higher quality services to clients, in order to improve customer satisfaction. To achieve this task effectively, it is crucial for the businesses to precisely find out and understand the desires and needs of the customers and be competent to tailor the products or services to meet or exceed customers' expectations and perceptions (Charoensukmongkol and Sasatanun, 2017).

Electronic commerce, online trading or shortly, e-commerce, means buying and selling via the Internet (or other forms of remote data transmission). The electronic mall was the early manifestations of e-commerce founded in the online portals of the 1980s. E-commerce enables consumers to electronically exchange goods and services without time or space barriers. In the previous 10 years, electronic commerce has grown at a remarkable pace, which is anticipated to continue or perhaps accelerate. The distinction between "electronic" and "traditional" commerce will become increasingly blurred as more enterprises relocate in the near future elements of their operations to the Internet. E-commerce is usefully defined as the implementation of trade in goods and services using telecommunications and technological tools.

Nowadays a variety of online shops exist, such as Electronic Money Transfer (EFT), Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), Internet Marketing, Supply Chain Management, Online Transaction Processing or Merchandise Management Systems. The two main forms of e-commerce are "business-to-business" (B2B) and "business-to-consumer" (B2C). The "e-commerce" between two or more entities on the Internet, rather than between a company and its clients, is known as "business-to-business". B2B enterprises frequently interact with hundreds, if not thousands, of other businesses as clients or suppliers. In comparison to traditional techniques, computerized processing of these transactions offers considerable competitive benefits. E-commerce, when properly executed, is frequently faster, cheaper, and more appropriate than traditional means of transferring products and services. Electronic data exchange (EDI) has been used in electronic transactions for a long time (from now on, EDI). EDI necessitates the creation of a dedicated data connection between each supplier and customer, and electronic commerce is a cost-effective way for businesses to construct several ad-hoc linkages. Electronic commerce has also led to the development of electronic marketplaces, where all parties implied naming clients, suppliers, and new customers are brought together to conduct mutually beneficial business.

B2C e-commerce is the exchange of services or goods over the Internet between shops that operate online and individual customers. User preference for the handiness of online shopping - coupled with the simple with which an online store can be opened - has made e-commerce one of the fastest growing industries. Consumer-to-consumer e-commerce is a consumer who sells goods or services online to another consumer. This sale is frequently eased by a website which is a third-party that assists to take care of the details regarding the transaction. The aim of "consumer-to-consumer" electronic transactions is to allow

consumers to sell straightly towards other consumers without turning to an intermediary. This allows the seller to retain more of his profit and the buyer may be able to buy the goods at a better price.

2. Data models

Spirituality has a great impact on all life, especially where one focuses the most energy. The majority of people spend most of their time at work. The models below show the trajectory and influence of spirituality with regards to work and CSR.

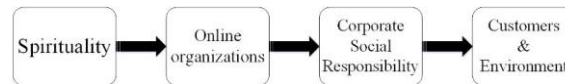### 2.1. Impact of spirituality on CSR

Figure no. 1. Trajectory of Spirituality with Regards to Organizations Model

Once implemented in organizations, spirituality could spread naturally in all domains, with the help of CSR, turning the society, in general, into a more sustainable one. The result could be more awareness towards the customers and environment, as well sustainable growth and prosperity.

Fgure no. 2. Impact of Spiritual Behaviour on Organizations Model

The model above shows the interconnectedness between all elements that form the organizational chain. The impact of spiritual and unspiritual behaviors on managers and employees affects the organizations, which are influencing the customers and environment in a positive or negative way. It must be taken into consideration the benefits of spirituality in all fields.

3. Questionnaire analysis

This article analyzes the influence of spirituality on CSR in organizations that operate online. The purpose of this research is to verify whether there are interrelations between spiritual responsible behaviors and the implementation of CSR. This paper answers the question if spirituality or spiritual awareness could change the tackle regarding CSR, and respectively be implemented in CSR norms. To verify the aspects mentioned above in this research, two questionnaires have been created separately and sent to a sample of 217 individuals who are entrepreneurs and employees. All the respondents answered from proper initiative. The number of questions was 9 for each sample. The questions were the same for both categories, but adapted to each one.

3.1. Description of the used data

The number of respondents was similar in both categories, 98 entrepreneurs and 119 employees. The following table includes general information of the questionnaire's respondents. In this case, entrepreneurs, their backgrounds and the business they are involved in.

Table no. 1. General information about the respondents – Entrepreneurs

Gender		Number of employees		Average profit - €		Average age	
Female	36%	< 50	81%	< 1500	0%	< 25	20%
Male	64%	51-150	15%	1501-3000	11%	26-35	56%
Unknown	0%	> 151	4%	> 3000	89%	> 36	24%

The following table contains general information of the employees about their backgrounds and the firms they work in.

Table no. 2. General information about the respondents – Employees

Gender		Number of colleagues		Average income - €		Average age	
Female	57%	< 50	15%	< 1500	76%	< 25	40%
Male	43%	51-150	38%	1501-3000	22%	26-35	45%
Unknown	0%	> 151	47%	> 3000	2%	> 36	15%

We can see that there is no significant difference regarding the number of the respondents of each questionnaire.

3.2. Questionnaire answers

In the charts below, we can find information with regards to the respondents' answers divided in the two categories.
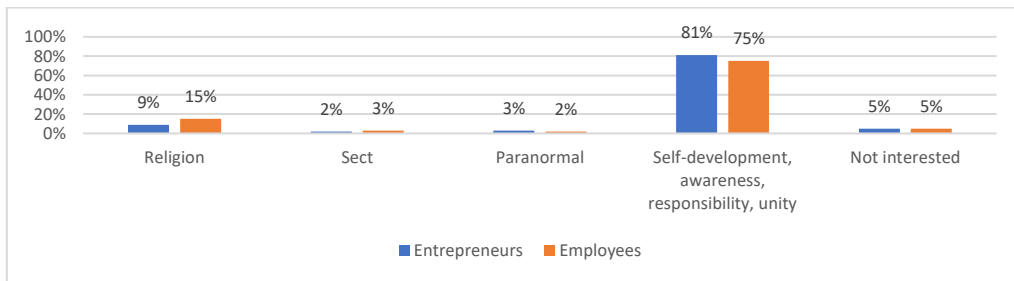

Figure no. 2. Meaning of spirituality from each's sample's point of view

As we can see, most of the entrepreneurs think that spirituality brings self-development and strengthens relationships by being more conscious as a person. They became more aware that spirituality is compulsory for a beneficial change in business. The chart above shows that employees as well see spirituality as an important factor nowadays. They are seeking ways to improve their lifestyles and mindset. By adopting a mindful, present approach, employees know that this is a great way to increase their productivity and creativity. Spirituality can help people see more clearly their common purposes with regards to work.
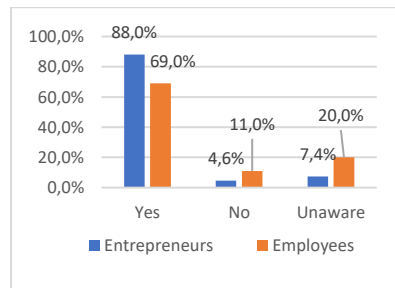

Figure no. 2. Beliefs about the contribution of spirituality in companies linked to CSR

Entrepreneurs believe that spirituality might have a big contribution towards the business approach regarding CSR. Including spirituality in CSR would correct tremendously the problems and inequalities that organizations have. The employees pay a huge part as well. From the employees' perception, spirituality might actually change the business environment dramatically in a better way for all parties involved. When having a positive approach in general, and empathizing with other beings, there are no losing parties.
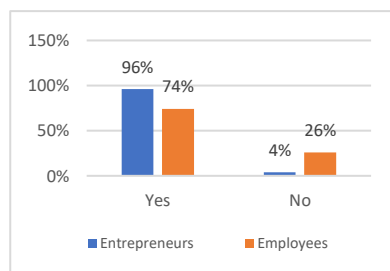

Figure no. 3. Do corporations imply in online social responsibility programs to utilize this as a growth indicator?

Entrepreneurs' perception about this is that the main reason corporations and other businesses involve in social responsibility programs is to utilize this as an indicator for growth. Being more exposed and interested to this kind of information, entrepreneurs are aware that it is an important instrument for manipulation and advertising. The most part of employees are conscious that the adoption of "corporate social responsibility" planning by major companies and corporations are far from transparent. No visible results were in the local communities regarding the improvement of the quality of life and the environmental protection most of the times.
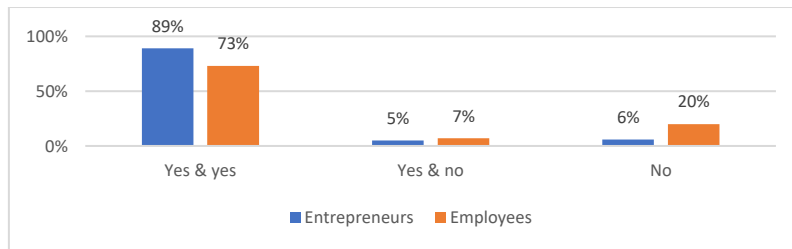

Figure no. 4. Do respondents apply spirituality in their daily personal and work life? And if yes, does it have positive results?

Most entrepreneurs apply spirituality in their daily personal and work life. The majority of them are making positive affirmations and visualization meditations in the first minutes after they wake up. This helps them have better perspectives and face the daily challenges more easily. Spirituality is getting more popular at workplaces. Employees are starting more and more to implement positive affirmations, and thinking in order to cope with stress and workload. They mentioned that they personalize their offices with positive affirmations and photos that elevate their mood, and try to be mindful when dealing with several work problems.

Conclusions

Results of the present study show that employees and entrepreneurs believe there is a strong connection between spirituality in correlation with success, self-development, awareness and unity. Both parts think that spirituality could have an important contribution if implemented in businesses with regards to Corporate Social Responsibility. The majority of them, especially entrepreneurs think that corporations get involved in social responsibility programs to utilize this as an indicator for their businesses to grow. Entrepreneurs and employees apply spirituality in their professional and personal life on a daily basis, and mentioned that it has positive effects. The percentage is bigger for entrepreneurs than employees due to their schedule, having the possibility to organize their time as they wish, not being so conditioned when wanting to invest in their personal and spiritual development. As well, they have the possibility to spend more time searching for spiritual information and techniques.

Personal development contributes to self-evolution and awareness and influences the exterior environment as well. Entrepreneurs are independent individuals, motivated by personal development, and could have a great impact on employees' way of thinking regarding spirituality and CSR. The profession and motivation influence the implication in social responsibility programs. The spiritual way of thinking shifts mind patterns and leads towards more responsibility and empathy. It is difficult to accept that there is no perfect model to apply spiritual CSR in companies or to endorse authentic spirituality at work. By exposing good practices and through an excellent leadership role model, replicating spirituality techniques is possible. They can also be promoted through good will. However, there are no exact ingredients to achieve spirituality at work for sure. In order to adopt a spiritual and holistic viewpoint, people must celebrate their individualities and not embrace a "one-size fit all" attitude. The consciousness of our own nature is very important for personal achievement, to cope properly with others and to be respectfully acknowledged.

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