

# Handbook of Research on Retailer–Consumer Relationship Development

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an increasing number of concerns as expressed by consumers, eventually aggregating the interests of various social movements expressing new more ethical and sustainable market stances. In particular, the authors focus on the case of Eataly, a new venture that emerged from an ideological alliance and a mutual organizational commitment between corporate power and the Slow Food social movement. Eataly represents an interesting setting to better understand how such forms of collaboration can occur, how and to what extent the community and corporate stances mutually adjust during the process, and which types of reactions emerge from the more radical members of the social movement.

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The chapter demonstrates the extent to which companies operating in the Retailing Grocery industry use Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as driver to enhance their brand and pursue commercial value, or to purely redefine their business priorities in accordance to evolving consumers' needs and expectations by making CSR a new concrete business model and evolving towards the concept of Corporate Shared Value (CSV). The study is addressed to analyse the matter of facts in two different European geographical areas: Italy and United Kingdom, chosen because of the peculiar approaches in companies' attitude towards CSR and CSV, ultimately. Many differences and some relevant similarities in the implementation of CSV as new strategic model between the countries have emerged, with UK showing the most formalized and standardized integration between social and economic value within its Grocer Retailer companies' business activities.

**Section 4**

**Innovation, ICT, and Social Media: The Multichannelling Challenges for Retailers**

*The last section is about innovation, which for retailing is primarily in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the related social media development. The characteristics of ICT innovation are analyzed with reference to the effects of new social media on the interaction between retailers and consumers. Multichannelling emerges as one of the most relevant consequences of this evolution. Multichannelling and its implications for marketing, organization, and distribution strategies seems to be the next decade challenge for all the players involved in the consumer-retailer-producer interaction.*

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Continuous advancements in technology make available a huge number of advanced systems that enhance consumers' in-store experience and shopping activity. In fact, the introduction of in-store technologies such as self-service systems, interactive displays, digital signage, etc. has impacted the retail process in

# Chapter 19

## Meanings and Implications of Corporate Social Responsibility and Branding in Grocer Retailers: A Comparative Study over Italy and the UK

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The chapter demonstrates the extent to which companies operating in the Retailing Grocery industry use Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as driver to enhance their brand and pursue commercial value, or to purely redefine their business priorities in accordance to evolving consumers' needs and expectations by making CSR a new concrete business model and evolving towards the concept of Corporate Shared Value (CSV). The study is addressed to analyse the matter of facts in two different European geographical areas: Italy and United Kingdom, chosen because of the peculiar approaches in companies' attitude towards CSR and CSV, ultimately. Many differences and some relevant similarities in the implementation of CSV as new strategic model between the countries have emerged, with UK showing the most formalized and standardized integration between social and economic value within its Grocer Retailer companies' business activities.*

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## BACKGROUND

Many authors consider responsible, ethical, philanthropic and sustainable behaviours to be effective routes companies can take to reach their markets and meet their consumers' needs successfully (Torres *et al.*, 2012; De Pedro & Gilabert, 2012; Vallaster *et al.*, 2012; Kuepfer & Papula, 2010; Macleod, 2001; Mohr *et al.*, 2001). All the actions conducted within the above mentioned fields are commonly defined with the name of Corporate Social Responsibility (defined within the chapter to as CSR) and have started being actively implemented by companies for the last three decades. As the for-profit world has started realizing the importance of playing a role as good citizen in the society (Carrol, 1991; Ahmed & Machold, 2004) and adjusting their whole organizational culture (Schein, 2010; Pringle *et al.*, 1988) according to a responsible way of doing business that creates value also for the society, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility has evolved towards the creation of Corporate Shared Value (defined within the chapter to as CSV) (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Implementing a model based on Corporate Shared Value means for companies undertaking a set of profitable activities that move beyond the trade-off between business and social concerns, to buster companies' competitiveness while improving at the same time economic value and the conditions of the society their activities directly or indirectly impact on (Porter & Kramer, 2011). In order to share the value they create, companies need to communicate their responsible, ethical, philanthropic and sustainable actions in a coherent way and integrate CSV with the other marketing activities that include branding, and so set up an *Integrated marketing communication* strategy (Schultz *et al.*, 1993; Krugman *et al.*, 1994; Duncan & Mulhern, 2004; Belch, Belch, 2009).

The necessity of integrating communication levers is perceived by companies as the most effective and strategic way to recognize their business a

reason to exist, and this is undisputed especially in crisis periods (Casalegno *et al.*, 2012), when new concerns drive consumers towards more responsible and coherent choices, as far as both economic and intrinsic value of products and companies are concerned. In the specific case of Grocer Retailers, for instance, consumers are nowadays looking for tangible benefits belonging to the implementation of Corporate Shared Value: when CSV domain directly affects their actual experience with the company or company's private labels they tend to modify their shopping behaviour (trendwatching.com) and may be willing to pay higher prices if the purchase is justified by a good cause (Cause Related Marketing) (Demetriou, Pappasolomou, & Vrontis, 2009) or the product simply acts in the best interest of society.

It is here that the relation between branding and Corporate Social Responsibility becomes crucial to understand the way in which companies are actually implementing the model of Corporate Shared Value. IN particular, whether CSR activities actually and purely aim at improving both society wellbeing and economic conditions or they are just addressed to help differentiating strategically companies' image related to their business operations (La Cour & Kromann, 2011) and obtain the competitive advantages (Porter & Kramer, 2002) for maximizing their profits (Friedman, 1970). In particular, which activities carried out within CSR really belong to the pure altruism of individuals running the company (Maple, 2008) and which ones just represent "an intellectual sloppy and trendy diversion from rigorous economic and institutional analysis" (Robins, 2005)?

## INTRODUCTION

The general aim of the chapter is to analyse the meanings and innovative implications of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies and policies adopted by grocer Retailers operating in two different European countries: Italy and United

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Kingdom. In particular, the study seeks to serve three main purposes:

- To analyze the relation between Corporate Social Responsibility and Branding within companies' *Integrated marketing communication* strategy and therefore, to explore the real nature and implications of CSR strategies, which can be connected to the brand equity enhancement, to a pure altruistic and social vision or just to a mix of the two as practical redefinition of business priorities defined to as Corporate Shared Value;
- To highlight how CSR has evolved towards the concept of Corporate Shared Value and, according to an extensive review of the literature, build a framework on CSV which groups together and describes the set of mixed activities undertaken by companies with the aim of combining and improving both social and economic value at the same time;
- To investigate the extent to which Grocer Retailers are evolving towards the implementation of Corporate Shared Value by considering also its level of integration within companies' brand and business strategies and compare the matter of facts between Italy and the United Kingdom.

The chapter follows the deductive approach of research, whose logic is to start with theoretical assumptions that are going to be accepted or rejected by the empirical evidence (Bryaman, 2004). Accordingly, the study is structured and divided in three main parts with the purpose of accomplish the objectives of the research.

The first part titled "CSR and communication" includes an extensive review of the literature that describes the relation between Corporate Social Responsibility and branding and points out their interaction within the Integrated marketing communication strategy that leads to the evolutionary

model of Corporate Shared Value. The aim of this section is to underline the impact of CSR as communication strategy that permeates multiple and mixed communication channels, including the physical one (the point of sale), with different meanings, purposes and implications, for the business itself and the reference audience or stakeholders.

The second part "The evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility: Corporate Shared Value as new strategic model" is designed and addressed to analyse the evolution Corporate Social Responsibility theory towards the model of Corporate Shared Value. Moreover, to draw a standardized and common framework of Corporate Shared Value based on several academic and business sources and researches; it will include all the activities companies carry out within social and economic purposes in order to figure out which ones of them are more to enhance the brand image and which others are, in fact, built to serve social purpose while reaching *shared value*. The framework seeks to be comprehensive of all the activities conducted with both social and economic intents and therefore includes all the original and traditional activities always identified with the name of Corporate Social Responsibility, it reclassifies them in different dimensions and adds also products, services and processes development as actions leading to the shared value creation.

In particular, the scheme of Corporate Shared Value - identified within the chapter with the name of "*CSV dimensions and activities*" - takes into account three main dimensions:

- **Accountability:** Referred to how companies communicate and give evidence of their behaviour towards Corporate Social Responsibility;
- **Corporate Philanthropy:** It includes all the activities carried out in order to respond to the community needs by supporting third sector projects of social interest;

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- **Ethics and Sustainability:** It is the dimension strictly related to the combination of environmental, societal and ethical concerns in processes, goods/products and services development.

The Corporate Shared Value framework has been built with the double intent of:

- **OFFERING** a better understanding over the real meanings of each activity, which is generally and simply defined under the name of CSR, but is, in fact, part of a more complex strategy with multiple objectives, some of which are clearly connected to a commercial and economic return;
- **WORKING** as standardized scheme to be applied to each of the Grocer Retailers operating in the countries at issue and part of the investigated sample in order to analyse their attitude and reasons driving towards the implementation of a Corporate Shared Value model.

As output of the literature review, the scheme on “CSV dimensions and activities” will function as tool to build the case studies for the practical observations.

Eventually, the third and last part titled “A compared analysis between United Kingdom and Italy” is addressed to the empirical analysis on a sample of six (6) Grocer Retailer companies, three (3) operating in Italy and three (3) from UK chosen among the biggest within the countries and the most involved (top spenders) in Corporate Philanthropy and investigated through the *case study* method of research (Yin, 2003). The aim is to investigate their behaviours and attitudes towards Corporate Shared Value and test whether the assumptions emerged from the literature review

are valid or not, depending on the specificities of the companies at issue and varying from country to country. The comparative analysis between the two countries strives to underline how socio-economic situation, institutional and historical settings, culture, religion, beliefs, preferences, and availability of information affect Grocer Retailers’ approach towards Corporate Social Responsibility, Philanthropy and Corporate Shared Value ultimately, regarding chosen activities, the communication of them and the real purposes behind them. Italy and United Kingdom are peculiar so, because despite the general settings of the two present quite similar features in terms, for instance, of population and gross domestic product, the cultural environment in which CSR and philanthropy have been developed looks quite different and interesting.

The theoretical framework on *CSV dimensions and activities* will be applied to each of the investigated Grocer Retailer, in order to give an overview of the implemented activities and the reasons that drive their choices. The case study for each company will be designed and developed by gathering qualitative information to investigate, such as: the characterizations of CSR policy including its level of formalization, the governance and structure of CSR within the company, the CSV adopted activities and objectives, the meaning and purposes of their strategy for Philanthropy including tools implemented to pursue it.

The chapter is designed to function both as theoretical framework for describing the innovative approach of Corporate Shared Value and understanding the implications coming from the inclusion of such model within the business strategy, and as empirical analysis, with the intent of using the developed theory to investigate Grocer Retailers’ CSV approach by comparing the matter of facts between Italy and the UK.

## CSR AND COMMUNICATION

### Communicating through Corporate Social Responsibility

As primary goal of any business, consumers influence and, are affected by, companies' values, beliefs, behaviours and their communication ultimately. Many factors (such as globalization, fast development of information and communication technologies, economic and financial crisis) have contributed, on one hand, to increase consumers' awareness and expectations towards products and services they buy and, on the other hand, have pushed companies to re-think about their offer, their social and environmental impacts and to build a new system of values which responds to the reference community and the society at large.

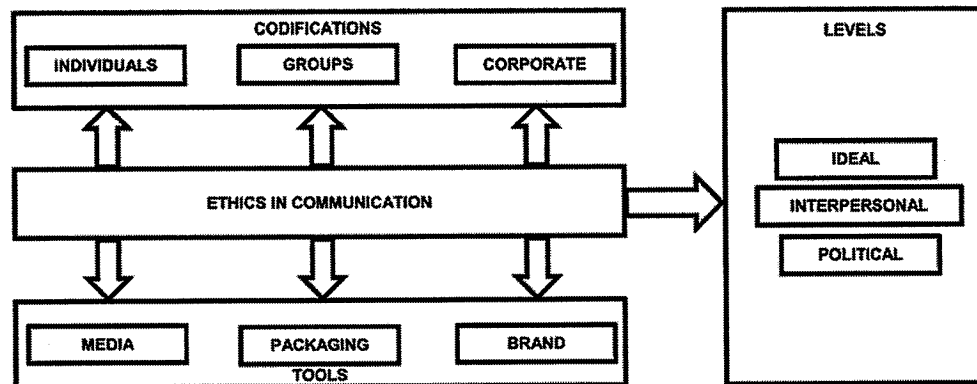
According to the 2013 Consumer Trend Report (2), nowadays products are asked to give back a specific set of expected and shared values. They need to be more than transparent to their audience, to become "naked" in communicating concrete and tangible benefits that go beyond the merely purpose a product is supposed to serve. "Brands' wishes will be consumers' command" (Consumer Trend Report, 2013) and, in this sense, consumers keep driving companies' choices in

the establishment of a new vision, new business models, products and services and coherent ways of advertising and creating marketing campaigns. The necessity of building up a coherent and integrated communication strategy is a feeling shared among all the stakeholders as extended audience of any corporation (Kliatchko, 2008). Consequently, companies need to leverage on constant factors and communicate simultaneously to different targets with different schemes; in other words, to create a synergy among communication channels (Belch & Belch, 2009), because the effect resulting from their integration is more powerful than any single undertaken communication action.

As a result, coherence represents the driver of communication and helps creating the expected reputation for companies; according to this perspective, over the last three decades Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has started playing also this role, to become one of the most effective internal and external way of communicating homogenization and alignment between activities and values within any company's business strategy.

As the Figure 1 shows, CSR (here defined as "ethics") is used to share principles and beliefs outside and inside the company; it is addressed to an ideal level involving the entire group of stakeholders, to the interpersonal one strictly

Figure 1. Ethics in companies' communication  
Source: adapted from Casalegno, 2012



connected to the sharing of company's values and, eventually, to the political sphere in which CSR actually becomes a driver for companies' strategic and practical decisions.

As far as CSR communication tools and means are concerned, the brand, the packaging and the media constitutes the major vehicles to run a coherent communication campaign in which principles and shared values can represent effective levers for competitive advantage and can likewise talk to an audience that is not simply persuaded by paid communication activities - such as the advertising, for instance - but more and more by the ethical characterizations and social concerns contained in products and expressed by companies. Accordingly, consumers are positively affected by companies that are able to transform their communication strategy into an integrated model addressed both to commercial purposes and social improvements (Kliatchko, 2008).

Therefore, since the brand is certainly one of the main levers companies own to communicate their shared values to the reference society and stakeholders, the next paragraph is addressed to theoretically demonstrate the configuration of a brand strategy when it is intended to establish a valuable relation with Corporate Social Responsibility.

### **Successful Brand Strategies Incorporate Corporate Social Responsibility**

The growing need of companies to differentiate themselves from competitors and build their own reputation by improving customer loyalty, combined with changes in the technological and social environment imposes profound changes in brand strategies. These changes determine the need to rethink strategies, actions and tools to manage the brand image and make it successful.

The growth in the number of branded products and the consequent growth of the intensity of communication activities increase the difficulty

of differentiating products by leveraging on tangible items. Companies hold consumers through a brand image, due to the extreme difficulty in winning them over through completely new products (Aaker, 1996). In some cases the difference between the various offers of the same product (of various companies) is minimal and brand becomes the only factor of differentiation. It is therefore necessary to understand the reasons why consumers give their preference to a brand among the many offers available. First of all, a brand that offers values and communicates principles behind companies' activities in addition to the merely intrinsic tangible characteristics of the product, is able to create more loyalty among customers than the simple product does (Aaker, 2004b).

Therefore, it seems evident that consumers obtain a number of intangible benefits (such as identification, gratification and, social acceptance) from the brand, whose importance is often superior to the purpose of the product itself. Brand becomes a vehicle to influence the perception of quality and to add value to the product.

The success of a company's brand (Blombäck *et al.*, 2012) is determined by a set of requirements (Aaker, 2004a; 2009; Balmer, 2008), which include Corporate Social Responsibility in accordance to a changing world perspective. Basically, companies connect the brand with the new trends arising among the society in general: environmental, social and economic sustainability are part of them. It is then extremely necessary to have consistency between the values associated with the brand and those transmitted by the behaviour of the company as a whole; any dystonia between companies' behaviour and brand identity is at risk of being immediately put in evidence and used against the company itself, with negative repercussions both on the brand image and on the customers' loyalty to the brand.

Evidence shows that a large proportion of consumers in Western markets (Allen & Root, 2004) bases their opinion on the brand considering also company's ethics, environmental impacts



and Corporate Social Responsibility, confirming that brand reputation is as important as brand awareness to create a coherent identity (Aaker, 1996; 2009; Wheeler, 2009; Christodoulides *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, as a system connected and tied to its environment, the company needs to create a relationship between corporate brand and the community the target belongs to. Brand is required to receive a kind of social legitimacy (Werther & Chandler, 2005) and this happens when the company is aligned to the behaviour rules built over time by the society and commonly accepted. It is here that Corporate Social Responsibility and brand appear to be closely interconnected.

CSR affects both the social legitimacy and the stakeholders perceptions thus impacts on the financial results of the company (Werther & Chandler, 2005). In this sense, profit maximization and CSR seem to become increasingly interconnected as well: social concerns incorporated into the brand strategies of the company allow the company itself to sustain its competitive advantages on a long term.

From the brand strategy point of view, the activities carried out within CSR should somehow be made visible inside and outside the company to create brand associations. The ways are numerous. Not necessarily the choice is communicating through the media, but in many the generation of a positive word-of-mouth represent a free and effective solution. This is the case of strategic philanthropy (Porter & Kramer, 2002) that companies implement to get visibility and benefit in a win-win situation (for the companies and for the social cause they are supporting).

Building a relationship between brand and CSR is important to strengthen customers' loyalty but, considering CSR popularity and complexity, isn't it time for it to become more than just a set of values to be communicated through the brand and become, instead, translated in a new strategic model as natural outcome of companies' social concerns and consumers' expectations?

## **THE EVOLUTION OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE SHARED VALUE AS NEW STRATEGIC MODEL**

As a set of non-business oriented actions addressed to temporarily improve companies' behaviour and give them a voice within the social debate, Corporate Social Responsibility is not a new concept for them. Nowadays CSR is largely being strengthened to include a concrete set of tools and planned activities addressed to solve social and environmental issues with positive repercussions on the reference community and ultimately on the existent and potential consumers, focusing also on the financial sustainability every company strives for. It is, in other words, a new way of positioning business and relations with community by using ethical drivers (Macleod, 2001; Mohr *et al.*, 2001; Kuepfer & Papula, 2010).

Corporate Social Responsibility is becoming part of companies' main mission and therefore the strategy seems to embrace more complicated levers and activities that deal at the same time with social, economic and commercial purposes. The issue is whether this ethical and social actions combined with the business strategy can actually be considered a new business model for companies or just an effective lever of marketing and communication (La Kour & Kromann, 2011; Maple, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 2002; Robins, 2005).

Reasons driving Corporate Social Responsibility to a new business model development raise issues of different kind and the dilemma is not of an easy solution: what appears clear is that CSR needs to impose itself as a new *corporate mindset* with its own strategic implications (Kim *et al.*, 2011); in other words, it needs to evolve towards a Corporate Shared Value (CSV) model implementation (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Despite the multiple conceptualizations of CSR and the fact that a single definition has yet to be accepted (Vallaster *et al.*, 2012), it is possible to refer to one that describes the authors' perception

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toward CSR as a “a cross-functioning management tool which aims at achieving long term goals by fostering voluntary companies’ multi-stakeholders relationships” (Freeman & Phillips, 2002; Civera & Musso, 2012).

Starting from the above definition, the authors have tried to enrich the meaning of CSR towards CSV by grouping together all the traditional activities carried out within the name of CSR (Civera & Musso, 2012) and add those more connected to the company’s business activities, which have a clear social purpose as well (such the ethical products development).

As the Table 1 shows, the three main dimensions of Corporate Shared Value include the activities generally implemented by companies when developing social and ethical strategies that also have profitable goals:

- **Accountability:** It refers to how companies communicate and give evidence of their behaviour concerning different subjects such as quality, environment, occupational safety and health, human rights and social responsibility through the voluntary adoption of International Standards and Norms or the Adherence to National or International Standards.

- **Corporate Philanthropy:** It includes all the activities carried out in order to respond to the community needs by supporting third sector’s projects of social interest, from simply cash donation, employees’ volunteering, Cause Related Marketing and so on. It is the dimension that, more than the others, can actually bring social and economic goals into alignment and improve companies’ long-term business prospects depending on the type of tools chosen to support good causes; this is why the empirical analysis will focus mainly on Corporate Philanthropy in order to respond to the research question.
- **Ethics and Sustainability:** It is strictly related to the combination of environmental, societal and ethical concerns in processes, goods/products and services development by making the best use of Research and Development and Innovation as tools to make the difference among the competitive arena.

Among the spectrum of the above CSV initiatives, Philanthropy is considered a growing activity (Liu & Ko, 2011) and accordingly, one of the major dimensions (Kim *et al.*, 2011) to explain

Table 1. CSV dimensions and activities

Dimensions	Accountability	Philanthropy	Ethics and Sustainability
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainability and Social Reports</li> <li>• Code of Ethics</li> <li>• Adherence to National and International Standards</li> <li>• Norms and Standards implementation:</li> <li>• UNI EN ISO 9001:2008 on Quality Management System Requirements</li> <li>• UNI EN ISO 14001 on Environmental Management Standard</li> <li>• OHSAS 18001 on Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series</li> <li>• SA8000: Social Accountability and Human Rights</li> <li>• ISO 26000:2010 on Sustainable Development and Social Responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cash and in kind supports</li> <li>• Sponsorships</li> <li>• Cause Related Marketing</li> <li>• Staff Involvement: payroll giving and volunteering</li> <li>• Corporate Foundations creation</li> <li>• Investments in specific projects in response to specific needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development and implementation of ethical products and services</li> <li>• Fair trade products</li> <li>• Ethical funds or investments</li> <li>• Micro finance</li> <li>• Eco and Environmental-friendly products</li> <li>• Sustainable processes: energy saving, recycling, searching for alternative energy sources and resources</li> <li>• Policies and Rules issued for certain types of stakeholders</li> <li>• Supply chain and employees involvement in CSR tools adoption</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Civera & Musso, 2012

CSV. Focusing on it gives a better understanding of whether the company benefits from commercial advantages deriving by CSR and branding inter-connection or its aim is to purely foster community well-being by adopting a new strategic model of CSV. Corporate philanthropy consists of several activities aiming at building relationships with Third Sector Organizations: from the simply cash donations and investments in specific projects of social interest to the sponsorships and partnerships (Baur & Schmitz, 2012; Liu & Ko, 2011) and Cause Related Marketing. In the context of philanthropy, it clearly appears that, the more the philanthropic activities are connected to the image and the brand of the company, the more the company can mutually benefit from them and apparent philanthropy can be perceived as a form of public relations or advertising and promotion (Porter & Kramer, 2002). Cause Related Marketing (CRM) represents the clearest example of this: consumers' behaviour are expected to increase in loyalty (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001) and the image of the company will benefit of better reputation among stakeholders (Brammer & Pavelin, 2006), while making CSR a new business model and creating, accordingly, a Shared Value.

In this sense, saying that investments in CSV under the form of philanthropic investments – and in particular in activities which can make the company increase its visibility on the market – have positive impact on the long-term competitive advantage of differentiating products and services (Porter, 1980; Demetriou *et al.*, 2009) is an understatement.

Given the theoretical framework, the aim of the chapter is to investigate if and how the big move towards Corporate Shared Value implementation – as innovative and more formalized way of thinking CSR – is being undertaken by companies, in the context of Italy and United Kingdom.

## **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN UNITED KINGDOM AND ITALY**

### **UK and Italy: Peculiarities in their Attitude towards CSR and Philanthropy**

Reasons, use and implications of CSR hugely vary from country to country and across sectors (Brammer & Pavelin, 2006). Many factors, such as socio-economic situation, institutional and historical settings (CGAP, 2011) culture, religion, beliefs, preferences, and availability of information really affect both the individual and the corporate behaviour towards ethics and philanthropy, regarding CSV chosen activities, the communication of them, the frequency and amount of donations to charities and the typology of relationships with them.

As far as the general setting of the two countries at issue is concerned, Italy and United Kingdom present quite similar features: first of all the population, which is estimated to be 60.1 million in Italy and 61.9 million in UK (United Nation, 2010) and secondly the gross domestic product of the two countries is quite comparable. The International Monetary Fund estimates UK GDP for the year 2010 to be equal to billion €1.700 and Italy GDP for 2010 at billion €1.707.

What looks quite different is the cultural environment in which attitudes towards CSR in general and philanthropy in particular have been developed.

The case of United Kingdom, for instance, is very representative of a country that has a strong tradition of charitable behaviour mainly due to third sector more formal development. The reasons can be found in historical evidence, which reveals how important the role of business

philanthropy has been during the years in building and maintaining the social and economic wealth of UK society (CGAP, 2011). Within the growth and the weight of third sector in UK as part of “social welfare provision in response to social, economic and political needs” (CGAP, 2011) profit oriented companies have taken a part in this development by seeking to achieve both their primary goal and the ones of the societal benefit through their charitable support.

In Italy, on the other hand, culturally the growth and the weight of philanthropy has always been more connected to the pressure and the influence of religion, which has played a significant role even in the political debate and process towards the creation of a welfare-state. Philanthropic activities have been characterized by far less visibility when compared to UK and US activities during the last decades (Assifero, 2010). Today within the growth of Corporate Social Responsibility and increasing concerns about whether or not businesses can be conducive to society well being, Porter’s *strategic donation and philanthropy* is gaining in importance both from the quantitative and the qualitative side. This may be the reason why Italian companies are seeking now, to introduce these practices as more formalized part of their core business activities.

Investments in CSR are generally positive and increasing in both of the countries. Reasons of investing still differ. The first “Report on Social Responsibility and Competitiveness” shows that in Italy the concepts of CSR and corporate philanthropy are still seen as related to the idea of improving brand image (RGA, 2009) rather than achieving social purposes through the implementation of a new strategic vision. The percentage of CSR communication has increased in both of the countries since 2008 and is surely representative of an ongoing and increasing attitude towards CSR communication. Furthermore, Italy suffers of a lack of CSR managers: 58,9% of the Italian companies does not have a formal CSR manager

in their organizational chart and the management is often addressed to people in charge of other functions (such as human resources, marketing and communication) (Altis, ISVI, 2006).

Companies make an extensive use of all the philanthropic tools with differences underlying and anticipating at a first glance what the findings emerged from our empirical analysis will reveal. Cash donations and employees involvement in philanthropic activities is far more popular in the UK, when, oppositely, Italian companies make large use of Cause Related Marketing and sponsorships (Osservatorio Socialis, 2010; Lillya, 2011).

By analysing the attitude toward CRS and Philanthropy in the context of Italy and the UK emerged that one of the most involved sector in these kinds of investments and concerns over the community is the Retail Grocery one.

### **Research Method and Considered Sample**

The research has been developed by following the deductive approach of study that represents the commonest view of the nature of the relationship between theory and empirical research (Bryman, 2004). All theories, hypothesis and assumptions emerged from the literature review on Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Communication and Corporate Shared Value have been confirmed or partly rejected through the empirical analyses conducted on a sample of six (6) companies among Retail Grocery sectors, three (3) operating in Italy and three (3) in the UK.

The sample of companies has been investigated over the extent to which their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes (with a great focus on Philanthropy) are becoming new business strategies connected to the Corporate Shared Value implementation, independent on the marketing and communication activities. The *comparative case studies* method of research has been used because of three different reasons.

## Meanings and Implications of Corporate Social Responsibility and Branding

First of all, the use of a *comparative study* has been necessary and required in order to be able to compare two different situations, which are in this case, referred to two different geographical contexts: Italy and United Kingdom.

Secondly, the *case study* methodology involves an extensive examination of the setting (it could be a community, an organization, a company, a single peculiar event) when a holistic and in-depth investigation is needed.

Eventually, in the case at issue, the existence of three out of three conditions that justify the *case study* implementation (Yin, 2003) has driven the choice:

1. When the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions: one of the purpose of the research is to respond to “how” companies implement CSV reasons why of doing so;
2. When the researcher cannot manipulate any behaviour among the people involved in the study: the present study does not involved people; companies have been – in fact – investigated through the analysis of their strategies and communication available on the Websites and published reports;
3. When contextual conditions are believed to be relevant to the phenomenon under study: in this case the different geographical countries to which they belong are relevant to the study; they affect companies’ behaviours and how they set up actions within Corporate Shared Value.

The information from the Websites and the published reports of each company has been collected at a single point in time (T1). The collection of information has aimed at detecting certain criteria addressed to produce a standardized framework to consistently respond to the research question.

In particular, information on each company have been gathered around:

- Company general information and financials;
- Characterizations of the CSR policy including its level of formalization
- Governance and structure of CSR within the company;
- Description of CSR adopted activities;
- Focus on the strategy for Philanthropy including tools implemented to pursue it.

The information has been gathered through a careful analysis of the companies’ Websites, in particular of the sections dedicated to Social Responsibility, Sustainability and Ethics (present in all the companies’ Websites at issue), and through a precise reading and studying of the Reports published in the field of CSR and Philanthropy (such as Social Report, Code of Ethics, Code of Conduct, and so on) available on the Website as well.

Companies operating in the Retail Grocery sector, both in Italy and the UK, are the most involved in Corporate Philanthropy; accordingly, the gathered data are effectively compared.

A total of six (6) companies have been empirically analysed. Table 2 summarizes the sample.

Some precise criteria have been used to choose the sample and have varied depending on the geographical context the company belongs to.

As far as the UK Retailers are concerned, two criteria have been applied: the identification of the largest Grocery Retailers in the UK (among the categories Hypermarket and Supermarket) and – among the largest – the choice of the most

Table 2. Summary of the UK and Italian companies’ sample

Italian Retail Grocery Sector	UK Retail Grocery Sector
Coop Italia	Tesco PLC
Conad Consorzio Nazionale Dettaglianti	J Sainsbury PLC
Esselunga SpA	Co-operative Food Ltd

involved in Corporate Philanthropy. As a result, according to the ranking reported on the Website *retailindustry.com*, the “Guide to UK Company Giving” (Lillya, 2011) and the book “Top 3000 Charities 2012/2013” (Caritas Data, 2012) (3), which ranks the top 200 donors per community investments, the sample is here composed by: Tesco PLC Sainsbury’s, and Co-operative Group (Food division).

For the Italian companies, because of the lack of data over the top corporate spenders in Corporate Philanthropy, the three largest Italian Grocery Retailers (in the category Hypermarket and Supermarket) according to the ranking reported by *retailindustry.com* have been picked up: Coop Italia (ranked at the 47<sup>th</sup> position), Conad Consorzio Nazionale Dettaglianti Soc. Coop. s.r.l. (67<sup>th</sup> position), and Esselunga SpA (115<sup>th</sup> position out of 250 Retailers).

## **KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

Given the premises that the UK and the Italian contexts can be considered quite similar and comparable when it comes to the economic, demographic and geographic factors, the empirical analysis of the peculiarities of each company at issue has led to formulate a various scenario, where many differences and some relevant similarities in CSV implementation as innovative strategy between the two countries and between the sectors emerged.

The conclusion will be drawn on the basis of the criteria used for the design of the case studies: characterizations of the Corporate Social Responsibility programmes, features of CSR Governance, typology of CSR tools used, description of the strategy for Philanthropy.

In both of the Italian and the UK contexts CSV implementation seems to represent the most effective response to the on-going challenges and changes companies and societies are facing all over the world. By having a look at the general

core and business strategy as far as Retail Grocery sector is concerned, it immediately and clearly emerges that all of them include ethics, sustainable and responsible aims or strategic objectives in the mission, values or Strategic Plan they set up for pursuing their main and core business purpose. This tendency underlines a very relevant shift of topics and issues in companies’ concerns. Especially in sectors like Retail Grocery they have started perceiving the responsibility of their activities and the impact they can have on consumers’ perceptions and choices.

Accordingly, CSV comes out naturally from the general business strategy, as at the heart of companies’ decisions and as core values driving all the activities each company aims to implement.

As far as the Governance of CSR is concerned, a big difference between the UK and the Italian contexts emerges. The 3 analysed players in the UK (Tesco, Sainsbury’s and Co-operative Food) appear to be much more formalized in the setting up of an ad-hoc Unit or Committee for CSR, belonging to the Group’s Board and Chairman, with the task of giving a formal approval to the most relevant actions and statements published in the field of CSR. All the companies provide a dedicated Unit or Committee or Group involved in implementing CSR both strategically and at an operational level by pursuing concrete activities.

The spread of CSV activities is high in all the analysed companies, no matter the country. Each player counts on different adopted tools to pursue its CSV strategy and activities in the accountability and ethics and sustainability dimensions.

At the opposite, the similarities emerging in CSV activities implementation as far as accountability and ethics and sustainability are concerned, are not – in fact – reflected in the strategy for Philanthropy. The extent to which Philanthropy is considered a proper strategic move is different between the countries. The general tendency suggests that Philanthropy is becoming (or there is an explicit declaration of doing it) a real and concrete innovative strategy within the whole business strat-

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egy, as to show that concerns about communities and societies' well being need to be strategically implemented in corporates decisions. Despite this tendency, huge differences in the strategic way of pursuing philanthropic activities emerge between Italy and the UK. In general, Philanthropy appears to be more formally implemented and standardized programme are more likely to be set up in the UK context, with projects having a longer gestation and life cycle and creating more loyal relationships. Clear plans describing the economic and financial efforts in the community investments and the results achievement for projects carried out over the past years are more common among UK players. Philanthropy, similarly to CSR, represents – for them – a concrete strategy, which needs to be embedded by the whole company. This statement might justify why the technique of involving employees to volunteer and/or to fund-raise for charities partnering with the company is greatly used in the UK context more than in Italy.

On one hand, the policy standardization is higher in the UK. On the other hand, a common tendency of making a use of Philanthropy as a commercial tool to obtain economic advantages and positive return on image and brand equity seems to belong to all the players; the use of Cause Related Marketing is common to all the analysed Grocer Retailers. This means that, no matter the country, pursuing a commercial return on philanthropic investments is a fact even for those Italian companies that do not implement any formal and

standardized policy or strategy for Philanthropy. The only small difference in this common tendency is that, in some cases, companies based in the UK clearly admit and communicate to their stakeholders which activities are carried out for a commercial purpose.

Table 3 summarizes the results described above, identifying each considered player with the acronym Gr (standing for Grocery).

Evidence shows that CSV can really be considered a driver of both marketing communication in order to increase brand equity and awareness and of social concerns implementation to make the whole company's communication homogeneous and coherent with the values and beliefs characterizing its culture.

The intangible asset represented by the reputation a company creates is the basis for improving brand strategy. The use of this asset in branding - if managed and shared - creates a virtuous cycle building trust and increasing the equity of the brand. Accordingly, CSV incorporates brand and Corporate Social Responsibility strategies to improve the social impact, the market perception and the commercial performance of a company and its products by combining in those tangible and intangible attributes, values, symbols and social issues.

What emerges as common to all the companies part of the sample is the fact that they all go beyond to the simple CSR like a random combination of communication and non-business oriented actions

*Table 3. Findings summary*

Investigated Areas	Italy			United Kingdom		
	Gr1	Gr2	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6
Spread of CSR in accordance with the current issues	Gr1	Gr2	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6
CSR Governance – Formalization				Gr4	Gr5	Gr6
CSR Accountability		Gr2	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6
Philanthropy – Formal implementation				Gr4	Gr5	Gr6
Philanthropy – Employees volunteering	Gr1			Gr4	Gr5	Gr6
Philanthropy – Cause Related Marketing	Gr1	Gr2	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6
Philanthropy – Commercial purposes				Gr4		

addressed to the community; they are actually starting implementing the innovative model of CSV which combines brand and social concerns in a formalized and strategic way in order to have positive impact both on financials and the community itself.

This kind of mixed social activities and marketing communication are driven by and are addressed to the internal and external customers, which have the power to strengthen the process and make CSR and brand merge into the innovative model of Corporate Shared Value (CSV), as the highest level of strategy formalization for companies.

Like a virtuous circle (Figure 2), the implementation of such innovative model as strategic lever can bring companies to the achievement of benefits impacting both externally and internally, aligning brand and social concerns in order to make the company a *value to share*.

### FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

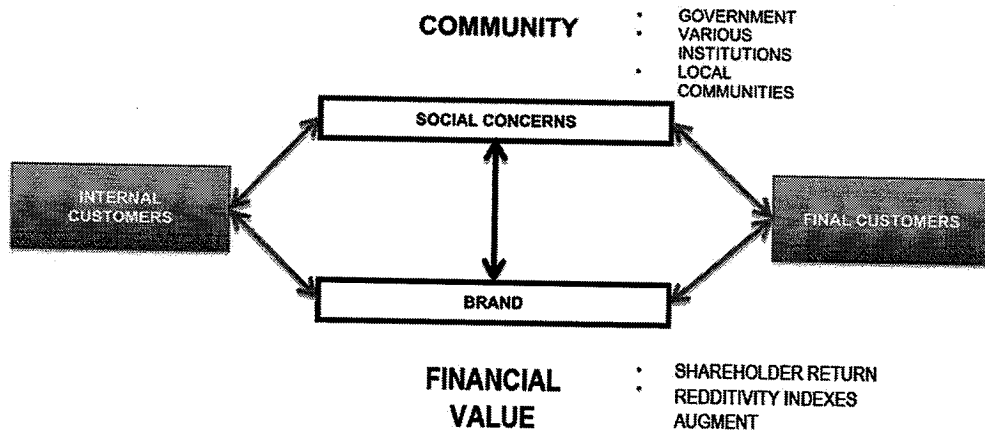
Since the present research is focused on two Countries and one specific industrial sector within the category of retailing, next steps might consider a

wider geographical area and the analysis of various sectors. The geographic areas of immediate concern in relation to these emerging trends are the Mediterranean countries and the Anglo-Saxon ones, considering cultural and sociological analogies, peculiarities and differences explained before in the chapter regarding consumers' behaviours in Italy and UK respectively.

As far as additional analysis of different sectors is concerned, an interesting contrast to the retail grocery can be represented by the distribution strategies of luxury goods. Given that individuals polarize their preferences in both consumer goods and luxury goods markets because of interconnected different reasons, further researches might be focused on figuring out the meanings and implications of Corporate Shared Value innovative strategies among retailing sectors differing hugely between each other: consumer and luxury goods, to see whether the strategies for CSR and branding differ.

Eventually, it would be useful to investigate the same issues, taking into account the perception and the points of view of consumers through an in-depth empirical analysis.

*Figure 2. Innovative strategy virtuous circle*





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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Branding:** The strategy used to create a unique name and image for a product in consumers' mind.

**Cause Related Marketing:** A commercial activity in which businesses and charities form a partnership with each other to market an image, service or product for mutual benefit.

**Corporate Shared Value:** A set of profitable activities that aim at improving at the same time both the economic value and the conditions of the society companies' activities directly or indirectly affect.

**Corporate Social Responsibility:** The sum of policies concerning a corporate self-regulation integrated in its business model.

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**Ethics and Sustainability:** The combination of environmental, societal and ethical concerns in processes, goods/products and services development.

**Integrated Marketing Communication:** The strategy of communicating simultaneously to different targets with different schemes in order to create a synergy among communication channels so that the effect resulting from their integration will be more powerful than any single undertaken communication action.

**Philanthropy:** Consists of several activities aiming at building relationships with third sector organizations. From the simply cash donations and investments in specific projects of social interest to the sponsorship of development and some cause related marketing activities.

### **ENDNOTES**

1. The Authors own full responsibility of the contents of the paper. Anyway paragraphs named 'Background', 'Introduction' and

'Key findings and conclusion' have been attributed to Professor Candelo, Dr. Casalegno and Dr. Civera; while paragraphs named 'Successful brand strategies incorporate Corporate Social Responsibility' and 'Further research direction' must be attributed to Professor Elena Candelo. Paragraphs named 'Communicating through Corporate Social Responsibility' and 'UK and Italy: peculiarities in their attitude towards CSR and Philanthropy' are attributed to Dr. Cecilia Casalegno. Eventually, paragraphs named 'The evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility: Corporate Shared Value as new strategic model' and 'Research method and considered sample' must be attributed to Dr. Chiara Civera.

2. For the full report see [trendwatching.com](http://trendwatching.com), last access 28th of August 2013.

3. 2011 Worldwide community investments: Tesco PLC (£ 64.3 million), Sainsbury's (£ 25 million), and Co-operative Group (£ 7 million cash donations).