

## **?It?s Not You, It?s Me?: How Corporate Social Responsibility Decreases Customer Citizenship Behavior**

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### **Resumo**

The possibilities of consumers helping each other vary across services and emphasize its dynamic and interdependent nature. With investments in technology-based, technology supported services, and customers' empowerment, companies have interest in fostering customer voluntary behaviors that traditionally have been operated by employees (Groth, 2005). This paper analyzes how CSR activities influence helping behaviors among customers. Across two studies, we demonstrate that when participants were faced with previous opportunity to satiate self-defining goals through CSR, they had a reduced propensity to help other customers. Besides, we propose entitativity to foster customer helping in those situations. We extend previous research on CSR addressing the adverse effects on CCB. We show a negative facet of CSR that is still underexplored in the literature. Also, we provide behavioral support for our claim with our dependent variable on Study 1. The number of studies on CCB literature has grown in recent years, but no research has analyzed this effect and underlying factors that can attenuate undesirable behaviors. We also focus on helping other customers, a specific dimension of CCB, to understand the extent which customers are willing to go to help the firm.

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### **ABSTRACT**

The possibilities of consumers helping each other vary across services and emphasize its dynamic and interdependent nature. With investments in technology-based, technology supported services, and customers’ empowerment, companies have interest in fostering customer voluntary behaviors that traditionally have been operated by employees (Groth, 2005). This paper analyzes how CSR activities influence helping behaviors among customers. Across two studies, we demonstrate that when participants were faced with previous opportunity to satiate self-defining goals through CSR, they had a reduced propensity to help other customers. Besides, we propose entitlement to foster customer helping in those situations. We extend previous research on CSR addressing the adverse effects on CCB. We show a negative facet of CSR that is still underexplored in the literature. Also, we provide behavioral support for our claim with our dependent variable on Study 1. The number of studies on CCB literature has grown in recent years, but no research has analyzed this effect and underlying factors that can attenuate undesirable behaviors. We also focus on helping other customers, a specific dimension of CCB, to understand the extent which customers are willing to go to help the firm.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Whether working out at the gym, having lunch at the restaurant, traveling on vacation, or buying new clothes, when customers look around, they are surrounded by people sharing the same venue with similar needs and purposes. Eventually, these fellow customers may need opinions about a new gadget, instructions on how to adjust gym equipment or even a lesson on how to self-check-in at the airline kiosk. The possibilities of consumers helping each other vary across services and emphasize its dynamic and interdependent nature. With investments in technology-based, technology supported services, and customers’ empowerment (e.g., Bitner, Brown, & Meuter, 2000; Cova & Dalli, 2009), companies have interest in fostering customer voluntary behaviors that traditionally have been operated by employees (Groth, 2005). Thus, these discretionary extra-role actions performed by consumers during service delivery, coined Customer Citizenship Behavior (CCB), are critical on promoting service quality and customer satisfaction besides creating a favorable climate service (Balaji, 2014; Bettencourt, 1997; Bove et al., 2009; Johnson & Rapp, 2010; Kim & Choi, 2016).

Companies are increasingly fostering interactive encounters among their actual and potential customers. Initiatives such as brand communities (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001), online forums (e.g., Moe & Trusov, 2011), social campaigns (e.g., Peattie & Peattie, 2003), and events and fairs help to mobilize customer towards moral responsibility, shared identity, and social consciousness. In the same stream, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs are rising due to public pressure and customers’ greater willingness to purchase products from these firms (Pérez & Del Bosque, 2015; Pirsch & Gupta, 2007; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). They are grounded on salient social identity and self-definitional needs (e.g., Marin, Ruiz, 2007; Matten & Moon, 2008). Whereas the increasing interest in CCB in recent years is notable (e.g., Anaza, 2014; Choi & Lotz, 2016; Thompson, Kim, & Smith, 2015), there is a scarcity of authors that approached the influence of CSR on citizenship behaviors. On one hand, the number of companies investing on CSR

activities such as cause-related marketing, corporate philanthropy, and minority support programs have exponentially increased in the last decades (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Lii & Lee, 2012; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). On the other hand, CCB integrates avenues for social capital, customer co-creation of value, firm recognition and reputation (Bettencourt, 1997; Nguyen, Groth, Walsh, & Hennig-Thurau, 2014). Lii and Lee (2012) found that philanthropy was the only CSR initiative to influence in-role and extra-role intentions through customer-company identification and brand attitude as mediators. Despite initial efforts, there is still a need for novel and counterintuitive empirical findings on these research domains.

Drawing on social identity theory, we propose CSR as part of a desirable self-concept in which “we” is a priority instead of “I”. We posit that CSR attends collective goals that reinforce shared values and “perceived similarities between the self and other in-group members” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). Since social identity assumes that people determine their self-concept by connecting with social groups and organizations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), they tend to assume corresponding roles and responsibilities. The theory offers a bridge between the self and social entities (Belk, 1988; Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010).

We also adopt the self-completion lens to argue that social identification is a necessity that can be satiated by complying with CSR initiatives. Self-defining goals (i.e., belonging to a group or consolidating social self) have multiple indicators or symbols that are exchangeable for one another (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981). People seek to satisfy self-defining-goals and being a good citizen is a goal commonly shared, such as doing good for people close to you, people in need, or yet fellow customers. Since helping is only one of self-defining dimensions, helping some individuals may reduce the propensity to help other individuals. The abstractedness of innumerable routes to attend self-defining goals may lead people to disengage of their goal or bring impatience on seeking “progress” that cannot be measured or premeditated.

Interestingly, consumers can fulfill their goals in various ways. As such, they are likely to embrace more accessible and immediate ways of self-symbolizing to anticipate gratification (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). As a result, because consumers are likely to disengage after perceiving progress toward a self-defining goal (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 2013), consumers are less likely to engage in other forms of satisfying self-defining goals of social identity after complying with CSR initiatives. For example, an initial token display of support for a cause at the fast-food cashier (e.g., donating US\$1 to the Red Cross) may decrease the chance of a subsequent display of support to another customer (e.g., teaching someone how to use the soda fountain machine). As a result, we propose, counterintuitively, that by endorsing CSR actions and achieving self-definition goals, customers may inhibit posterior displays of CCB (i.e., helping fellow customers) considering that they already obtained satisfaction for helping third parties.

This study offers several contributions. First, we extend the logic of social identity and self-completion theories for a more micro level field in which we connect to CSR and CCB. Further, the proposition of CSR as an inhibitory variable instead of a trigger to citizenship or desirable behaviors is counterintuitive and offers new paths of research (e.g., Marin, Ruiz, & Rubio, 2009; Ramasamy, Yeung, & Au, 2010). Second, we inaugurate the boundary condition of customer entitativity (Lickel et al., 2000; Rydell & McConnell, 2005) as a mechanism underlying these effects. Proximity, similarity, and interdependence characterize entitative groups (Effron & Knowles, 2015). Third, we contribute to self-completion theory by bringing to light entitativity as a relevant condition that attenuates issues (i.e., impatience and overextension) related to self-defining goals. These conflicts affect the development of behavioral competencies, and may damage communication and interpersonal relations (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 2013). Lastly, we focus on the often-overlooked CCB dimension of helping other customers to better understand how CSR initiatives influence discretionary

demonstrations of citizenship among customers. In this case, feedback, recommendation, facilitation, cooperation, tolerance, and advocacy are dimensions that don't benefit other customers directly (e.g., Balaji, 2014; Curth, Urich, & Benkenstein, 2014; Yi Nataraajan, & Gong, 2011).

Two following experiments demonstrated the effects of CSR on CCB. In Experiment 1, we tested our core proposition by exposing respondents to CSR versus neutral conditions of an existing company. The ones in the neutral condition were more predisposed to assist other customers afterward. In Experiment 2, we replicate our main finding with three different companies and different stimuli from Experiment 1, besides adding a boundary mechanism that moderates the relationship between the adherence to CSR initiatives and helping fellow customers.

## 2 EXPERIMENT 1

Our primary goal in Experiment 1 is to investigate the core premise that due to self-completion, people tend to feel satiated on complying with social expectations reflected on CSR. Thus, we posit that customers exposed to a neutral condition will be more willing to perform citizenship behaviors towards other customers since they didn't have the previous opportunity to attend to their self-definition goals concerning social identity. Respondents in the CSR condition will be less willing to help other customers in a second circumstance.

### 2.1 Participants

Two hundred and fifty American members of a community-based subject pool participated in our study in exchange for monetary compensation (62,8% female,  $M_{age} = 43.95$   $SD = 14.193$ ). Each respondent was randomly assigned to one of the two established conditions of the study.

### 2.2 Manipulations

We employed a one factor (firm products: CSR vs. neutral) between-subjects design. Participants were exposed to a cover story in which we would ask their opinion to estimate sales of Microsoft's new products for 2018. To manipulate our independent variable (IV), half of the respondents received a condition with two software bundles that Microsoft is considering to launch: both had the same description, but one offered an additional application called Math Works while the other was Microsoft Groups (fictional products). They were asked to choose one of the packages. The other half of participants, assigned to the CSR condition, also received the same bundle, but this time with the possibility to choose between the adherence of "1 subscription = 1 tablet" campaign that would give one table for each subscription to Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BCGA) or Technology Education and Literacy in Schools (TEALS). Similarly, they had to choose a package between the two cause-related marketing (CRM) initiatives (Appendix A).

In this experiment, CSR condition was based on a CRM choice since it would require participants to make a choice and, thus, demonstrate progress towards self-defining goals. We hypothesized that participants directed to CSR condition would be less willing to help other customers in a short-term opportunity.

### 2.3 Procedures

Firstly, participants were assigned to one of the reported conditions (CSR or neutral). They were asked “which package would you choose?”. After choosing the bundle, we thanked them for participating in our poll and introduced the Microsoft Users Hub, a new hub for users to post questions and answers about how to optimize the use of Microsoft products and services. Then, we asked them to select all e-mail lists that they would like to sign up for: “I would like to be notified when users post questions on my area of expertise, so I can help them to solve their problems”; “I would like to be notified when other users respond to questions within my area of expertise, so I can help by rating the quality of their responses”; and “none of the above”. They were informed that they would be signed up for the lists selected, thus making their choices consequential. After answering our dependent variable, participants answered to manipulation and attention check questions. Next, participants indicated their demographics, were informed that they would not be signed up to any list and that we had not collected any identifying information, and were dismissed. We used a behavioral dependent variable (i.e., sign up to e-mail lists) to expand our finding beyond intentions to help (Groth, 2005; Parker & Ward, 2000).

### 2.4 Results and discussion

Due to the count nature of the data, we analyzed the data using a Generalized Linear Model (GLM) with Poisson distribution and Log link (Dobson & Barnett, 2008; McCullagh & Nelder, 1989). To test our hypothesis, we included a dummy variable for CSR (1 = CSR, 0 = control) as the independent variable, and the number of lists the individual signed up for (0, 1, or 2) as the dependent variable. Conforming our prediction, we found a main effect of CSR ( $\beta = -.112$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 3.834$ ,  $p < .05$ ) such as respondents in the CSR condition presented a lower CCB engagement than those in the neutral condition.

CSR seems to be associated with satisfied self-defining goals that decrease the necessity to perform a helpful behavior in the sequence. As assumed with the realism of the task (respondents were asked to subscribe to e-mail lists to help other customers) and on previous research on helping behaviors, the level of help was low but, when faced with a previous CSR choice, the level was even lower (0.8% and 3.2%) as shown in Table 16.

Table 1 – Cross tabulation of means (percentage)

		Cross tabulation			
		0,00	1,00	2,00	Total
CSR	0	88%	5,6%	6,4%	100% (125)
	1	96%	0,8%	3,2%	100% (125)
Total		92%	3,2%	4,8%	100% (250)

Study 1 established the expected effect of complying with CSR activities on their willingness to tighten bonds with other consumers through CCB. Consistent with literature on community identification, CCB is likely to emerge when people perceive other customers as partners who share common interests, as opposed to mere acquaintances that happen to consume similar products (Johnson, Massiah, & Allan, 2013; Johnson & Selnes, 2004). Research has shown that certain groups are composed by members that are perceived to form a cohesive entity, with similar characteristics and shared goals, that is, are perceived to have high entitativity (e.g., Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998; Hogg et al., 2007; McConnell, Sherman, & Hamilton, 1997). Extant literature shows that individuals use group membership to satisfy social identity goals only when the group is perceived to have high entitativity (e.g., Crawford, Sherman, & Hamilton, 2002; Smith, Faro, & Burson, 2012). Thus, if satiation of social identity goals indeed underlines the effect of complying with CSR activities on CCB observed in study

1, then we expect entitativity to moderate this effect such that complying with CSR activities will reduce CCB only when the individual perceive that the consumers of the brand form an entity (i.e., the group of consumers has high entitativity). We test this hypothesis in study 2.

### 3 EXPERIMENT 2

This experiment tested the extent to which high entitativity could attenuate the adverse effect of CSR on CCB. Specifically, we imply that differently from low entitative groups, that present a wider variance among members, inferences regarding high entitative groups are more generalizable and transmissible to other members. Predictable inferences about high entitative groups may facilitate information processing and increase willingness to help in a second task.

#### 3.1 Participants

One hundred and nineteen American participants of a community-based subject pool participated in our study in exchange for monetary compensation (62.2% female, Mage= 44.82, SD = 13.60).

#### 3.2 Study design and materials

As in study 1, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: CSR and neutral. We adapted the stimuli used by Habel, Schong, Alavi, and Wieseke (2016) to manipulate both scenarios. Participants were asked to evaluate one company from a set of three, totalizing 40 respondents per firm (i.e., Apple, Ikea, and Starbucks). The three firms represented a small sample of the list of cross-industry global brands provided by Interbrand<sup>1</sup>. In a first moment, participants in the neutral condition (approximately 20 for each company) read a brief description of the company (around 100 words). To the experimental group, besides the short text, we presented an additional fragment with a description of a prominent CSR initiative from the company (approximately 180 words). The additional paragraph detailed real actions promoted by firms. Following the steps of Habel et al. (2016), we were careful to structure the fragments as comparable as possible. Participants in the neutral condition didn't have access to information regarding firm CSR activities (Appendix B).

#### 3.3 Procedures

After asking for reading information about companies in the neutral and CSR conditions, we told participants that we were planning to launch a customer community. Thus, participants were asked how likely they were to “teach someone how to use a product correctly” and “explain to other customer how to use a product correctly”. They rated the sentences based on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = not at all likely and 7 = extremely likely). Our dependent variable was adapted from the “helping other customers” dimension of Groth (2005).

With the purpose to measure the role of entitativity in these effects, the indexes were borrowed from Lickel et al. (2000). They rated the statements “I feel that Apple/Ikea/Starbucks

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<sup>1</sup> <http://interbrand.com/best-brands/best-global-brands/2017/ranking/>

customers are a unit”, “I feel Apple/Ikea/Starbucks are as one”, and “I feel that Apple/Ikea/Starbucks customers qualify as a group” using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree). Upon completing the entitativity scale, participants were asked to answer the perceived company CSR engagement scale proposed by Habel et al. (2016) as manipulation check. Attention check was also verified before following to demographic questions.

### 3.4 Results and discussion

To verify our hypothesis, we conducted a moderation analysis (model 1; Hayes, 2013). We regressed CCB on entitativity (1 = CSR; -1 = control) and their interaction. As predicted, we found a significant interaction ( $\beta = -.356$ ,  $t = -2.273$ ,  $p < .05$ ). We also found a marginally significant effect on entitativity ( $\beta = .2721$ ,  $t = 1.73$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ). CSR had no significant effect ( $p > 0.10$ ). More importantly, we performed a simple slope analysis to probe the interaction and found a significant effect of CSR at high entitativity (operationalized as 1 SD above the mean;  $\beta = -.45$ ,  $t = -1.95$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ) and a non-significant effect of CSR at low entitativity (operationalized as 1SD below the mean;  $\beta = .31$ ,  $t = 1.29$ ,  $p > .10$ ).

Results of Experiment 2 reinforced our main proposition tested on the previous study that CSR helps to decrease customer engagement on helping other customers. When participants evaluated customers' entitativity regarding the brands, we observed that those who rated highly in entitativity had more propensity to display citizenship behavior (i.e., helping and teaching other customers). These predictions are probably due to associations of entitativity with shared values and social identity. Furthermore, the perception of the group of consumers as a unit helps to reduce the effort of processing information and improves the identification of outcomes and efficacy on performing these behaviors towards strangers (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 2013).

It is also important to mention that we failed to replicate the main effect of CSR on CCB, finding it only when the entitativity of the group was high. We speculate that this might have been because of the less involving task used in Study 2, since people were just reading information about the company rather than making consequential choices about CSR related products.

## 4 GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our main objective in this article is to analyze how a company CSR activities can influence helping behaviors among their customers. Based on two studies, we postulate and demonstrate that when participants were faced with a previous opportunity to satiate self-defining goals through CSR, they had a reduced propensity to help other customers (i.e., citizenship behaviors). Further, we also suggest that these findings are part of a phenomenon called overextension and impatience that attenuate the willingness to help in a second opportunity (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 2013). Ego depletion, that refers to the idea of completing a task which produces a temporary reduction of self-control to perform a second one, provides a subsidiary explanation to the observed results (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981).

We focus on the understudied role of entitativity in the second study to understand underlying factors that may affect this process. Entitativity is closely linked to attributions and impression formation (e.g., Yzerbyt et al., 1998). Besides, differences regarding groups entitativity have relevant consequences on how perceptions about these groups are processed

(Rydell & McConnell, 2005). Specifically, we offer support for our proposition with moderation evidence in this article, as well as showing that those participants who perceived a higher entitativity among customers of the companies were more willing to help others in a following situation. Characteristics of entitativity among helped members, such as similarity, proximity, homogeneity, and common goals, can impact and attenuate the overextension perception in addition to elicit social identity cues (e.g., in-group identification). In this sense, comprising a coherent unity may improve the propensity of customers to more frequently assist the company through different situations and programs (i.e., towards CSR activities and other customers' needs).

We extend previous research on CSR addressing the adverse effects on CCB. We show a negative facet of CSR that is still underexplored in the literature (e.g., Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, & Raghunathan, 2010). Also, we provide behavioral support for our claim with our dependent variable on Study 1. The number of studies on CCB literature has grown in recent years, but no research has analyzed this effect and underlying factors that can attenuate undesirable behaviors. Precisely, the few efforts that connected CSR to CCB presented a beneficial side of that relationship (e.g., Karaosmanoglu, Altinigne, & Isiksal, 2006; Lii & Lee, 2012). We also focus on helping other customers, a specific dimension of CCB, to understand the extent which customers are willing to go to help the firm. Additionally, we contribute to self-completion theory by suggesting the promotion of entitativity as a path to attenuate overextension and other issues that can harm self-defining goal attainments and social sensitivity. Wicklund and Gollwitzer (2013) affirm that there is a constant tension associated with self-definition and, consequently, a constructive process to be explored. In this way, there is numerous avenues that can be studied regarding self-defining goals and respective indicators.

Future work has several possibilities to address. Researches can evaluate the extent to which those helping behaviors embody self-symbolizing needs and social identifications. One of the alternatives is the approach of licensing theory to better understand these effects. Different from self-completion theory, licensing comprises a more explicit and rational mechanism that can boost someone's self-concept in a first moment, which in turn can liberate the person from engaging in posterior behaviors. Furthermore, the satiation effect of self-completion that we propose in this article happens in a social identity context. Next studies can investigate these effects in other domains, such as self-consistency theory. An additional opportunity of research is to include personal traits and customers' characteristics that can affect these mechanisms. Self-esteem, self-efficacy, empathy, and private and public self-consciousness may be relevant factors to understand how and why the effects occur. Another way to think about the relationship of CSR on CCB is providing a halo effect to extend the feeling towards CSR endorsement beyond the direct relationship between consumer-company, including other customers and stakeholders. We also speculate that the company CSR activity may play a role in the interaction. CRM, the activity used in Study 1, embeds self-identity and demands some cognitive effort from customers. Next studies could examine the moderating role of choice and how deliberately selecting a program may affect the following interactions among fellow customers. Studies to generalize our results, such as manipulating entitativity (e.g., Crawford, Sherman, & Hamilton, 2002) or using fictional firms, may also be conducted.

Our findings have relevant implications to services industry. Since citizenship behaviors help to develop a good climate service, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and corporate reputation, companies should invest on activities that provide an entitative group perception to their customers (e.g., virtual communities, activities in special occasions, etc.). Additional measures that aim to mitigate adverse effects of CSR may assist companies to have more positive outputs considering CCB. Actions promoting customer-company identification may also help to extend the help towards other customers of the firm. Other types of CSR (e.g., philanthropy or ethical

business practices) can trigger different social-identity mechanisms among members. Besides, marketers should also consider aspects of CSR initiatives, such as periodicity, intensity, and social projection that may be connected to the discussed issues regarding self-completion (i.e., impatience and overextension).

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