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The Social Responsibility shown by International Retail Chains in the Czech Republic – Student Awareness Survey (primary research)
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Summary:
This paper presents the results of the primary research conducted among students of the Faculty of International Relations of the University of Economics, Prague. The aim of this research was to discover the extent of students' awareness about the current situation among retail chains in the Czech Republic in the area of "Corporate Social Responsibility". The results have been processed with the aid of standard mathematic – statistical methods. At the beginning of the text several hypotheses are set out; most of them are finally confirmed by the results of the survey. Only some of the international retail companies are regarded as socially responsible. The retailers should perform "socially responsible" activities; however, "CSR" is not the main reason their customers' prefer them.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, retail chains, retail companies

Společenská odpovědnost (CSR) mezinárodních retailingových řetězců v ČR – Výzkum mezi studenty (primární výzkum)
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Abstrakt:
Text přináší výsledky primárního výzkumu provedeného mezi studenty Fakulty mezinárodních vztahů Vysoké školy ekonomické v Praze. Cílem výzkumu bylo zjistit názor studentů na současnou situaci mezi retailingovými řetězci v České republice, co se týká jejich „společenské odpovědnosti". Výsledky výzkumu byly zpracovány pomocí základních matematicko-statistických metod. Na začátku textu jsou stanoveny některé hypotézy, z nichž většina je pak potvrzena výsledky daného výzkumu. Pouze některé mezinárodní retailingové řetězce jsou vnímány jako společensky odpovědné. Retaileři by měli provádět „společensky odpovědné" aktivity, nicméně „CSR" není hlavním důvodem jejich zákaznické preference.

Klíčová slova: společenská odpovědnost podniků, retailingové řetězce, retailingové firmy

Content

Introduction

I have already devoted two Working Papers to the topic of "Corporate Social Responsibility". In my first Working Paper I concentrated on the explanation of the term "CSR", as well as on the evaluation of several methods of companies' assessment in terms of their social responsibility. In my second Working Paper I described the results of an empirical survey conducted among students, which was aimed at determining students' opinion about "CSR" in general; as well as about the current situation in the area of the "CSR" among companies operating in the Czech Republic, in general. The outcome of the survey is, briefly, as follows:

1. Most students have already heard about the topic of CSR.
2. The most frequently mentioned activities, that should be the part of CSR, are social and environmental activities.
3. Most companies in the Czech Republic are not regarded as socially responsible.
4. Students would prefer to buy products produced by socially responsible companies.
5. Students have problems obtaining information about the socially responsible activities of companies; the main sources of information are companies' own communications; which is not very trustworthy.

In the following text I will present the results of another questionnaire survey conducted among the students of the University of Economics in Prague, which follows on from the above mentioned survey, and *concentrates on the student's attitude towards, and evaluation of, the situation in terms of socially responsible behaviour of international retail chains operating in the Czech Republic.* The survey was carried out in May 2008, and the group of respondents consisted of students from the Faculty of International Relations of the University of Economics in Prague.

Students have been chosen for the purpose of this survey especially due to the fact, that they can be easily addressed and they represent potential future employees, as well as managers, of the international retail chains in the Czech Republic. Of course we should not forget the fact that a group of students cannot serve as a sample of the whole population of the Czech Republic.

The research has been performed by means of a structured questionnaire, which was created with the assistance of Ing. Milan Postler, Ph.D. from the Department of Retailing and Commercial Communications of the University of Economics, Prague. The questionnaire was distributed personally to students of the second and third year classes, who filled in the questionnaires during their seminars. Therefore, the rate of return was 100%.

In total, 250 questionnaires were distributed and completed; of these, 236 were analysed further due to several of them having been incorrectly filled, or the presence of some equivocal answers. The questionnaire contained eight, all closed, questions. The evaluation was done by means of the standard mathematic – statistical methods.

I have set out several working hypotheses as follows (some of them similar to those from the previous survey):

1. Only some retail companies in the Czech Republic are regarded as socially responsible.

2. Students would not choose any retail chain to shop in, on the basis of its social responsibility policies alone; the most important factors of their choice are location and prices.

3. Students have problems in obtaining information about the socially responsible activities of retail companies, the main source of information are companies´ own communications, which is not very trustworthy.

Respondents

Of the 236 respondents who completed the questionnaires correctly, most were women (71.19%); which is a fact that corresponds to the structure of the Faculty of International Relations. Almost all of the respondents were aged between 18–25 years, which also demonstrates the typical population of the Faculty. The three students who were over 26 are rather an exception.

If we look at the respondents' household composition; more than half of them live in households of 4 people; quite a lot in households of 3 people (20%). Households of 1 person are quite rare (2.97%). This is probably the situation, where a student lives alone in a flat, or in the students' hall of residence [dormitory]. As regards the monthly household income, most of the respondents' households earn, monthly, more than 30,000 CZK (61%) or 20,000–30,000 CZK (25%).

The respondents live in towns and cities of all sizes. However most of them live in Prague (33%), which is given by the fact that they study in Prague as well. On the other hand, 26% of the respondents live in small villages (less than 10,000 inhabitants).

All tables and figures in the paper come from my own research.

Table 1:   Number of respondents according to Gender

Group	Absolute	Relative (%)
Men	68	28.81
Women	168	71.19

Table 2:   Number of respondents according to Age

Group	Absolute	Relative (%)
18–25 years	233	98.73
26 and more years	3	1.27

Table 3:   Number of respondents according to Household Members

Group	Absolute	Relative (%)
1	7	2.97
2	21	8.90
3	48	20.34
4	134	56.78
5 and more	26	11.02

Table 4:   Number of respondents according to Household Monthly Income

Group	Absolute	Relative (%)
0–10,000 CZK	14	5.93
10,000–20,000 CZK	21	8.90
20,000–30,000 CZK	58	24.58
30,000 CZK and more	143	60.59

Table 5:   Number of respondents according to Place of Residence

Group	Absolute	Relative (%)
town 0–10,000 pop.	61	25.85
town 10,000–20,000 pop.	21	8.90
town 20,000–50,000 pop.	31	13.14
town 50,000–100,000 pop.	20	8.47
town 100,000 and more pop.	24	10.17
Prague	79	33.47

1.   Have the Respondents Ever Heard about the Phenomenon of "CSR"?

The first question in the questionnaire was used as a screening question: *Have you ever heard about the phenomenon of "Corporate Social Responsibility"?*

In the case that the respondents answered negatively, their questionnaires were not evaluated further. This happened in the case of 63 respondents; therefore we can say that 26.69% of the students asked do not know about Corporate Social Responsibility at all. The other questionnaires were evaluated further and their number was 173 (73.31%). I have analysed the demographic structure of both groups and there are just very minor differences between both groups: in case of negative answers there are slightly more women (in case of gender) and there are slightly more students with a household monthly income lower than 20,000 CZK. But the differences are so small, that we can say both groups are almost identical in terms of demographic characteristics.

In my further texts I will only analyze the results of the group with positive answers.

Structure of the group with positive answers:

Table 6:   Number of respondents according to Gender

Group	Absolute	Relative (%)
Men	52	30.05
Women	121	69.95

Table 7:   Number of respondents according to Age

Group	Absolute	Relative (%)
18–25 years	172	99.42
26 and more years	1	0.58

Table 8:   Number of respondents according to Household Members

Group	Absolute	Relative (%)
1	6	3.47
2	13	7.51
3	37	21.39
4	97	56.07
5 and more	20	11.56

Tab. 9: Number of respondents according to Household Monthly Income

Group	Absolute	Relative (%)
0–10,000 CZK	11	6.36
10,000–20,000 CZK	11	6.36
20,000–30,000 CZK	42	24.28
30,000 CZK and more	109	63.00

Tab. 10: Number of respondents according to Place of Residence

Group	Absolute	Relative (%)
town 0–10,000 pop	45	26.00
town 10,000–20,000 pop.	16	9.25
town 20,000–50,000 pop.	22	12.72
town 50,000–100,000 pop.	17	9.83
town 100,000 and more pop.	17	9.83
Prague	56	32.37

2. Are Retail Companies in the Czech Republic Socially Responsible?

Table 11: Which statement do you agree at most with?

Group	Total		Men		Women	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
Most retail companies in the Czech Rep. behave socially responsibly	5	2.89	4	7.69	1	0.83
Some retail companies in the Czech Rep. behave socially responsibly	76	43.93	19	36.54	57	47.11
Only a few retail companies in the Czech Rep. behave socially responsibly	90	52.02	28	53.85	62	51.24
No retail company in the Czech Rep. behaves socially responsibly	2	1.16	1	1.92	1	0.83

Almost all respondents think that some, or only a few, retail companies in the Czech Republic do behave socially responsibly (44%, 52% respectively), there are few respondents of the opinion that most retail companies behave socially responsibly, as well as there being few respondents who think that no retail companies, at all, behave socially responsibly. In comparison with the question; that concerned the situation of companies in general; the situation in the case of retail companies is very similar. However, the retail companies are considered to be slightly more responsible, especially by the men. 8% of them think that most retail companies behave socially responsibly; conversely, only 1% of women share this opinion. But 2% of men and 1% of women assume that no retail company, operating in the Czech Republic, is socially responsible. Otherwise, there are no special gender tendencies.

As for the factor "Household Monthly Income" – it is evident that the groups with higher incomes (20,000 CZK and more) tend to express also the view "most retail companies in the Czech Republic behave socially responsibly", but the percentage returning this answer is still very low (below 5%), and these groups are also rather of the view that "some retail companies behave socially responsibly" instead of the statement that "few retail companies behave socially responsibly". On the contrary, the lower income groups (0–20,000 CZK) tend to prefer the opinion that "few retail companies behave socially responsibly".

The lower income groups are probably more sensitive to the issue of CSR, and they do not feel convinced about the retail companies' socially responsible activities.

I have not identified any special tendencies attributable to the factor "place of residence".

3. Which Retail Chains Do the Respondents Prefer to Do Their Shopping in?

Table 12: In which retail chains do you prefer to do your shopping?
(more options possible, the same preference)

Group	Total		Men		Women	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
Ahold	109	63.01	30	57.69	79	65.29
Tesco	78	45.09	26	50.00	52	42.98
Globus	22	12.72	4	7.69	18	14.88
REWE (Billa, Penny Market)	25	14.45	10	19.23	15	12.40
Schwarz (Lidl, Kaufland)	10	5.78	4	7.69	6	4.96
Interspar	28	16.18	6	11.54	22	18.18
COOP	6	3.47	2	3.85	4	3.31
Tengelmann (Plus Discount, OBI)	5	2.89	1	1.92	4	3.31

In total, Ahold is named on the first place, followed by Tesco, Interspar, REWE (Billa, Penny Market), Globus, Schwarz, COOP and Tengelmann. Ahold and Tesco seem to be very strong, as there is a big gap between the percentage of respondents which named Tesco and Interspar, which is on the third place (45%, 16% respectively). In the case of men, the order is different; it looks as follows: Ahold, Tesco, REWE, Interspar, Globus and Schwarz, COOP, Tengelmann. In the case of women the ranking is also slightly different from the ranking of men: Ahold, Tesco, Interspar, Globus, REWE, Schwarz, COOP and Tengelmann. But in each case Ahold and Tesco are ranked in the first two positions, and the discount shops like Schwarz and Tengelmann are not favoured. COOP, the Czech cooperative retail chain, is also not top of the list.

It is quite surprising, that the figures do not show any tendencies according to the Household Monthly Income criterion. The results more or less correspond with the results of the whole group. Ahold and Tesco occupy the first two positions with every income group, and the discount shops are not popular, even in the case of the low income groups.

I have not identified any tendencies attributable to the factor "Place of Residence".

4. What Is the Reason for Giving Preference to the Chosen Retail Chains?

The most important reason for the choice of retail chains by respondents is location; slightly more important for men than for women; followed by assortment and the price of goods. This result is not very surprising. Also, the shopping atmosphere seems to play an important role in the choice (slightly more for women than for men). On the contrary, social responsibility has almost no importance for the respondents in the choice of retail chains. Only advertising was named with less frequency than social responsibility. This fact apparently disproves the statement that socially responsible companies are more attractive for the consumers who buy their products. But it would be interesting to observe developments in this situation in the future.

Table 13: What is the reason for your preference of the chosen retail chains? (more options possible, the same preference)

Group	Total		Men		Women	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
prices	58	33.53	17	32.69	41	33.88
assortment	109	63.01	31	59.62	78	64.46
location	115	66.47	37	71.15	78	64.46
personnel	7	4.05	1	1.92	6	4.96
social responsibility	6	3.47	2	3.85	4	3.31
shopping atmosphere	44	25.43	10	19.23	34	28.10
advertising	2	1.16	0	0.00	2	1.65

The factor "Household Monthly Income" shows only a few specific tendencies: Social responsibility is more important for the lowest income groups than for the other income groups (9%, 0–4% respectively). Also, assortment and location

are slightly more important for the lowest income group than for the other groups. Otherwise, the ranking of the factors is very similar to the overall group ranking – location, assortment and prices occupying the first three positions. Prices do not seem to be of higher importance for the lower income groups than for the other groups.

I have not identified any tendencies attributable to the factor "Place of Residence".

5. Which Retail Chains in the Czech Republic Do Behave Socially Responsibly?

Table 14: Which retail chains in the Czech Republic, in your opinion, do behave socially responsibly? (more options possible, the same preference)

Group	Total		Men		Women	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
Ahold	55	31.79	13	25.00	42	34.71
Tesco	65	37.57	13	25.00	52	42.98
Globus	26	15.03	9	17.31	17	14.05
REWE (Billa, Penny Market)	21	12.14	7	13.46	14	11.57
Schwarz (Lidl, Kaufland)	4	2.31	2	3.85	2	1.65
Interspar	36	20.81	11	21.15	25	20.66
COOP	6	3.47	3	5.77	3	2.48
Tengelmann (Plus Discount, OBI)	9	5.20	1	1.92	8	6.61
Don't know	31	17.92	10	19.23	21	17.36

In total, 18% of respondents do not know which retail chains in the Czech Republic behave socially responsibly. The most responsible companies appear to be Tesco (38%), Ahold (32%), Interspar (21%), Globus (15%) and REWE (12%). The other chains are not regarded as very responsible as their percentage was 5% or less (Tengelmann, COOP and Schwarz) – most of them are discount stores. In the case of both genders the ranking is almost the same, as the difference is only on the last three positions (Tengelmann, COOP and

Schwarz). But this does not change the fact that the discount stores are regarded as the least responsible.

The results according to the Household Monthly Income are quite different for each income group (see the tab. 18), but we can sum up, that Tesco, Ahold, Interspar, Globus and Rewe always occupy the first positions and the discount stores (Schwarz and Tengelmann) the last positions.

The results sorted according to "Place of Residence" do not show any specific tendencies which are different from the whole group.

6. Where Do the Respondents Obtain Information on the Socially Responsible Behaviour of Retail Companies Operating in the Czech Republic?

Tab.15: Where do you obtain information on the socially responsible behaviour of retail companies operating in the Czech Republic?
(more options possible, the same preference)

Group	Total		Men		Women	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
Corporate web sites	44	25.43	10	19.23	34	28.10
Newspaper articles	74	42.77	19	36.54	55	45.45
Corporate communications	50	28.90	12	23.08	38	31.40
Annual reports	4	2.31	2	3.85	2	1.65
Products labels	34	19.65	5	9.62	29	23.97
Assessment of independent organizations	21	12.14	8	15.38	13	10.74
Own experience	48	27.75	18	34.62	30	24.79
Don't know	7	4.05	3	5.77	4	3.31

In total, the respondents obtain information about companies' behaviour mainly from newspaper articles (43% of respondents), corporate communications (29%), from their own experience, especially during shopping (28%), corporate web sites (25%) and from product labels (20%). Only 12% of the respondents obtain information from independent organizations' assessment, which is accounted for mainly by the fact that students do not know these organizations

and their assessments. Only 3% of the respondents cite as a source information from the annual reports of companies. The annual reports are not regarded as very trustworthy.

It is interesting, that the product labels are much more preferred by women than by men (24%, 10% respectively). The ranking of the results sorted by men and women is slightly different, but the differences in percentages are small, except for those named above (product labels).

The results sorted according to Household Monthly Income show quite a similar picture as the results of the whole group – the most favoured information sources are newspaper articles, corporate web sites, corporate communications, own experience and product labels. The annual reports, as well as the assessment of independent organizations, are not very often named.

As regards the factor "Place of Residence", the figures are very variable and there are hardly any tendencies to be identified. The ranking is different for each group, but generally the annual reports and assessments of independent organizations are the least mentioned.

7. Which Socially Responsible Activities Do Retail Chains in the Czech Republic Perform Most Frequently?

Table 16: Which socially responsible activities do the retail chains in the Czech Republic perform most frequently in your opinion?
(more options possible, the same preference)

Group	Total		Men		Women	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
Ecological products	129	74.57	35	67.31	94	77.69
Ecological activities and energy saving	45	26.01	18	34.62	27	22.31
Sponsorship	52	30.06	13	25.00	39	32.23
Support of the local community	16	9.25	4	7.69	12	9.92
Donation, charity	62	35.84	13	25.00	49	40.50
Support of the healthy lifestyle	78	45.09	17	32.69	61	50.41
Social programmes	26	15.03	8	15.38	18	14.88

for employees						
Support of suppliers	7	4.05	2	3.85	5	4.13
Other	1–bio products	0.58	1–bio	1.92	0	0.00
Don't know	4	2.31	3	5.77	1	0.83

In total, the socially responsible activities of retail chains are mainly connected with ecological products (75% of the respondents), followed by support for healthy lifestyles (45%), donations and charity (36%), sponsorship (30%), ecological activities and energy saving (26%), social programmes for employees (15%). Support of the local community and support of suppliers are not mentioned very often (15%, 4% respectively). The differences between men and women are not very strong – only in the case of donations and charity, which are more preferred by women (41% × 25%), and in the case of the support for healthy lifestyles, which is also much more preferred by women (50% × 33%).

As regards the Household Monthly Income, the "ecological products" are named the most, and they are preferred slightly more by the lower income groups; furthermore "donations and charity" are also frequently named (and preferred more by the lower income groups) as well as "support for healthy lifestyles". "Sponsorship" seems to have quite a strong importance for all the income groups (about 30% of the respondents on average), "ecological activities and energy saving" are named by most the income groups (20–30%) except the income group with a household monthly income of 10,000–20,000 CZK. "Social programmes for employees" are named quite frequently by all the income groups except the group with income less than 10,000 CZK. "Support for the local community" and "support for suppliers" are not mentioned very frequently by any of the income groups (always less than 10% of respondents).

In case of the factor "Place of Residence", the frequency of all answers is very similar to the frequency of the whole group.

8. Are These Activities Sufficient?

In total, most of the respondents have the opinion that the socially responsible activities of the retail chains in the Czech Republic are not sufficient (62%), even if most of them are not very sure of their opinions (8% of the total number of respondents). Only 13% of the whole group are of the opinion, that the socially responsible activities of retail chains operating in the Czech Republic are sufficient (only 1% of respondents from the whole group are sure about it). 25% of the respondents cannot say anything. As for the gender tendencies – the

men are slightly more positive – 17% of men think that the activities are sufficient (only 2% of them are certain in their opinion), on the other hand only 11% of women are positive in this matter. But the percentage of negative answers is almost the same in the case of both men and women (64%, 62% respectively).

Table 17: Are these activities sufficient in your opinion?

Group	Total		Men		Women	
	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)	Abs.	Rel. (%)
Certainly yes	2	1.16	1	1.92	1	0.83
Rather yes	20	11.56	8	15.38	12	9.92
Don't know	43	24.86	10	19.23	33	27.27
Rather not	95	54.91	28	53.85	67	55.37
Certainly not	13	7.51	5	9.62	8	6.61

In cases where the results are sorted according to "Household Monthly Income", we can observe, that all the income groups are very negative about the point at issue. The frequency is slightly different for each group, but there are hardly any clear tendencies to be identified. No income group is very certain about its opinion. Basically all respondents tend to answer rather yes or rather no, possibly they do not know. But the negative answers are prevalent.

Conclusion

Most respondents have already heard about the phenomenon of "Corporate Social Responsibility" (73% in total).

Only some, or only a few, companies in the Czech Republic are regarded as socially responsible, the very same situation appears in the case of the retail companies operating in the Czech Republic, even if the retail companies are seen by the respondents as being slightly more "responsible". As for the sources of information, most respondents obtain information from newspaper articles, corporate communications, their own shopping experience, corporate web sites and product labels. But the assessment by independent organizations is not very often used among students; therefore they should be more educated on these sources of information (that could be the part of university education).

The most popular retail chains for shopping among the respondents are Ahold and Tesco, followed by Interspar, REWE and Globus. The discount stores did not prove to be very popular. It is quite interesting, that the very same retail

chains are also named as socially responsible – mostly Tesco and Ahold, followed by Interspar, Globus and REWE. The discount stores occupy the last positions.

"CSR" did not prove to be the reason of preference for any of the retail chains. The main reasons of preference are location, assortment and prices.

The most frequently named socially responsible activities performed by the retail chains in the Czech Republic were: selling ecologically friendly products, support for the healthy lifestyle, donations and charity, sponsorship and further ecological activities and energy savings. Support for the local community and support for suppliers were not named very often. These activities are regarded as not sufficient by most respondents; therefore the international retail companies should perform more socially responsible activities as well as communicating them properly to customers.

To sum up the results I come back to my hypotheses:
1. Only some retail companies in the Czech Republic are regarded as socially responsible (confirmed).
2. Students would not prefer any retail chain to do their shopping in, only because of its social responsibility; the most important factors for their choice are location and prices (confirmed).
3. Students have problems to obtain information about the socially responsible activities of retail companies; the main sources of information are companies' communications, which is not very trustworthy (partly confirmed, the main sources of information are also newspaper articles, their own experience, product labels. Also the students would appreciate more information about the assessments of independent organizations).

In my survey I was trying to obtain some basic information about students' awareness of the CSR issue, and about the current situation in the retail market in the Czech Republic. All results have been individually described without any personal evaluation. Therefore the information provided in the paper is to be regarded as fact, and not judgment.

It would be good to analyze the available figures by more sophisticated statistical methods, but that would exceed the space of this working paper, therefore it will be a part of my following works.

It would also be interesting to perform a similar survey in the future to monitor any changes in students' opinion.

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