Ecological Responsibility, Component of the Corporate Social Responsibility

LAURA MUREŞAN, CRISTIAN-ROMEO POŢINCU, MIHAI DUGULEANĂ
Department of Public Law
Department of Marketing, Turism, Services and International Transactions,
Department of Product Design and Robotics
Transilvania University of Braşov
29, Eroilor Blvd., Braşov
ROMANIA
laura.muresan@unitbv.ro, cristipotincu@unitbv.ro, mihai.duguleana@unitbv.ro

Abstract: Conceptually, including the ecological responsibility as an independent component into the general concept of social responsibility, together with the other four types of responsibility, is justified by the current evolution of the society, and complexity of the ecological aspects exceeding the categories of legal responsibility or economic responsibility. The ecological responsibility implies the integration of the requirements for the environment protection into the polities and strategies of any commercial company.

Key-Words: Social responsibility, Ecological responsibility, Qualitative marketing research, Quantitative marketing research, Sustainable development, Legal responsibility, Economic responsibility, Ethical responsibility, Philanthropic responsibility.

1 Evolution of the social corporate responsibility

In order to defend their rights, even since the Middle Ages, traders have organized themselves in corporations – named universitas. In time, they have acquired administrative, juridical and even legislative autonomy. The corporation included the traders and craftsmen in the same branch and was led by a consul, elected from them, assisted by counselors. [2]

The end of the 1950s has been marked by an increase of the power of the consumers to influence the behavior of the commercial companies.

In this context, starting with the 1950s, a popular and efficient proposal has appeared at the international level: for the commercial companies to voluntarily take responsibility for several social aspects. [18]

The commercial companies have become more and more exposed to public analysis, as the television and internet have evolved. The shareholders of the commercial companies, social groups and environment protection organizations acquired enhanced power, amplifying their expectations from the commercial companies. The consumers have become more and more conscious of their rights and power to influence the behavior of the commercial companies.

In the 1970s, the preoccupations related to the natural environment and development of pressure groups each focused on a certain theme represented another major influence factor on the commercial companies. In the 1970s and 1980s, the reputation of the commercial companies, their relations with the community in which they conducted their commercial activities have become more and more important.

Since the 1980s, the pressures meant to raise the environmental standards and improvement of labour conditions have forced the commercial companies to better synchronize the social investments with the business strategies.

In the 1990s, at the same time with the extension of the globalization process, the social responsibility of the commercial companies has developed. The commercial companies became “citizens” of the community in which they conducted their commercial activities, taking certain responsibilities. The business environments started to be more and more involved in providing important services. Thus, it has become an obligation of these commercial companies to pursue much more than profit on a short term.

The social responsibility of the commercial companies is not only a tendency manifested in the rich countries but it has at present become a global phenomenon.

2 Term of corporate social responsibility

The Romanian explanatory dictionary (DEX) [5] defines responsibility as a conscious attitude, a sense of liability for the social obligations; or a task, liability which somebody takes.

Other authors [3] support that the definition given to
the social responsibility by the European Commission and underline the fact that the social responsibility is that behavior through which companies decide, without them being imposed to, to integrate several ecologic or social objectives among their preoccupations, thus creating a new type of relation or partnerships with several groups of interests within the company.

It is also considered that the social responsibility can also be regarded as a fundamental ethical principle which expresses towards “whom” and for “what” a commercial company is responsible, in the light of the ethical system accepted and promoted by it. In this vision, the social responsibility implies: the compliance with the laws, with the contractual provisions – starting from the premise that the contract is the law of the parties which obliges them to comply with it –, honesty, but also the consideration of desiderates of several groups interested in the existence and operation of a commercial company. [20]

In order for the commercial companies to adopt the requirements of the corporate social responsibility, it is considered [7] that these possess the necessary means in order to comply with human rights and that they want to participate in the social progress.

It can be stated that the social responsibility of the commercial companies is a moral liability regarding the interaction of their activity with: clients/consumers, own employees and community in their whole. The interests of the community imply, besides other social aspects, the protection of the environment.

At present, the social responsibility of the commercial companies must be regarded from a complex perspective. We consider that the social responsibility of the commercial companies is what the community expects from a commercial company ecologically, economically, legally, ethically and philanthropically.

In our opinion, the social responsibility includes all these types of responsibilities: ecological responsibility, economic responsibility, legal responsibility and philanthropic responsibility.

We consider that the ecological responsibility is a distinct responsibility, deriving from the economic and legal responsibilities but exceeding as importance these fields.

3 Ecological responsibility, component of the corporate social responsibility

Most of the authors do not consider that the ecological responsibility is a distinct type of the social responsibility. The current evolution of the community in which the commercial companies conduct their activity in the context of complex ecological aspects, exceeding the categories of the legal or economic responsibility, justifies, in our opinion, the inclusion of the ecological aspects into a distinct component of the social responsibility which we call ecological responsibility.

The ecological responsibility is a reflection of the sustainable development considered by the specialty literature [4] to be a basic value of the social responsibility. In this context, we can state that the ecological responsibility lays at the basis of the social responsibility.

The sustainable development is defined as economic development while complying with the requirements of the natural environment.

A socially responsible attitude from a commercial company implies ecological responsibility, namely the compliance of the ecological diversity in performing the commercial activity. The concept of biological diversity – biodiversity – is defined as the variety of life forms expressed through millions of species of plants, animals and microorganisms, with their genetic patrimony and complex ecosystems, in the edification of which the living environment participates. The term biodiversity covers the ensemble of natural abundance of the biosphere: terrestrial and water species and their ecosystems.

The maintaining of the biodiversity is nowadays a global requirement for at least three reasons: as a principle reason stating that all species have the right to live under the conditions which are proper to them; multiple forms of life maintain the chemical and physical balance at the surface of the Earth, its existence being a requirement for survival; experience shows that maintaining a maximal genetic stock presents an economic interest for agriculture, medicine industry.

The “ecological crisis”, which occurred in mid 1960s, and its immediate consequence, the possibility of releasing a self-destructing catastrophe, questioned for the first time in history the availabilities of the human being to exploit and use nature, the limits within which the economic growth can be conceived and developed, so that it would not essentially and irreversibly degrade the natural environment on which the human civilization depend more and more. [6]

The ecological responsibility of the commercial companies implies the integration of the environment protection requirements into the commercial activity.

If we consider the ecological responsibility from the perspective of the “sustainable development” evolution, we can state that this type of responsibility precedes all the other types of responsibility, components of the social responsibility.

The sustainable development – ecodevelopment – pursues the fulfillment of the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the chances of
fulfilling those of the future. As the concern caused by the environment issue has become greater during the latest decades, the preoccupation for the fate of the future generations and equitable distribution of the natural resources between generations, not only at the level of only one, has become more and more obvious. It is considered that a commercial company performing their activities in the light of the sustainable development must have a long-term approach and perspective, without neglecting the opportunities occurring at different times. Real value can be created today, which will sustainably support the development of the business for tomorrow. [1]

Practically, ecological responsibility means preventing or minimizing the negative impact over the environment, supporting the initiatives of promoting the responsibility over the environment, developing and supporting the non-polluting technologies, saving the raw material etc. A minimization of the negative impact over the natural environment produced by the activities of the commercial societies has to be considered, by identifying the possibilities of optimizing the use of resources, storing and recycling the waste, by controlling and reducing the atmosphere pollution, water, soil, or protecting the fauna and biological flora variety.

We consider that by integrating the ecological responsibility within the strategic and operational management and marketing, the commercial companies will generate a positive impact over the society and the natural environment and will achieve another reputation in social plan.

During some marketing researches [8] developed in Brasov County, ecological responsibility was taken into consideration, an element of the social responsibility of commercial companies.

The qualitative marketing research having the theme "Asserting the social responsibility from the Brasov managers’ perspective", was conducted using the method called "interview pencil and paper".

When ranking the social responsibility types of the commercial companies, by their importance, the legal responsibility is considered as being the most important by the interviewed managers. Afterwards, on the second place, there is the economical responsibility, followed in order by the ecological responsibility, the ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility.

There can be noticed that ranking the corporate social responsibility elements is a realist aspect. Respecting the law represents a priority, while disrespecting it may generate different sanctions which can negatively affect the company’s patrimony. On the second place there is the economical responsibility, considered the most important for the company’s survival. Protecting the environment is on the third place as importance, this showing an increased preoccupation for maintaining a cleaner natural environment. Then respecting the ethical preoccupations follows, and on the last place there is achieving philanthropic actions, because these preoccupations are directly connected to the financial resources left after fulfilling the obligations contained by the first three responsibility types.

As a confirmation of the idea of treating distinctly the ecological responsibility, the managers interviewed consider there is a powerful connection between asserting the social responsibility and protecting the natural environment and comprises very many basic directions related to the natural environment protection.

The quantitative research having the theme "Attitudes and opinions of Brasov citizens regarding the social responsibility promotion by the companies which develop a commercial activity in Romania” took into consideration people over 18 years old, of both genders, dwelling in Brasov. The final size of the pattern was 398 people, to which an aleatory error of ± 4.91% corresponds.

In the table no. 1 the ordinal results of the scale are exhibited, an average scoring being calculated for each result. The best scoring obtained is the lowest because it refers to a question with ordinal scale of ranking where the first place is awarded to the social responsibility type that the respondents consider the most important.

The legal responsibility is considered the most important type of social responsibility, registering an average scoring of 2.22 points. On the next place there is the ecological responsibility with an average scoring of 2.75 points; and on the third position there is the ethical responsibility with 2.94 points. The last two positions are occupied by the economical responsibility and ethical responsibility with 3.06 respectively 3.79 points.

| Table no. 1
| Rank, according to the given importance, the following types of social responsibility of the commercial companies |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Legal responsibility                          | 360             |
| Ecological responsibility                     | 360             |
| Ethical responsibility                        | 363             |
| Economical responsibility                     | 361             |
| Philanthropic responsibility                  | 362             |
| Valid N (list wise)                           | 359             |

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Ranking the social responsibility types by the questioned consumers – of the ecologic responsibility, the economical responsibility, the legal responsibility, the ethical and philanthropic responsibility – was also exhibited as compared to the results obtained at the same
question within the qualitative research „Asserting the social responsibility from the Brasov managers’ perspective”. We will analyze comparatively the Brasov managers’ view and the Brasov consumers’ view concerning the importance given to one or the other types of the responsibilities mentioned.

The legal responsibility is the tool for fulfilling the juridical norms prescriptions. This type of responsibility, which is an element of the social responsibility of the commercial companies obtained as importance in the ranking made by the Brasov consumers as well as by the Brasov managers questioned within the marketing researches conducted. The first place demonstrates what is expected from all of those involved in trading. The role of the juridical instruments is to protect everyone who develops an economical activity in accordance to the ethical principles, and that is why we consider they were given a special importance.

One of the most important responsibilities of a business is considered the economical responsibility, which represents being a functional commercial companies and maintaining itself on the market. That is why satisfying the economical responsibilities is demanded to all commercial companies. Thus, we can say that the Brasov managers are aware of this reality, in their opinion the economical responsibility is on the second place right after the legal responsibility, responsibility supported through legal penalties. The starting point in any responsible business has to be, of course, its profit but obtaining it must be made socially responsible.

Ethical responsibility obliges the commercial companies to enterprise what is right and equitable even if they are not forced to proceed to such normative existent deeds at one point. The ethical responsibility is more important for Brasov consumers, who situate it on the third place, comparatively to Brasov managers who rank it on the fourth position.

The philanthropic responsibility ensures the commercial companies the freedom to involve in actions which concern the improvement of the employees’ life quality, local communities and, at last, the entire society. According to the ranking of Brasov consumers and managers, the philanthropic responsibility is situated on the last place, being addicted to the profit level made by the commercial companies.

Regarding the ecological responsibility proposed as a basic element of the corporate social responsibility, a reflection of the lasting development, this aspect is also highlighted by the Brasov consumers’ and managers’ opinion, who place ecologic responsibility on one of the top positions as importance. Ranked by legal and economical responsibility, ecologic responsibility precedes yet ethical and philanthropic responsibility.

4 Conclusions

The paperwork supports the proposal to include the ecologic responsibility as a distinct element of social responsibility together with the other four types of responsibility: economical responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility. It is consider that this distinct responsibility, ecologic responsibility, will determine a greater attention from the commercial societies regarding protecting the natural environment.

Conceptually speaking, including an independent element within the general concept of social responsibility, ecological responsibility together with the other four responsibility types is justified by the actual evolution of society and by the complexity of ecological aspects which exceed the juridical or economical responsibility categories. The ecological responsibility of commercial companies refers to integrating the requests of protecting the natural environment within the politics and strategies of any commercial society.

References:


