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# **Examining the role of corporate social responsibility on media imagery**

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Extended Abstract

The tumultuous business environment of the past that was categorized by political unrest and social activism has motivated today's business environment towards a greater emphasis on humanistic matters (Dunn et al 1994; Bell and Emory 1971; Dawson 1980; Feldman 1971; Koder 1972). Companies must work hard to maintain efficiency while producing a profit and also while building a socially responsible reputation. Consumers expect companies to demonstrate congruence with the social values they hold, simply providing a product is no longer enough for relationship building (Marin and Ruiz 2007). The extent of identification with a company is dependent upon the company's identity in the mind of the consumer. It is therefore a good idea for companies to be concerned with being ethical for the sake of maintaining a positive relationship with their customers. This positive relationship can lead to enhanced "loyalty and retention, leading to greater company profitability" (Marin and Ruiz 2007). This new environment makes it necessary for corporations to ensure that all of its actions are in the best interests of its reputation.

One of the major components of consumer loyalty is the ability of the customer to relate with the reputation of the brand. Consumers are motivated to engage in relationships with companies in hopes of satisfying "self-definitional need through identification" (Marin and Ruiz 2007). Although maintaining a positive social image through responsible action is not a function of a company's legal obligation (Buhmann 2006), researchers agree that it a valuable business practice. In order to partake in socially responsible practice, companies typically involve themselves in goodwill projects or environmentally safe production procedures. A method of social responsibility that is often overlooked is in the area of media imagery.

Many times when a company is putting forth media imagery, there is a disconnect between social responsibility and action. Whether it is intentional or unintentional, the image that a company displays affects its reputation. Images that demean and denigrate a people is in turn socially irresponsible. According to K. Sue Jewell (1993), mass media plays an important role in maintaining social discrimination. With minority purchase power constantly rising, the monetary influence of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans cannot be disregarded. It is expected that by 2009 African American consumers will have an estimated aggregated purchasing power of approximately \$965 billion, Hispanic American consumers \$992 billion, Asian American consumers \$528 billion, Native American consumers \$65.6 billion (Selig Report 2004). Even the most subtle form of social discrimination towards these groups is in turn working against the bottom line of any retailer.

Media is a conveyor of stereotypes (Gramsci 1996). Companies must work hard to be responsible when utilizing this method for meeting corporate goals. A function of modern media is that it constructs social knowledge through imagery that shapes how we perceive the world (Hall 1977). With a desire to attract viable consumers, self image of potential customers should not be jeopardized by visual evidence that would damage how they feel about themselves (Rosenberg 1979) and in turn the company.

This manuscript will analyze the current literature regarding social responsibility and media imagery in order to have a comprehensive understanding of where and how these often disparate goals can coincide for the greater good of all in the realm of media communication. The following research questions will be addressed in this review:

- What are the current beliefs presented in the academic literature regarding the social responsibility of companies?
- What impact does negative, racially based media imagery have on minorities in America?
- How can these identified constructs of corporate social responsibility and responsible media imagery be connected and presented as suggestion to media companies for maintaining social responsibility regarding media imagery?

Citations

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