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Skeleton Answer: Can CSR activities and sustainability offset negative publicity in the age of green consumerism?

Introduction

In this section, an introduction should be given to the essay, including what key areas will be explored. This will include a very short description of the essay structure, and topics such as CSR, sustainability, green consumerism.

May also want to introduce specific studies that the essay could be based around, such as Nike or Ryanair – as they have sustained negative press in the past.

Main body

The main body of the work will critically discuss the proposed topic title, and ultimately draw conclusions on whether or not CSR initiatives can be used to offset negative consumerism.

Traditionally, the main body will first aim to define some of the key terms used within the essay, to help form the foundation of the analysis.

Defining CSR & sustainability

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) first needs to be defined. This can be defined as “being concerned with treating the stakeholders of the firm ethically or in a responsible manner...with the **wider aim of social responsibility being to create higher and higher standards of living, while preserving the profitability of the corporation, for peoples both within and outside the corporation**” (Hopkins, 2012, pp. 15-16). Other definitions can also be explored to create a critical approach for defining key terms.

Sustainability is a key aspect of CSR, and will examine how an organisation structures their operational processes and procedures to minimise their environmental impact and CO2 emissions (Ramus, 2001). Again, further definitions can be explored to create a critical analysis, whilst also looking to name and describe some of the key concepts of sustainability – such as the Triple Bottom Line (Norman & MacDonald, 2004).

Defining green consumerism

Green consumerism represents the second key term of the essay, and should also be defined. This can be asserted as the adaption in consumer lifestyles which greatly support the ‘green’ activities of an organisation, including purchasing Fairtrade, organic or ethically sourced goods (Moisander, 2007). Additional definitions could be explored to create a critical approach to defining green consumerism.

This is creating enormous pressure on many organisations to operate with underlying principles of CSR, or they may threaten a significant amount of key demographics that align with the green consumerism ideology.

Explore driving forces for pursuing CSR

An exploration should be conducted to understand what some of the driving forces of CSR activity are, which will help form an understanding as to whether or not it can be used to offset negative publicity. A plethora of literature can support this, as there are many researched reasons as to why organisations will pursue CSR, and what form of CSR they may pursue.

Some of the most significant reasons for pursuing CSR is for increase profit generation, developing a company’s brand reputation, engaging with wider consumer demographics or a genuine interest for contributing to the long-term sustainability of the world (Crowther & Aras, 2008). Organisational case studies can be referenced here, such as Tesla – who seem to adopt genuine motives for developing their technology to benefit the consumer, and the environment (Hardman,

2016).

Increased profit generation is heavily debated within CSR, with the topic of whether or not many strategies are implemented genuinely, or just to benefit the organisation (Russo & Perrini, 2010). This would also form into the analysis on whether or not it is used to offset negative publicity.

Explore how CSR is beneficial to offset negative publicity

A substantial portion of the word count should be allocated into this section, which should utilise theory and literature from the previous section to analyse whether CSR can be used to offset negative publicity.

Adopting a case study approach for this would be optimum, and should involve companies like Nike (slave labour) or Ryanair (poor customer service) and how they have developed their CSR activities since bad publicity. Nike have a rigid and strict CSR policy since their critiques for using slave labour, and this can be seen as a direct response to offset the negative publicity (Newell, 2015). Ryanair are also utilising these concepts to create an entirely new brand image for the company, and detract away from historically poor negative publicity (French, 2015).

Identify ways in which CSR is seen to be beneficial with offsetting negative publicity, such as tailoring strategies against the source of the publicity. For Nike, this would see them develop CSR initiatives against low priced labour within the supply chain, and the creation of a more sustainable, ethical, and resilient supply chain. Furthermore, explore how organisations who already have an exceptional reputation utilise CSR activities to maintain their strong reputation. This allows firm to minimise the impact on any future negative publicity, and acts as a form of barrier for protecting their organisational reputation. However, this could ultimately be discussed against the principle that CSR strategies are used to generate profits, with any other outcomes being additional benefits (Zhu, et al., 2014).

Aim to summarise this section of the report with key findings (that CSR is likely to be used as a tool to offset and maintain corporate reputation) and explore how this is communicated to consumers through detailed CSR reports and marketing (Reynolds & Yuthas, 2008).

Side with one argument

It is important to state a general stance with regards to the essay title, with it likely that the analysis supports the notion that CSR is used to offset negative publicity. However, this is likely done to ultimately improve the profits of the organisation, and firms that have acquired negative publicity will often not have any interest in pursuing genuine CSR strategy.

Therefore, ulterior motives may also underpin the critical analysis of whether or not CSR can be utilised to offset negative publicity, but that CSR strategies are still implemented by firms who show a genuine interest in operating more ethically and sustainably.

Conclusion

Summarise the core concepts and arguments within the essay, and present the overall conclusion as to how CSR is used to offset negative publicity, which will resultantly help a firm improve their performance.

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