How Corporate Social Responsibility Drives Electronic Word-of-Mouth: Social Influence and Self-Image Expression in Food DNVBs

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Abstract:
Digitally Native Vertical Brands (DNVBs) offer small food businesses unique market-entry opportunities via direct-to-consumer models. Because DNVBs rely heavily on consumer trust, positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is critical for survival. In a cross-sectional survey (N=404) we investigate how CSR communication translates into eWOM through self-presentation and social identity. Findings indicate that CSR perceptions are positively associated with consumer's willingness to generate positive eWOM. This relationship is mediated by two psychological factors: social influence and the need for self-image expression. By positioning CSR as a strategic communication resource rather than just a corporate initiative, this research introduces a novel framework for understanding brand-consumer engagement in digital environments. The results offer practical managerial guidance for DNVBs to leverage CSR as a tool for driving digital advocacy, while also suggesting directions for future research.

Keywords: CSR communication; eWOM; social influence; self-image expression; Digitally Native Vertical Brands; direct-to-consumer