

The solutions to improve CSR activities for Vietnam Enterprises: Evidence from Ho Chi Minh City Power Corporation (EVNHCMC)

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Abstract:

CSR activities are very important not only to generate stakeholder attitudes and behaviors but also, over the long run, to build corporate/brand image, strengthen stakeholder–company relationships, and enhance stakeholders' advocacy behaviors for the enterprises. By analyzing the company's current situation, managerial implementations are proposed, including in terms of CSR activities improvement via Website quality such as Customer-centric website design, Efficient current website management, regular updating of the latest information, Social network, and Customer centricity solutions by Customer Support Service Level Agreement (SLA), Organizing seminars, reality shows, expert's advice in the electricity industry to raise customer awareness, customer responsibility in saving energy for sustainable development.

Keywords: CSR, sustainable development, COVID-19, EVNHCMC.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly disrupted the global economy, hitting profits and profitability on a scale rarely seen outside of major recessions. This exceptionally difficult time for businesses has put their commitment to ethical business conduct and corporate social responsibility (CSR) to the test (He & Harris, 2020), posing challenges to firms with regard to the struggle of balancing the interests between stakeholders and their own business. Under these exceptional pressures, some firms would be likely to pursue short-term gains and reduce long-term CSR investment due to lack of slack resources and mounting pressure for survival which are caused by the outbreak of COVID-19. However, the pandemic also offers an opportunity for businesses to shift towards more genuine and authentic CSR and contribute to addressing urgent global social and environmental challenges (He & Harris, 2020; Mahmud et al., 2021). A company may be active in CSR programs, either

as a charity act or as a strategic driver, but unless the company makes an effort and chooses the right means to communicate them to its stakeholders, CSR efforts are not going to make any impact on its business (Amaladoss & Manohar, 2013). There are significant research studies done on CSR from numerous perspectives, but very limited studies were conducted from a communication perspective, particularly in Vietnam electrics sector context. Ho Chi Minh City Power Corporation (EVNHCMC) is one of the 5 Power Distribution Corporations under The Vietnam Electricity Group (EVN), whose main task is to distribute electricity in Ho Chi Minh City. EVNHCMC defines the responsibilities of the company toward stakeholders and society. By using desk research and survey method, this empirical case study aims to determine the awareness level of customers about CSR activities through communication channels and evaluate the effectiveness of communication channels of EVNHCMC in particular and Vietnamese

enterprises in general.

2. Literature review

2.1. Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), from Jamali's (2008) and Jamali et al.'s perspectives (Jamali, 2008), is concerned with the commitment of companies to contribute to sustainable development, stakeholder interests, and enhancement of societal conditions. Also centering on stakeholders' interests, Ghobadian, 2007 (Ghobadian et al., 2007) defines CSR as being "concerned with treating the stakeholders of the firm ethically or in a responsible manner. "Ethically or responsibly" means treating stakeholders in a manner deemed acceptable in civilized societies. Social includes economic and environmental responsibility.

CSR literature is partly built on the stakeholder literature. Carroll (1991, p.43) expresses stakeholder as "... The concept of stakeholder personalizes social or societal responsibilities by delineating the specific groups or persons business should consider in its CSR orientation". Stakeholders exist both within a firm and outside (Tuan, 2012).

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development defines CSR as "the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large". The European Commission defines CSR as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis".

Carroll's (1979) model of CSR also incorporates profitability as a dimension among the four responsibilities:

1. The economic responsibility to generate profits;
2. The legal responsibility to conform to local, state, federal, and relevant international laws;
3. The ethical responsibility to meet other social expectations, not written as law (e.g. avoiding harm or social injury, respecting moral rights of individuals, doing what is right, just, fair); and
4. The discretionary responsibility to meet extra behaviors and activities that society finds desirable (e.g. philanthropic initiatives such as financial contribution to various kinds of social or cultural enterprises).

Carroll's "pyramid of corporate social responsibility"

indicated a hierarchy of responsibilities ascending from economic and legal to more socially oriented responsibilities, i.e. ethical and philanthropic (Carroll, 1991). The core of CSR is the idea that no company can afford to act in opposition to, or in isolation of, issues in society and alienated from its stakeholders (Golob et al., 2013). Hence, CSR can be considered a participative social process where communication has a central role (Golob et al., 2013).

2.2. The role of Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has risen prominence as a serious discipline in management, contributing to society is not a totally new concept for firms. The impact of corporate activities on society has

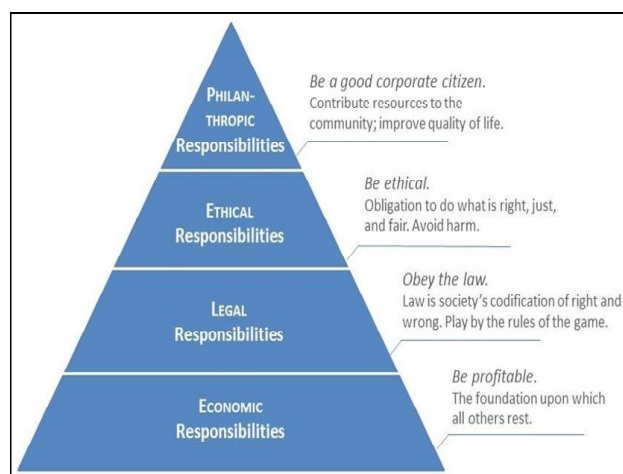


Figure 1. Carroll's pyramid model of corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1991)

been debated by practitioners and researchers right up to this day. There have been many research studies that have explored the operation of corporate organizations within the social realm and the relationship of CSR with factors such as corporate financial performance, customer engagement, firm performance, organizational citizenship behavior, worker attitude and behavior. Various studies reveal that responsible activities are increasingly valued and demanded by stakeholders and they, in turn, influence corporate reputation and have a significant positive effect on evaluation of the company and purchase intent (Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Carlisle & Faulkner, 2005; Mohr & Webb, 2005). Companies with sound CSR values will be able to attract and retain the best talent, brand image, and employee morale and develop these intangible assets into strategic advantages (Kakabadse et al., 2005).

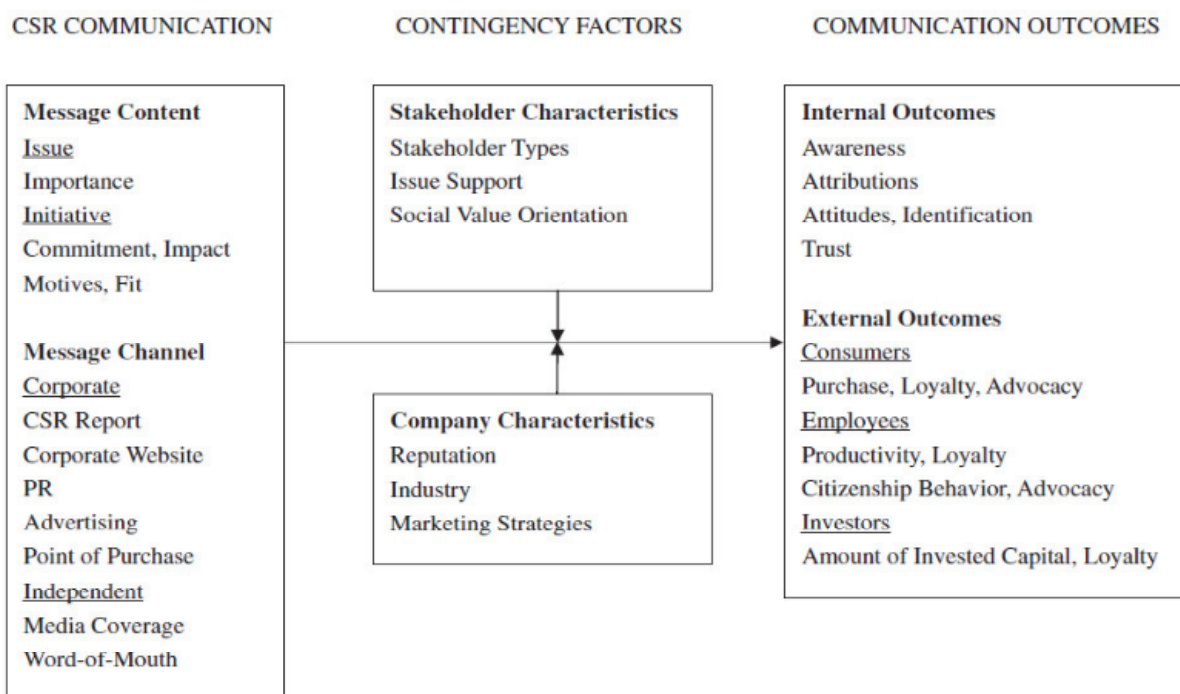


Figure 2. A framework of CSR communication (Shuili Du et al. ,2010)

2.3. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication

CSR communication is a process of anticipating stakeholders' expectations, articulation of CSR policy and managing different organizational communication tools designed to provide true and transparent information about a company's or a brand's integration of its business operations, social and environmental concerns, and interactions with stakeholders (Türkel & Akan, 2015). At the operational level, CSR communication holds a tool function referring to the set of communication tasks and activities that are relevant to spreading CSR messages, such as editing CSR sections of corporate websites, CSR reports, advertisements, writing CSR newsletters, etc. (Golob et al. , 2013)

CSR communication is indeed gaining more significant attention in academia and practice (Shuili Du & Sen, 2009; Golob et al. , 2013). CSR communication refers to how companies present their CSR principles and activities to stakeholders (Tang & Li, 2009). The increased pressure upon organizations to publicize their CSR activities to stakeholders obliges companies to manage communication more effectively and efficiently (Türkel & Akan, 2015).

Message content

A company's CSR message can pertain largely

to a social cause itself or to a company's specific involvement in a social cause. Message content includes Issue, Important, Initiative, Commitment, Impact, Motives, and Fit.

Message channels

Companies can share information about their CSR activities or information through various communication channels. The company can communicate its corporate social responsibility activities through formal documents such as annual corporate responsibility reports or press releases and introduce a special section on the company's website to introduce corporate social responsibility; it can also use the media of television or ticket ads and product packages to communicate its corporate social responsibility initiatives. In addition to reporting on corporate responsibility and dedicating portions of corporate websites to CSR businesses also use traditional advertising channels to communicate their CSR activities.

3. Research Findings

3.1. Digital transformation inclusive from EVN to EVNHCMC

EVN has approved the Digital Transformation plan for the whole corporation to be accomplished by the year 2020. A transformation that involves technology, resources, organization and culture is a prerequisite for



Figure 3. EVN launching the EVNCONNECT digital ecosystem - a great step forward on the digital transformation roadmap

Source: EVNHCM official website

EVN to be more agile and resilient in a fast-changing world According to Vietnam Electricity (EVN), they are considered one of the pioneering state-owned enterprises in the field of digital transformation, contributing to improving production and business efficiency, corporate governance and bringing many benefits to customers and partners. There are several digital transformation strategy activities deployed inclusive from EVN to EVNHCMC as the following:

- Improving operational efficiency: deployed Digital Office software; issued 27,000 electronic identification codes for units to send/receive documents on the national document communication axis; put into use the Business Intelligence reporting system (BI); completed building the application to serve employees (SmartEVN); held thousands of online meetings. The surveillance camera systems on the construction sites are integrated with smart applications such as fingerprint, face, and vehicle license plate recognition. Deploying key tasks of Telecommunications and IT infrastructure relating to a cloud computing system, database, application platform architecture (Platform), and network security operations center (SOC) (EVN, 2022)

- Bringing benefits to customers: promote and improve the quality of electricity service provision on digital platforms, electricity purchase and sale contract signing transactions and electronic documents, have

deployed new methods of electricity payment to bring convenience to customers such as QR Code, Mobile Money; upgraded website and App of Customer Care, applied AI in customer care, etc. Connecting payment via the Mobile Money application increases convenience for electricity customers, especially those in rural, remote and isolated areas during COVID. VN has launched the EVNCONNECT Digital Ecosystem, which connects and integrates with the national digital platforms, the digital platforms of the industries,... (Figure 1).

3.1.1. Digital transformation - CSR activities toward customers (Household, Business, Manufacturing Industries, Administrative Offices)

EVNHCMC has continued to promote the automatic in collecting electricity index of customers by installing auto remote electricity meters so that customers can check and monitor the amount of electricity consumed through the EVNHCMC CSKH application (Figure 2).

EVNHCMC has to cope with some issues and challenges related to the shortage of call center employees because of being quarantined of COVID-19. But EVNHCMC ensures to provide 100% online service, develop customer care multi-channel on digital platform such as Customer Care Application (EVNHCM CSKH) for mobile phones, National Public Service Portal Website, support 24/7 via Zalo

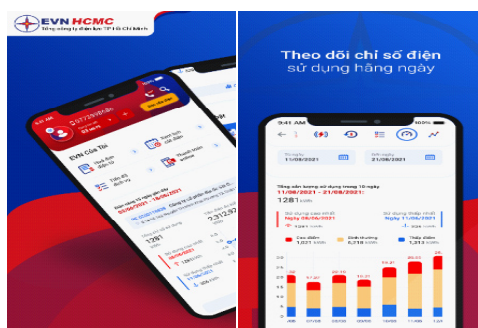


Figure 4. EVNHCMC application

page or Hotline number: 1900 54 54 54; or separate a website to serve customer namely Customer Care Center (cskh.evnspsc.vn) or email address (cskh@hcmpe.com.vn)

Accumulated to Sep, 2021, there have been nearly 1.2 million customers installing and using the EVNHCMC Customer Service App on mobile

devices, and nearly 1 million customers have registered to follow the Corporation's Zalo page... to quickly approach the electrical services provided by EVN. In August 2021, Hotline 1900545454 received more than 173,000 calls, in which approximately 6000 calls per day. From January, 2021 to September, 2021, the customer care center of EVNHCMC received and handled around 1.3 million calls via hotline; 23,962 requests via EVNHCMC's website; 8,495 requests via email; 110,000 requests via EVNHCMC CSKH application.

Besides, EVN provides cashless electricity bill payment services on customer service applications, customer care websites, the National Public Service Portal, etc. EVN and power corporations have also cooperated with banks and intermediary organizations to provide customers with more options and higher convenience by online electricity bill payment:

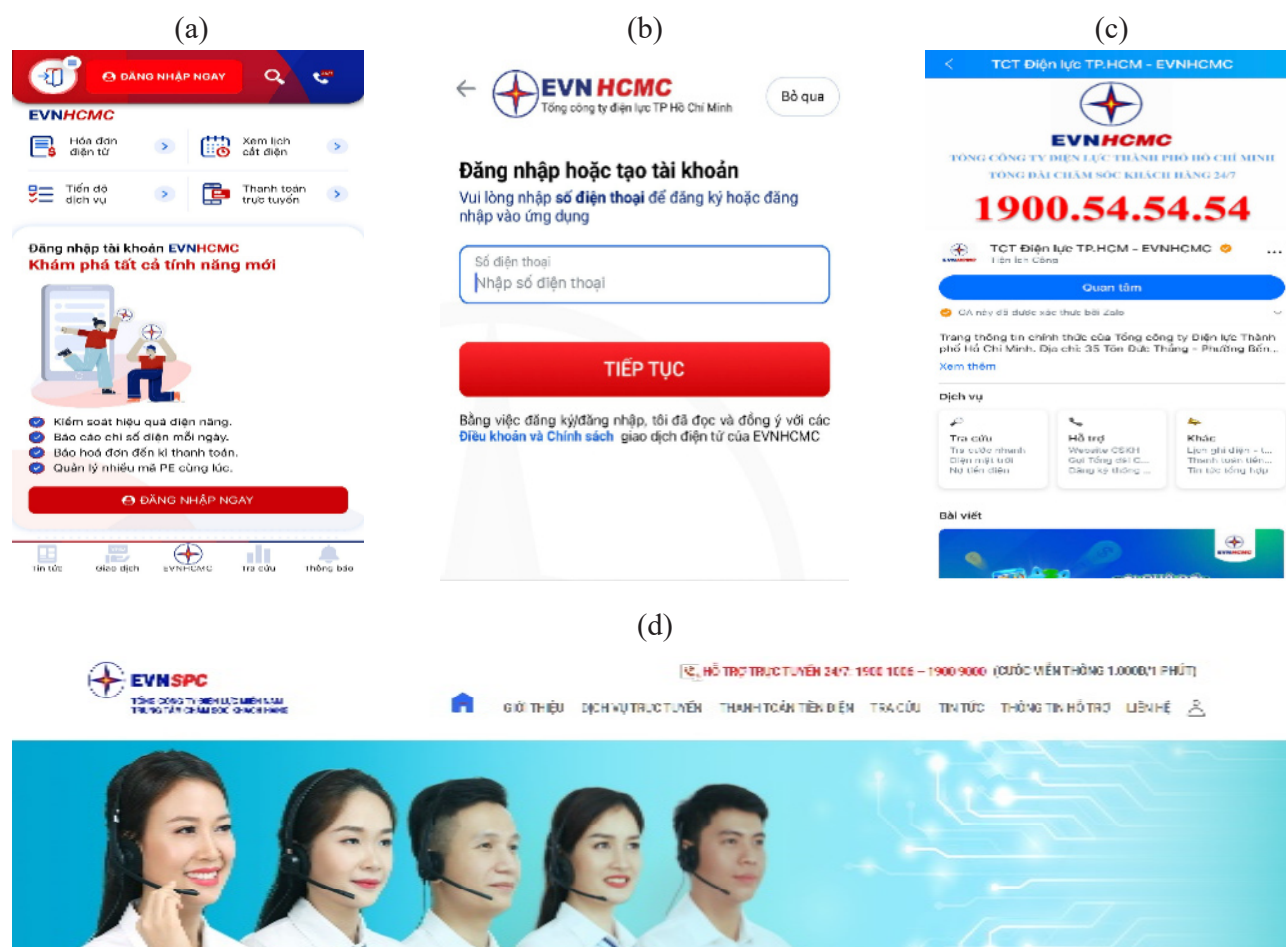


Figure 5.
(a) EVNHCMC's customer care application; (b) Login screen to EVNHCMC application;
(c) EVNHCMC customer care Zalo page; (d) Customer Care Center website

Source: Compiled by authors

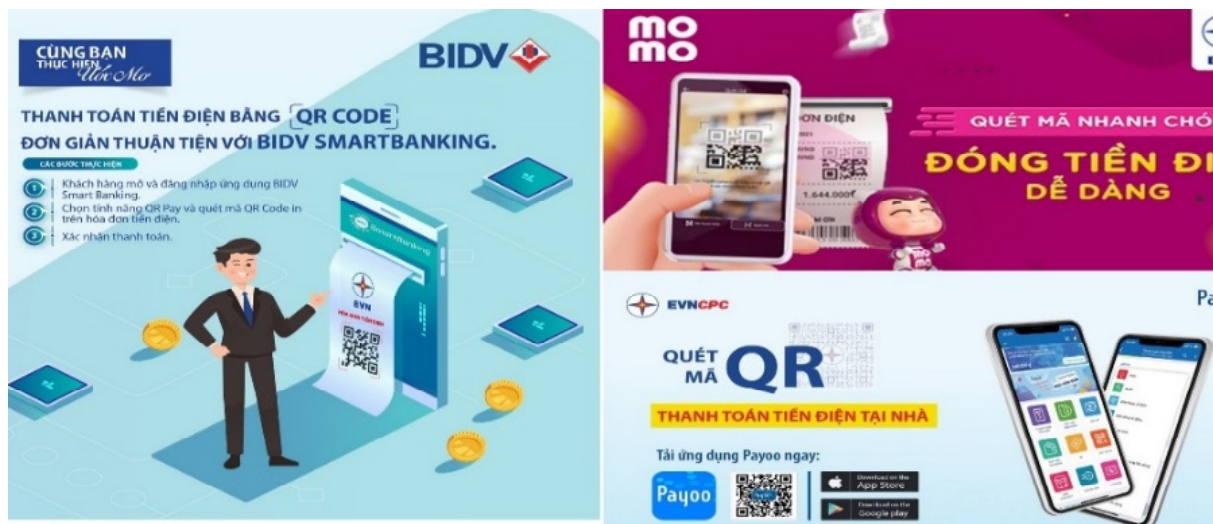


Figure 6. Electricity bill payment services poster

Source: EVN's official website

payment via bank accounts, e-wallets, payment with QR code, etc... has provided convenience to customers, especially during the period of implementing social distancing, also increasing the rate of non-cash payment for electricity bills. Up to 30th Dec, 2022, electronic transactions in EVN have reached 99.91%, and 92% of people have used non-cash payment methods for electricity bills (Toan Thang, 2022).

Digital transformation and applying technology completely in the operation activities, EVNHCMC gains competitive advantage during COVID pandemic.

3.1.2. CSR activities toward Administrative Offices division

- EVNHCMC has supplied electricity stably for online teaching and learning

EVNHCMC has implemented many solutions to ensure an uninterrupted and stable electricity supply for students' online teaching and learning. By controlling and monitoring of 100% operating parameters by software, which helps EVNHCMC detects and handle immediately incidents on the power grid, ensuring there are no problems or long-term problems impact to online teaching and learning.

The electricity supply reliability ratio is reflected in two indexes are SAIFI (System Average Interruption Frequency Index - SAIFI) and SAIDI (System Average Interruption Duration Index - SAIDI). In the first 8 months of 2021, EVNHCMC has SAIFI index was 0.33 times, decreased 20% compared to the same period in 2020; SAIDI index was 21.24 minutes, decreased

31.30% over the same period. From the beginning of September 2021 to end of 2022, SAIFI index 0.03 times, declined 44.34% over the same period (0.05 times); SAIDI index 2.6 minutes decreased 34.05% over the same period (3.94 minutes) (Phan Thảo, 2021).

To achieve the above results, EVN Corporation has conducted monthly review of the situation of power sources, power grids, sub-loads to make electricity supply plan in Ho Chi Minh City, ensures the power grid has been operated safely and reliably;

EVNHCMC has noticed this responsibility was not only ensuring the reliability of electricity supply for citizen's daily life, but also meet online teaching and learning demands when Ho Chi Minh City implemented social distancing.

- EVNHCMC has accompanied Health sector during COVID-19

As the direction of the City People's Committee HCMC, EVNHCMC has quickly installed ayto/ backup electricity generation for many field hospitals during COVID-19 such as Field hospital at District 7, Binh Chanh district, Cu Chi district, Binh Hung Field hospital,)

As of 11th, July, 2021, EVNHCMC has supplied electricity for more than 316 medical units, hospitals, field hospitals, public organizations. In addition, electricity has been supplied to 538 units eligible for vaccination (EVN, 2021).

Besides, EVNHCMC has arranged a priority electricity supply for the oxygen production plant of



Fig. 7.

(a) Workers were installing a backup electricity generator for Field hospital at District 7
(b) Workers were installing an auto electricity generator for Field hospital at Vinh Loc B apartment

AirLiquide Vietnam Co., Ltd. and the ALV industrial gas plant (which produces oxygen for medical treatment COVID-19) (EVN, 2021).

3.1.3. CSR activities toward customer affected by COVID-19

- Five rounds of electricity bill reduction for customers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

In the spirit of actively joining hands with the whole country to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and contributing to share the difficulties of people and power customers, Vietnam Electricity (EVN) has reported to the Prime Minister (PM) and the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT) for permission to reduce electricity tariff and electricity bills for the 5 times. The table 3.1 below shows brief information of 5 rounds of electricity bill reduction for customers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- EVNHCMC's donation to support social, community, employees has got COVID-19

EVNHCMC has supported 9 billion VND for 7 hospitals with equipment for COVID-19 treatment, including: Thong Nhat Hospital, 30/4 Hospital, 115 People's Hospital, University Hospital of Medicine and Pharmacy, Oncology Hospital, 103 Military Hospital (5G Field), Pasteur Institute of Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh (EVN, 2021).

EVNHCMC received 1,200 medicine bags, 130 oxygen meters, 3,600 COVID-19 rapid test kits from the Vietnam Electricity Trade Union to support the southern electricity units in the areas affected by COVID-19 (Hồng Hải, 2021).

EVNHCMC's trade union supports workers on shift duty during social distance, the total support fund of the EVNHCMC's Union is more than 700 million VND (Anh, 2021).

3.2. CSR channels of EVNHCMC

The COVID-19, at a global level, with mandatory lockdowns of varying degrees, people have been greatly affected by the virus onslaught as enforced stay-at-home restrictions and social distancing measures were the order of the day. Most manufacturing organizations, especially those industries dealing with the production of essential service items, have continued their operations amidst the disruption of the pandemic and precautionary restrictions imposed by the country in which they operate. However, the electricity industry is particular, EVNHCMC has ensured the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) during COVID-19 pandemic, supplying the electricity to customers (individuals and organizations), the public sector, and especially the hospitals.

- EVNHCMC Website

Table 1. The main information related to five rounds of electricity bill reduction

Round/Time	Amount
1 st round (3 months, from May, to July, 2020)	More than 9.300 billion VND
2 nd round (3 month, from Oct to Dec, 2020)	Approximately 3.000 billion VND
3 rd (7 months, from Jun to Dec, 2021)	Approximately 1.500 billion VND
4 th round (2 months, from Aug to Sep, 2021 & 07 month, from June to Dec, 2021)	Approximately 2.500 billion VND
5 th round (03 months, from Sep to Nov, 2021)	Approximately 600 billion VND

Source: Compiled by authors

The website is considered an effective communication channel of the company, helping customers to approach the company proactively, regularly and conveniently. There is no doubt that web page as CSR communication tools are vital in displaying EVNHCMC's information.

EVCHCMC website displays the information: EVNHCMC's announcements, report - feedback, community activities, Press Release from EVNHCMC, EVN News, with diverse content and transparency. The information on CSR activities during the COVID-19 period has always been updated continuously, improved customers' awareness and trust in EVNHCMC. As of 17th June, 2023, with the total number of website visits up to 36,890,548 times and an average of daily visits of more than 300 times, it's figure illustrates that customers are interested in

the information provided by the website.

In addition, EVNHCMC has launched Customer Care Website namely <https://cskh.evnhcmc.vn/>. Three main contents include: Online transactions Tab (Online requirement for supply electricity, online payment, online change information request, electricity contract, other support services,...). Information lookup Tab such as the consumed electricity, and Smart Grid. Making a free call to Hotline, online support or simulation of electricity fees are other features of this website.

- Social network

EVNHCMC CSR activities during the COVID-19 have recorded and received customer concern, has been spread widely by reputable media units. Take a quick look for keywords: "EVNHCMC, COVID" shows more than 121.000 results in 0.38s, "EVNHCMC, chuyển đổi số, COVID" has 77,300



Figure 8. A part of EVNHCMC website

Source: EVNHCMC's official website

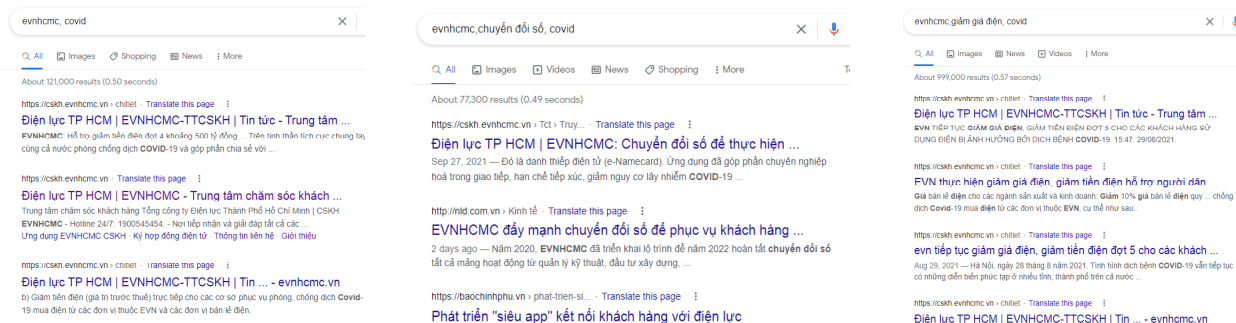


Figure 9. Screenshots from Google page

Source: Compiled by authors

results in 0.49s, while key words “EVNHCMC, Giảm giá điện, COVID” displays 999.000 results in 0.57s.

The information related to the social responsibility of EVNHCMC is always covered densely in the media; e-newspapers such as Tuổi Trẻ, Thanh Niên, Vnexpress, Vietnamnet, Người lao động...; fanpages on social networks and spread widely through personal Facebook accounts. The image of pioneering for the community creates customer satisfaction, and trust from stakeholders.

- Hotline of customer care

Through the hotline 1900545454, which was deployed in June, 2012 by EVNHCMC, customers can directly raise queries, answers sudden electricity outages (if any), requests for new installation or relocation of galvanometers, electricity price... as well as other services related to the use of electricity. In addition, the call charge rate of hotline 1900545454 call is cheaper than hotline 19001122 call, approximately 600 VND/minute for landline phones and 1000 VND/minute for mobile phones. This is considered a great effort of EVN HCMC to handle and solve customer requirements.

Since Nov, 2021, EVNHCMC has launched The multi-channel Customer Service Center will receive and handle information from various channels such as: Hotline 1900545454, customer care website: cskh.evnhcmc.vn, email: cskh@hcmpe.com.vn, chat via Facebook, Fanpage, Zalo page of EVN Corporation, Chatbot: automatic answering the customer questions on website, Callbot: customer service callback

function, Customer Relationship Management system (CRM), call quality management system: has the function of recording, recording the screen of inbound calls...

The multi-channel switchboard has provided communication diversity options for customers to actively interact with EVNHCMC, increase the frequency of connecting with customer care center, thereby increasing customer satisfaction.

- EVNHCMC Customer Care App

EVNHCMC Customer Care is a customer care application via SmartPhone of EVN Corporation. Ho Chi Minh. The application supports customers to update timely information about electricity bills, electricity outage schedules, pay electricity bills online, receiving electronic bills, register for electricity services, ... quickly and conveniently. In addition, the application also helps customers send support requests to EVN in just a few seconds on the phone, completely free of charge.

3.3. Evaluation of CSR governance activities of EVNHCMC

3.3.1. The achievements in CSR governance activities

- Accompanies customers, strives to seek solutions to overcome difficulties facing the COVID-19, proposes and implements urgent policies promptly, increases electricity generation and grows the business and gradually recovers after the impacts of the pandemic;

- Has made a strong remark in the application



Figure 10. Customer care Multi-channels

Source: EVNHCMC's official website

of science and technology, digital transformation in all fields of operation: digital transformation in transaction, payment, auto remote electricity meters, online electric incident report, customer care center 24/7. This minimized COVID-19 affectation, meet customer urgent requirement during the most difficult time of HCMC;

- The launching event of new EVNHCMC app with user-friendly interface alongside with clear indexes of electricity bill has helped a lot of customers figure out themselves related to the electricity bill in the context of relentless efforts in preventing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic and support the social distance strategy of Vietnamese government.

- The customer satisfaction point of EVNHCMC, assessed by Quoc Viet Research & Consulting Co.,Ltd - Independent Research and Consulting Unit, was 8.66/10 points in 2019, rose 0.33 points after 1 year; subsequently, it is the highest in EVN Corporation. In which, quality human resources with a positive attitude, high professional knowledge, and good customer service skills. With technical criteria, EVNHCMC is one of the few units with 8/8 points;

- Expressing the gratitude to all customers who use electricity by offering reasonable solutions to improve service quality such as decrease the electricity bill fees, provide non-disruption electricity sources for online learning activities of students within HCM city region.

3.3.2. The limitations

- There are many customers who have not been supported due to the shortage of headcount during COVID-19;

- EVNHCMC app has a gap between the production environment and User Acceptance Testing (UAT) environment, app error; the solutions have not been implemented effectively, not achieved the goals that impact customer experience;

- 3% of the unsatisfied customers (below 6 points), complained about providing an insufficient electricity outage schedule, breaching Customer Support Service Level Agreement (SLA), and electrical service instructions were still not timely.

4. Managerial implications

With regard to a need for EVNHCMC to communicate CSR more effectively to stakeholders, some potential solutions are given as follows:

4.1. CSR activities improvement via Website quality

Customer-centric website design: (1) quality improvement of customer touchpoints in which the website is one of the crucial points by customer-centric website design to provide an optimal experience for users through functionality, content, and features they're looking for; (2) Review and improve the website interface: highlight EVNHCMC's CSR activities by add new tab namely "EVNHCMC and customer contents", separate "Activities" tab (currently including News, Media, Necessary information,...) into details contents assist saving searching time, create a button to navigate to the media page, comprehensive review "Contact us" feature is not an instruction map to go to EVNHCMC address but rather support users realistically.

Efficient current website management: enhance the website administration staff capacity, and increase interaction between users and Website by creating a Q&A section or chatbot to answer customer's questions promptly. Application of advertising support tools Google Adwords to raise brand identity.

Regularly updating the latest information of EVNHCMC: maintain sending push notifications via EVNHCMC app or utilize customer email as a new communication channel.

4.2. CSR activities improvement via social network

Posting trending videos about tips to save electricity, inspiring meaningful messages on social media to attract viewers and subscribers, educating children the survival skills regarding to electricity problems.

Engaging employees in CSR strategy, motivating employees to participate in social-oriented activities, encouraging employee creativity and innovation by organizing creative contests such as transforming CSR information, socially oriented responsibilities i.e. philanthropic...by short video format.

4.3. Other implications

Customer centricity: revise/ promulgate the regulation on service quality standards of EVNHCMC, Customer Support Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Customer care center. It is a set of guidelines that specify the customer service standards that support agents are required to meet during customer interactions and address promptly customer requirements.

Organize seminars, talk shows or reality shows, and expert's advice in the electricity industry to raise customer awareness, customer responsibility in saving energy in the global warming and climate change context.

5. Conclusion

When the COVID-19 outbreak brought about a serious crisis, the balance between business interests and responsibility to customers and the community was a measure of the business's declared commitment to business ethics. When implementing CSR, the budget is not the deciding factor, it is the idea and the way to create a media spread that needs to be focused on. In this paper, we have analyzed and revealed that EVNHCMC activities during COVID-19 have justified their responsibility to society and relevant stakeholders which are mainly ethical and altruistic in nature, aimed at contributing to accompany by Vietnam Governance to overcome COVID-19 for sustainable development. Corporate social responsibility is gradually becoming an inevitable trend in the world. In Vietnam, domestic businesses are also transforming strongly to catch up with this trend. Through social responsibility, businesses in general and EVNHCMC in particular have contributed significantly to the fight against the pandemic. Social responsibility also helps EVNHCMC gain great media attention and enhance its reputation, strengthening its position and affirming its brand value. Continuing to promote CSR strategies and making a difference in brand communication will be factors businesses should consider to gain a competitive advantage in the current period.

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