

Linking National Culture to Corporate Political Activity in Pursuit of Environmental Sustainability: A Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Culture of a country influences the social and institutional capacity for environmental sustainability. This paper is focusing on the government and corporate level. Recognizing the importance of maintaining relationships with government institutions as well as consumers, this study aims to bring corporate political activity (CPA) as a marketing tool in the limelight to encourage literary and scholarly contributions to the limited research related to political activities in the field of marketing. It is presenting a perspective with an example of a collectivistic country. This conceptual paper endeavours to present an idea to protect the environment by proposing a model to propose that national culture has the forces which shape government and political environment, organization's ability to acquire resources/capabilities, and the strategies (the firm-level, institutional-level and corporate-level). These factors ultimately can influence the way CPA can be used as a marketing tool to influence both consumer behaviour and the government for environmental stability.

Keywords: National culture; corporate political activity; environment; sustainability

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1 INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that corporates are becoming politically active and influencing the government policies across the globe (Lord, 2000) in their favour by increasing their political action committees' expenses, today (Martin, Josephson, Vadakkepatt, Johnson, 2018; Lin, 2018; Kerr et al, 2014). They are also actively taking part in the socio-political issues and in some cultures, even show the audacity to pass anti-government statements (Vadakkepatt, Korschun & Martin, 2018). With firms using political tools both reactively and proactively, it is safe to assert that political activities have become an important part of any firm's strategic mix (Keillor, Hauser & Dannemiller, 2009). Scholarship identifies such activities as the corporate political activities (CPA), and define such activities as an operational choice which is often fused in the business strategy (Keillor, Hauser & Dannemiller, 2009). Corporate political activities (CPA) is an organization's strategic activities with which the organization tries to resist against the policies of the government in their favour (Hadani, 2012; Hillman, Keim & Schuler, 2004; Baysinger, 1984). It can be "any deliberate action taken by firms to influence governmental policy or processes" (Getz, 1997, pg 32-33). Such strategies are central to the organizations' overall business strategies (Barron, 2010). Today, corporates are trying to manage the regulatory environment, shape political issues to influence governmental policies (Martin et al, 2018) more than ever. Such activities have

shown to have an influence on firm's performance (Hillman et al, 2004). Existing scholarship has assessed the influence of corporate political activity (CPA) on financial implications and performance of the firm, but how CPA influences consumer behaviour and how national culture influences CPA are arenas which are still open for scholarly investigation. Recognizing the importance of maintaining relationships with government institutions as well as consumers, this study aims to bring CPA in the limelight to encourage literary and scholarly contributions to the limited research related to political activities in the field of marketing.

The issue chosen to present the idea, is environmental stability. Sustainable consumption can only be accomplished when responsibility is shared by the government, producers and consumers for reduced consumption in order to decrease the pressure of controlling the natural resources usage. It is a challenge for the government, companies (public and private) and societies especially where the degree of consumption contributes to the economic growth, to foster effective responses to environmental challenges (Husted, 2005 quoting Global Leaders 2001). Culture of a country influences the social and institutional capacity for environmental sustainability. And this capacity involves human response to environmental degradation (Husted, 2005). This paper is focusing on the influence of national culture on the government and corporate level.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the reasons to study the influence of culture on CPA is that every country has its own culture which influences the way corporations plan their CPAs (Barron, 2010). Corporations have become politically active across the globe and are spending hefty amounts on managing their regulatory environment as well as on shaping political issues, influencing governmental policies, on lobbying etc in many countries (Martin et al, 2018) through their political action committees, PAC (Lord, 2000). Corporations are also participating in socio-political issues, sometimes even engaging in controversial issues (Vadakkepatt et al, 2018). Such activities are mostly influenced by the national culture (Chapel & Moon, 2005). However, in some national cultures it is not appropriate to take anti-government stance because political interventions can reduce the organizational efficiency (Saeed, 2013). Therefore, it is important to keep good relationships with the government and adopt strategies like lobbying efforts, inviting politicians for the BoD membership, campaign contributions etc (Ibid). There are many countries where businessmen participate in politics actively and, several businessmen have been and still are working as the head of the state and on important positions in public offices across the globe (Faccio, 2006). Such countries are quite varied in terms of the level of economic and market developments, and type of government etc, and corporations rely on lobbyists and PACs to affect legislations (Kumar et al, 2015). In such conditions, corporates can become strong actors of the society who can influence culture and politics (Stern & Barley, 1996).

Another reason to consider national culture is that the research on CPA is mostly developed in USA and most of the theories are more relevant to the US domestic phenomenon (Barron, 2010). The theories employed mostly explain corporates political behaviour in terms of the business-specific, industry-specific and political system characteristics (Hillman, Keim & Schuler, 2004; Getz, 2001). Most of the scholarship is largely universalistic because most of the scholars have been using these theories,

easily observable and measurable variables, and appealing methodology to replicate the research done on US firms, outside US without studying and collecting information about the country context especially the distinctive national culture (Barron, 2010; Adler, 1983). While there exist similarities and universal rationales in the way corporates design their political strategies across the globe, management phenomenon is different in other countries (Adler, 1983) especially due to the national culture context, political behaviours and institutional arrangements in each country which the researchers need to understand before embarking on the research (Barron, 2010).

The way management handles strategic choices often reflect the national cultural touch (Barron, 2010). It is therefore not uncommon in the business scholarship to study and examine cultural dimensions (Yeganeh, 2014). This study is employing Hofstede cultural dimensions and using Pakistani corporate culture as an example. This study will focus on the Hofstede's six cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2011).

In high power distance societies (which are mostly poor countries of low economic development), the focus is mostly on the internal politics than on the merits of the problem and importance is mostly given to authorities in power which is why debate relates to the private sector's awareness and responsiveness to the social issues like environment, lacks the strength (Husted, 2005). Pakistan is a high power-distance society where power inequalities are not only accepted but expected (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Islam, 2004). This is quite visible in even the business sector because it is deeply ingrained in the national culture (Mubarak & Naghavi, 2019). In such high power-distance countries, policy decisions are mostly taken by like-minded political ruling elites, businessmen and civil servants (Eising, 2003; Barron, 2010), unlike low power-distance corporatist and pluralist countries where social and economic actors like firms, trade unions and civil society representatives take part in policy making (Barron, 2010). Based on the national culture in such countries (*Ibid*), the CPA mostly revolves around formulating strategies to influence the legislative bodies' decision (Lord, 2000). In order to influence the policy outcome in their favour, firm's management may employ information strategies as well as constituency building strategy where activities like public consultations and marketing tools like public relation activities and promotions, publicity etc are employed to communicate the policy preferences to the policy makers directly as well as to gain support of people for the policy position (Hillman & Hitt, 1999). Such activities are often propelled and influenced by the national culture (Barron, 2010).

According to Hofstede Insights¹, Pakistan is an extremely restrained society. In their view, in such cultures people try to control their desires and impulses because it is not considered right to express freely. In business world, it can be related to the freedom to hold an opinion and a voice and, willingness to give feedback (Communicaid, 2019). We can assume that in restrained cultures, firms will prefer to follow the policies and norms acceptable in the national culture of a country and prefer marketing activities related to relationship building.

¹ Hofstede Insights. Detail on Pakistani culture through the lens of the 6-D Model©: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/pakistan/> Accessed on August 21, 2019.

Scholarship on cross cultural studies have used the uncertainty-avoidance dimension to explain that national culture influences the attitudes towards the rules and regulations (Barron, 2010). Whether it is related to campaigning and lobbying for or against the laws and regulation that supports or negatively impacts the firm (Barron, 2010 quoting Van Schendelen, 2005), or, formulating a law or a legislation which can give the firm a competitive advantage or a defensive mechanism (Barraon, 2010 quoting Shaffer, 1992), national culture influences the firm's CPA.

With predefined codes of conducts related to the non-conventional ideas and behaviours, resistance to social change and new ideas and approaches (Mubarak & Naghavi, 2019) and focus on short term gains (Mubarik, Chandran & Devadason, 2016), Pakistan scores high on the uncertainty avoidance dimension (Islam, 2004, Mubarak & Naghavi, 2019). Most of the business prefer to employ the acceptable processes and modes of doing businesses (Mubarak & Naghavi, 2019). Research indicates that in such culture of low tolerance for ambiguity and high uncertainty avoidance, new laws at the societal level and regulations at the organizational level are introduced (Meuleman, 2010; Harrison & McKinnon, 1999; Jeanquart-Barone & Peluchette, 1999; Moussetis, Rahma & Nakos, 2005; Perry 2002).

Pakistan is a short-term oriented society where short-terms gains are preferred over long-term gains even in business dealing (Mubarak & Naghavi, 2019). In such cultures, strategic planning horizon is often explained using the short-term dimension because the importance is attached to the attainment of the results over a short period of time (Barron, 2010). Also, societal change is not easy in such cultures unlike cultures with long-term orientation which prefer a more realistic approach and invest in projects which help them in preparing for the future (Mubarak & Naghavi, 2019). Based on the preference for the strategic time frame, firms in short-term oriented cultures may carry out political activity for a shorter duration and is mostly *transactional*, unlike *relational* activities which is carried out in the cultures with long-term orientation (Barron, 2010), for example publicity and other advertising strategies.

With a score of 50 (according to the Hofstede Insights²), which is an exact intermediate score between the dimensions, Pakistan represents a balance between masculinity (monetary gains) and femininity (values). While Pakistani culture is shifting more towards masculinity with the emergence of technological revolution, importance of money and education, developing close relationships is still important in the business world (Mubarak & Naghavi, 2019). Scholarship has indicated that in some countries, firms often employ the *financial incentive strategies* (Hillman & Hitt, 1999) to make contribution to the political elites (Hansen & Mitchell, 2000) from their financial resources to influence political behaviour in their favour (Barron, 2010). In feminine cultures, it is considered unethical, while being acceptable in masculine cultures (Vitell, Nwachukwu & Barnes, 1993; Husted, 1999). In masculine cultures where desire for material success is very high, firm give importance to the economic growth more and therefore adoption of expensive environmentally friendly technology is quite slow. This

² Hofstede Insights. Detail on Pakistani culture through the lens of the 6-D Model©: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/pakistan/> Accessed on August 21, 2019.

can decrease the capacity of a nation ultimately to be environmentally developed (Husted, 2005). While the cultures where importance is given to care for others and human relationships, and attention is given to improving the quality of life (i.e. feminine cultures), has higher levels of environmental stability (Ibid). Assuming that societal change is often not accepted very easily in Pakistan (Mubarak & Naghavi, 2019), firms will have to develop long lasting relationships with the stakeholders to promote environment friendly products.

Businesses function in negotiated environment (Barron, 2010). While there are many interest groups in individualistic countries who have brought the environmental issues in the limelight, there are few in collectivistic countries where officially recognized groups and bodies are given importance over individual initiatives etc. (Husted, 2005). That is why firms upon sensing lack of conformity with the resolutions, they try to find a way out for the firms through discussions and negotiations with the policy makers (Oliver, 1991; Bodewyn & Brewer, 1994) in collectivistic countries. Firms and their managers must engage in negotiation with policymakers to earn concessions, favours and benefits (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Pakistan is a collectivistic society, and while bargaining behaviour is national-culture-driven (Barron, 2010), business decisions are influenced by a group of personnel, and group cohesion is encouraged (Mubarak & Naghavi, 2019; Barron, 2010). While people of a country may exhibit both individual and collectivistic orientations (McSweeney, 2002), firms in individualistic cultures mostly go for distributive or win-lose bargain and, those in the collectivistic culture prefer integrative or win-win bargain (Barron, 2010 quoting Fisher & Ury, 1981) along with collective political actions (Hillman & Hitt, 1999) to reach to a decision which is beneficial for all the parties involved. Since eradication of air pollution is important, we can assume that companies in countries like Pakistan try to negotiate with the government on win-win terms for the environmental issues, while trying to adjust with the *government and political environment*.

This is important to consider because sometimes the environmental factors can amplify the state uncertainty³ situation with respect to the corporate's dependence on the government jurisdictions. While some factors may increase response uncertainty⁴ (Milliken's 1987 uncertainty typology; Sutton et al., 2020). Though researchers believe that dependence and uncertainty may not exhibit covariation, dependency on the government may create uncertainty for the corporate and the managers (Sutton et al., 2020). Uncertainty is considered as a crucial element of the resource dependency theory. As a matter of fact, it is found that uncertainty moderates the relationship between response and dependence (Ibid). Bearing this in mind we believe that *organizational resources and capabilities* too can influence the CPAs both, when the corporate has to control the unpredictable external elements, actors and their behaviour (Hillman, Withers & Collins, 2009) and when it has the ample resources and right capabilities. These include corporate's resources and all kinds of strategic political activities (at the institutional/firm/etc. level) which rely on the corporate's non-market capabilities to handle the political

³ State Uncertainty means government's actions towards the corporate are not predictable easily.

⁴ Response Uncertainty means the efficacy of corporate's attempts to handle and manage its dependence becomes uncertain.

environment (Oliver & Holzinger, 2008) which help it in gaining competitive advantage in the political markets.

In the political markets, CPA is then used as a marketing tool, e.g. lobbying (Insead & Chatain, 2008), running promotional campaigns for public service messages to protect environment in different constituencies to influence and other corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities (Dahlsrud, 2008). CSR combines social and environmental concerns in the ways in which any business is operated, and interactions are handled with the stakeholders (Van Marrewijk, 2003). Such activities then influence government actions and the consumers and their behaviour. While government may get pressurised by observing consumers' acceptability of the idea being promoted, consumer may prefer their moral believes (Baron, 1999) and environmental concerns (Mohr & Webb, 2005) over their self-interest (Hydock, Paharia & Weber, 2019). However, if corporates need to be careful about the predominant ideology. If the ideology of the consumers/majority is not in-line with what is being promoted and how it is promoted, CPA/CSR activities can backfire. So, CPA marketing strategies need to be planned with target consumers in mind. Summed up idea is presented in Figure 1.

Sustainable consumption by consumers can only be accomplished when responsibility is shared by the government, producers and consumers for reduced consumption in order to decrease the pressure of controlling the natural resources usage. It is a challenge for the government, companies (public and private) to control the degree of consumption which contributes to the economic growth to foster effective responses to environmental challenges.

3. CONCLUSION

Extent literature has shown that politicians play an important role and has strong influence on business environment (Hillman & Hitt 1999). It is this influence that affects the corporates' performance as well (Bonardi, Hillman, & Keim, 2006). This paved way for the research on CPA (Liedong, 2020). The research on CPA highlights and presents the opinions and suggestion which influence corporates and forms a crucial part of the democratic process where policy-making process is of prime importance (Coen, 1997; Lawton, McGuire & Rajwani, 2012). Most of the studies which have paid attention to relational strategies (Rajwani & Liedong, 2015) by focusing on the personal and/or the social ties among managers and the politicians (Guo, Xu & Jacobs, 2014; Li & Zhang 2007; Peng & Luo 2000). Such relational strategies are more favourable depending upon the cultural settings (especially high context and collectivistic) as well as the economic systems which are often relationship based in the developing countries (Liedong, 2020) like Pakistan. While extant research shows that CPA is mostly studied from the perspective of antecedents of political strategies (Liedong & Frynas 2017; White, Bodewyn & Galang, 2015), the nature/type of political activity (Barron 2011) as well as the outcomes of political activity (Hadani & Schuler 2013), there is a need to study the influence of high-context collectivistic national culture on the CPA (especially as an influencing marketing tool) and environmental stability. This research article has tried to focus on this area by presenting a perspective which is open for empirical research. We propose that national culture has the forces which shape government and political environment, organization's ability to acquire resources and brush up capabilities, and the firm-

level, institutional-level and corporate-level strategy. These factors ultimately can influence the way CP can be used as a marketing tool to influence both consumer behaviour (via CSR and promotional strategies) and the government for environmental stability.

This idea is presented in Figure 1.

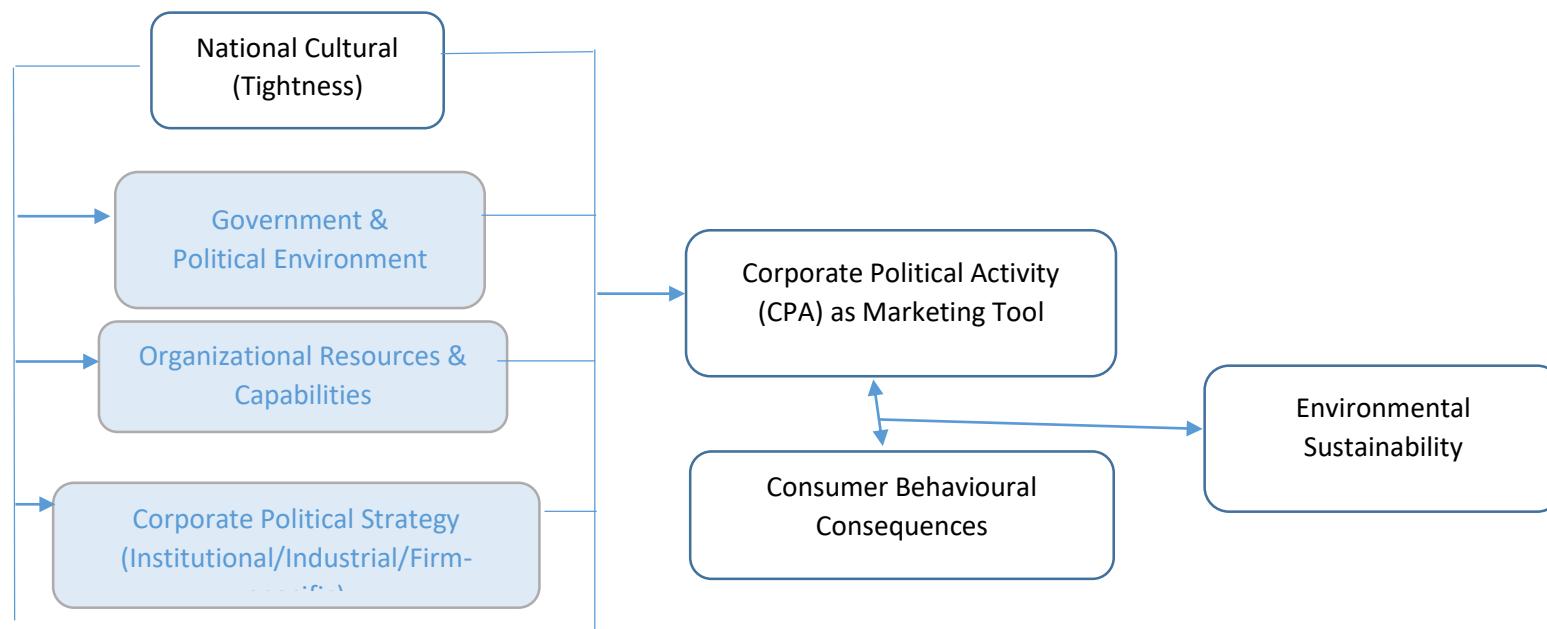


Figure 1: Influence of National Culture on CPA to Influence Environmental Stability

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