

Walmart and Corporate Social Responsibility

About the Societal Marketing Concept

In recent years, the concept of societal marketing has become more important, particularly to larger brands that are subject to greater mainstream and social media attention. The goal of being seen as a good corporate citizen and contributing to society overall – the key shift from the marketing concept to the societal marketing concept – is executed both through corporate actions and through the communication of those actions to the customers of the firm and to the broader community.

The following is a quote from an Adweek article on Walmart and CSR.

According to Allen Adamson, North American chairman at brand consulting firm Landor Associates, "In this new, transparent world, where everything a company does is seen by everybody and consumers are doing business with companies who 'do the right thing' in terms of treating their workers well, for the environment, sustainability."

Walmart and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)

One of the most valuable brands in the world and the world's largest retailer is Walmart. For a range of reasons, Walmart often suffers from a negative perception among parts of the community. It seeks to improve this perception through appropriate and positive corporate actions.

Here is an example of their CSR approach...

Sustainable Products at Walmart and Sam's Club | Our Pledge to Customers/Members

Our customers and members count on Walmart and Sam's Club to deliver affordable products in a way that is sustainable for people and for the planet. To meet those needs, we work with partners all along the supply chain to improve the sustainability of products we sell. We do this while working to offer quality products, everyday low prices and putting customers in charge of their food choices by helping provide clear, accurate information about food ingredients and production.

And according to Walmart – quoted in the same Adweek article – the goal of their CSR is business and profit-based and not just a public relations (PR) exercise.

Walmart spokeswoman Molly Blakeman said, "These are first and foremost business decisions and not part of a concerted effort to alter perceptions of the company."

Student Discussion Questions

1. To what extent will Walmart's CSR activities help improve any negative image problems it may face?
2. In your opinion, are Walmart's CSR programs business-based decisions or are they mainly a PR exercise? Why?
3. Do you think that smaller brands need to be concerned with CSR issues, or is this primarily a concern for higher profile brands?
4. Do you think that acting with CSR can deliver profits or is it mainly an additional cost for firms?
5. If social media were not as prominent and influential as it is now (as was the case in the past), that large brands would be so active with CSR programs?