

# A study on the generation and influence of negative emotions in consumers' Perceived Hypocrisy—— from the perspective of attribution theory

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**ABSTRACT:** *The perceived hypocrisy of consumers on corporation social responsibility activities has brought great difficulties to the development of the company. This study takes consumers as the research object and uses the questionnaire survey. From the perspective of attribution theory, this study probes into the causes and influence of negative emotions in the context of consumer perceived hypocrisy. The negative impact of consumers' perceived hypocrisy on corporation attitudes and behaviors is exerted through the intermediary factor of negative emotions. At the same time, the attribution of consumers' perceived hypocrisy is also important, because the judgment of corporation hypocrisy can influence consumers' perceived hypocrisy and negative emotions.*

**KEY WORD:** *corporation Social Responsibility; Internal Attribution; Perceived Hypocrisy; Negative Emotion.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility refers that when conducting normal business activities and expansion, an corporation should not only consider its own financial situation and operation situation, but also consider the impact of its operation on social development and natural environment. Therefore, more and more corporations regard charity as a kind of business activity, and raise market awareness and social recognition through donation.

Therefore, corporations choose to carry out CSR activities to get positive response from customers and achieve good reputation and performance. However, a lot of CSR activities in the market brought some negative benefits instead of positive impacts. For example, Nongfu spring's "drink a bottle of water to donate a penny" campaign has been questioned by the public because the actual amount of donation does not match the sales volume. Vanke donated 2 million yuan to wenchuan in 2008, but was criticized by the public for the small amount. Thus, it can be seen that consumers do not necessarily "pay for" CSR behaviors. When corporations actively undertake social responsibilities, the phenomenon that the CSR concept to be publicized is inconsistent with the actual activities is defined as "corporation hypocrisy". If corporate social responsibility activities are understood as hypocritical behaviors by consumers, they may bring serious negative impacts to corporations. Nongfu spring's suspicious donation activities eventually led to a decline in sales. After vanke donated an additional 100 million yuan, the property and stock still boycott. At present, most studies on CSR only focus on the positive impact of CSR activities, while studies on consumers' perceived hypocrisy and its negative impact on corporations also emerge. That is to say, when CSR activities of corporations cause perceived hypocrisy, consumers will respond differently. This research discusses CSR negative emotions and their impact from the view of internal attribution, and explains consumers' different responses. It will provide an effective guidance for the enterprise and avoid enterprise in the process of CSR activities trigger the negative emotions.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

Attribution is the process of making a concrete analysis of an action that you or someone else has done, and deducing its cause and origin. People's attributions about the outcome of things affect their perceptions. Attribution theory has also been introduced into corporate social responsibility research to explain consumer responses. Consumers' attributions to CSR behavior affect consumers' attitudes toward corporate products, quality perception, purchase intention, brand attitude, CSR perceived performance and CSR satisfaction. If consumers believe that corporate hypocrisy is caused by enterprises, consumers will have a relatively high degree of perception of corporate hypocrisy. Therefore, the following assumptions are proposed:

H1: consumers' internal attribution of corporation hypocrisy can have a positive impact on consumers' perception of hypocrisy.

According to emotion theory, emotions are psychological responses to cognitive explanations. A large number of studies have shown that attribution can have a significant impact on consumer sentiment. If consumers believe that corporation hypocrisy is caused by internal reasons, they will generate negative emotions. According to Xie's research, consumers' negative emotions triggered by irresponsible corporation behavior include contempt, anger and disgust. Therefore, the following assumptions are proposed:

H2: the internal attribution of consumers to the hypocrisy behavior of corporations will have a positive impact on the negative emotions (contempt, anger, disgust).

Research in psychology has shown that moral transgressions by others can trigger negative emotions. People's perception of corporation irresponsibility often leads them to think that the company's behavior is morally wrong, thus generating corresponding emotional responses. Xie et al's research shows that corporations' irresponsible behavior in the environment will lead to consumers' negative emotions, including contempt, anger and disgust. Consumers' perception of hypocrisy will lead them to believe that companies are irresponsible and hypocritical, and generate a sense of "being deceived", thus generating correspondingly negative emotions. In other words, the hypocritical behavior of corporations will make consumers generate negative emotions towards corporations instinctively. Therefore, the following assumptions are proposed:

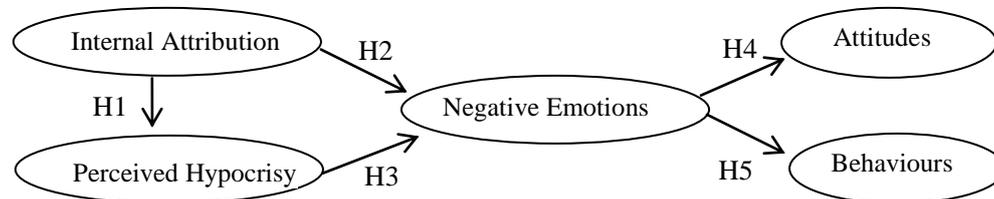
H3: consumers' perception of hypocrisy can have a positive impact on their negative emotions (contempt, anger, disgust).

Studies have used negative emotions to explore consumers' responses to "corporate irresponsibility" or "hypocrisy". The irresponsible behavior of enterprises in environmental issues can also be regarded as a kind of moral transgression. Therefore, the irresponsible behavior of enterprises in environmental issues can cause negative emotions of consumers, and thus affect consumer attitudes and lead to negative behaviors of consumers, including negative comments, complaints and resistance. At the same time, the negative emotions of consumers caused by the irresponsible behavior of enterprises can also be adjusted by some factors, such as social collective self, moral identity, relational self and fair value. Therefore, the following assumptions are proposed:

H4: consumers' negative emotions will have a negative impact on their attitude towards corporations.

H5: consumers' negative emotions will have a positive impact on their negative behaviors (negative comments, complain, resist).

To sum up, the conceptual model of this study is shown in figure 1.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**

### III. DATE ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 Variable measurement

In this study, the related variables of this study were compiled on the basis of the mature scales of related variables in existing studies. This study included five variables: internal attribution, hypocritical perception, negative emotion, attitude and behavior. Among them, emotion and behavior are second-order variables. The study used a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 7 at a time from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In this study, internal attribution was referred to the scale developed by Gregoire et al., attitude was referred to Wagner's scale, and negative behavior was referred to Xie's scale.

This study conducted a questionnaire survey on consumers. A total of 345 questionnaires were issued and 321 were recovered, of which 302 were valid. The recovery rate was 93.04% and the effective rate was 87.54%.

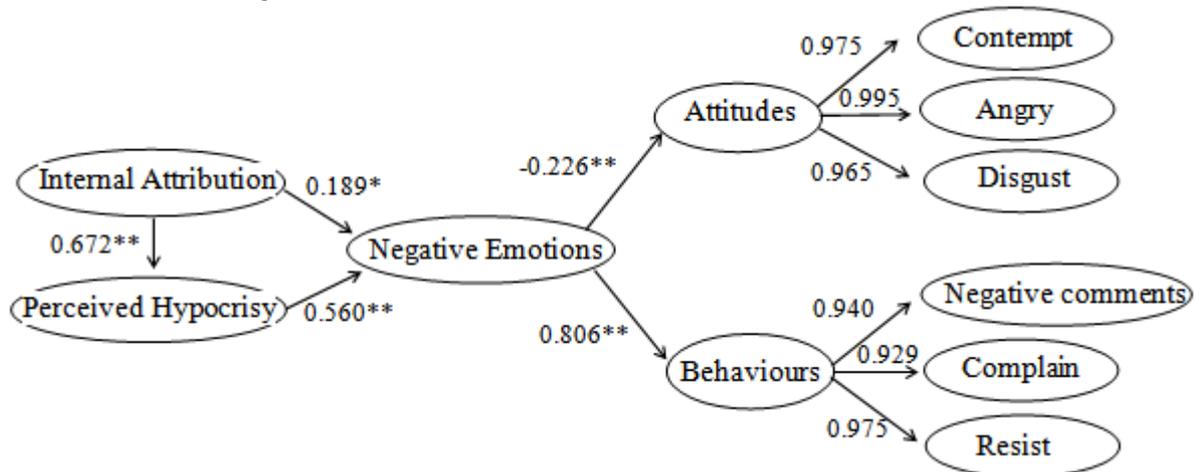
#### 3.2 Confirmatory factor analysis of measurement model

In this study, we used AMOS16.0 software to test the reliability and validity of data through confirmatory factor analysis. The results showed that the model fitted well:  $\chi^2(302) = 467.317$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.514$ ,  $RMR = 0.064$ ,  $GFI = 0.882$ ,  $AGFI = 0.850$ ,  $TLI = 0.965$ ,  $CFI = 0.862$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.045$ . The combined reliability of all structural variables is above the recommended level of 0.6, and the mean variance extraction (AVE) is also above the recommended level of 0.5, indicating that the measurement of relevant structural variables has good reliability. The standardized factor load of structural variables was higher than 0.6 and was significant at the

level ( $\alpha=0.01$ ), indicating that the scale had a high aggregation validity. In addition, the scale in this study has a high discriminant validity, because the square roots of AVE of all the rows in this study are greater than the correlation coefficients between rows and columns.

### 3.3 Structural models test

In this study, the structural equation model was used to test the hypothesis model in FIG. 1 to explore the response mechanism of consumers' hypocritical perception. The results are shown in FIG. 2. The goodness of fit statistic of the model:  $\chi^2(302)=567.567, \chi^2/df=1.699$ , GFI=0.928, AGFI=0.902, TLI=0.974, CFI=0.977, RMSEA=0.048. According to these statistics, the fitting degree of the structure model is good.



**Figure. 2** path analysis results of structural equation model

Note : \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

Figure 2 is the normalized path coefficient diagram of the structure model in this study. First of all, consumers' internal attribution of corporation hypocrisy has a significant impact on consumers' perception of hypocrisy ( $\gamma = 0.672, p < 0.01$ ), It also has a significant impact on consumers' negative emotions ( $\gamma = 0.189, p < 0.01$ ). Secondly, consumers' hypocritical perception has a significant impact on their negative emotions ( $\gamma = 0.560, p < 0.01$ ), Finally, consumers' negative emotions have a negative impact on their attitudes ( $\gamma = -0.226, p < 0.01$ ), And have a significant impact on negative behavior ( $\gamma = 0.806, p < 0.01$ ). In summary, the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5 in this study are supported.

## IV. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Conclusion

The research results show that: first, consumers' internal attribution of corporation hypocrisy enhances their perception of hypocrisy; Second, consumers' internal attributions of corporation hypocrisy increase their negative emotions. Thirdly, consumers' hypocritical perception of corporations has a significant effect on their negative emotions. Fourthly, consumers' negative emotions lead to their negative attitude towards corporations. Fifth, consumers' negative emotions significantly increase their negative behaviors. Specifically, it shows that the negative influence of consumers' attitude and behavior on corporations caused by consumers' perception of corporation hypocrisy plays a role through the intermediary factor of negative emotions. The attribution of consumers to the hypocritical behavior of corporations is also very important, because the judgment of the hypocritical behavior attribution of corporations can affect the level of consumers' hypocritical perception and negative emotion.

### 4.2 Discussion

Theoretical contributions: first, in-depth research on the psychological and behavioral mechanisms of consumers' hypocritical perception response opens the "black box" of consumers' hypocritical perception response mechanism. Second, this study introduces emotional variables into the field of hypocrisy and finds the key role of negative emotions. Thirdly, this study introduces negative consumer behavior into the study of consumers' hypocritical perception response, which fully improves the types of consumer response behavior.

Practical significance: first, corporations must start from the society to find reasons and methods for CSR activities from their own perspective, so as to increase consumers' trust and recognition of

corporations. Second, when implementing CSR strategy, corporations should make scientific planning, reasonable organization and timely follow-up, pay attention to consumers' recognition of corporation activities and increase corporation transparency. Thirdly, when consumers' hypocrisy perception appears in the implementation of CSR strategy, corporations need to communicate with consumers timely, appease their emotions and understand their needs, so as to realize the real purpose of CSR implementation.

#### **4.3 Research limitations and future research directions**

First of all, this study in order to isolate the corporation brand influence on investigation and research, the questionnaire used in virtual corporation A and B as A substitute for, in reality the behavior of the consumers have different with the implementation of corporation, the corporation brand in the consumers' perceptions of sound hypocritical mechanism played A what kind of role, in the future study still needs more research were discussed.

Secondly, the data source of this study is mainly concentrated in one region, and there may be similar cognition of corporation brands. Whether the response mechanism of consumers' hypocrisy perception in different regions is the same or not needs to be verified by more scholars in a larger geographical range in the future.

Finally, from the Angle of attribution theory, the paper discusses the hypocrisy consumers of attribution plays role in consumers' perceptions of the response mechanism of hypocrisy, did not discuss other psychological factors on consumers' perceptions of the response mechanism of hypocrisy is it possible to happen in the study has certain one-sidedness, the future will explore more psychological factors in consumers' perceptions of the response mechanism of the hypocrisy of the role.

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