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Corporate Social Responsibility in the Textile and Apparel Industry: Barriers and Challenges

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Abstract: Corporate social responsibility seems to be becoming crucial in the management strategies of all industries. The paper presents the importance of corporate social responsibility activities in the textile and apparel industry. The textile and apparel industry has been chosen because in many cases the production is being transferred to developing countries. This means that it has a significant influence for the global economy and global management. The main aim of this study is to investigate the barriers and challenges to corporate social responsibility in the textile and apparel industry. The paper analyzes the structure of this industry in the global context and examines areas of the textile and apparel industry such as labour conditions, human and workers' rights, and environmental issues, each of which is especially sensitive in terms of CSR actions. On the basis of those social and environmental aspects, there have been recognized barriers and challenges of CSR. The main barrier observed to the introduction of CSR rules in the textile and apparel industry is the lack of the control caused by geographical distance. The paper also shows other obstacles to the implementation of CSR activities and suggests steps that need to be taken to overcome them

Keywords: CSR, textile industry, apparel industry, management, barriers to CSR.

1. Introduction

In today's world, a lot of the effects of globalization are quite visible. Globalization is understood as a process which leads to an increasing interdependence between political, social and economic elements of the world (Bogunia-Borowska and Śleboda, 2003, p. 21). It means that the borders of countries are opening up, making possible flows of technology, capital, and people, and also that it is much easier to run an international business. This possibility, however, also brings with it some challenges and responsibilities and facing them is crucial for the success of an international business. One of the most important things is a proper method of management. A firm which has an influence on different societies and groups of interest from different parts of the world should follow a method of management which will take into consideration the needs of stakeholders at every level of the firm's activity. There is also a need to accept ethical rules relating to different cultures (Nowakowski, 1999, p. 145). Thus, business has begun to look for new ways of management. One of them is the concept that includes corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainable development. What is more, the growing society awareness of the role of the business in environmental issues and solving social problems is another factor adding to the dynamic progress of social responsibility in business (Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2014, p. 9).

The main aim of the study is to identify the barriers and challenges to CSR in the textile and apparel industry. The paper introduces the concept of corporate social responsibility and its main characteristics and also the specificity and global structure of the textile and apparel industry. In the next part of the study, the author presents the aspects of CSR in the textile and apparel industry in the context of global problems.

2. CSR as a part of modern management

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is based on the idea that management can and should go beyond the regulatory framework. It is a strategy not focused on maximizing profit, which has been a traditional task of management to date. CSR includes social, ethical and environmental aspects of running a business. Its fundamental component is dialogue

with stakeholders, a term which includes all of the subjects in the various areas of a company, such as customers, suppliers, the local community, and the environment.

Before considering a socially responsible management system, generally speaking some elements must first be included into the management system. There are some European and global standards for CSR which are fundamental to creating social responsibility in a company. One of the standards is the management standard ISO 26 000, which is an international guideline on social responsibility. The ISO 26 000 is one of the documents recommended by the European Commission in its *EU Strategy on Corporate Social Responsibility* (PKN, nd). The ISO 26 000 standard contains five elements which are recommended to be implemented (Rok, 2013, p. 133), as follows:

- the first one concerns creating a declaration of values. The rules and values that should be included in the declaration include: transparency, respect for human rights, responsibility, expectations of stakeholders, and compliance with laws, including international and ethical standards;
- there should be a commitment on the part of the management staff to formal recognition of social responsibility as a basis of the firm's activity. This also refers to the participation of different groups of stakeholders at all the levels of management;
- the third element is to ensure the integration and compliance of the system of management with human and workers' rights, environmental protection, consumer rights, fair business practices, as well as community involvement;
- instruments should be implemented which will provide transparency of communication, credibility, constant improvement, and procedures and methods for the evaluation of results and their impact;
- the last element recommended is to define a vision of the firm which will contribute to sustainable development.

Apart from including the above components in the socially responsible management system, the ISO 26 000 standard also lists areas of actions in the field of CSR. There are seven basic core topics which together create a holistic approach to CSR (ISO, 2014):

- organisational governance;
- human rights;
- labour practices;
- community involvement and development;

- fair operating practices;
- the environment;
- consumer issues.

There are different ways to include these aspects in a company's management strategy. The literature distinguishes three basic models which are based on the relationship between a company's business strategy and its CSR strategy. In the first model, a firm's business strategy has nothing in common with CSR, and the company does not consider CSR activities when planning the firm's strategy. According to the second model, the business strategy and CSR are opposites, which mean that the strategy of the company is in contradiction with the rules of CSR. In this model the company does not make any contribution to CSR and sustainable development. In the third model the strategy of the firm fully corresponds with CSR. This is the only model in which socially responsible management is possible. Within this model, however, two approaches can be distinguished. These approaches demonstrate different ways to manage a firm in accordance with CSR principles. The first is when CSR is a separate part of the firm's strategy, i.e. when it contains some specific aims which conform to CSR guidelines, while there may also be some parts of the firm's activity which do not correspond with social responsibility. In the second approach, CSR is an integral part of the strategy of a firm. In this approach, all of the decisions taken by the company must be based on the principles of CSR and sustainable development. The principles of CSR determine the strategy of the company and there are no actions which fall outside this area (Rok, 2013, p. 141).

3. The textile and apparel industry in the global economy

The global economy is mainly based on competition between regions of the world to accumulate the highest market share in terms of trade in both goods and services. As the Table 1 shows, in general the Asian region has a higher export than import than in the case of Europe and North America. The share of the Asian market in global economy is continually increasing. It is also generally thought that the world is becoming flooded with goods 'made in China'. This means that the global economy has to manage problems connected with the structure of global trade and production.

Table 1. Import and export in selected regions of the world (bln USD) as of 2014

Region*	South Asia	South-east Asia	Eastern Asia	Western Asia	North America	Europe
Import	626	1237	3323	995	2880	6046
Export	480	1316	3710	1455	2094	6267

Note: The adopted division of the world into regions is based on that used by the UN categorization and includes: South Asia – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka; Southeast Asia – Brunei, the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Singapore, Thailand, East Timor, Vietnam; Eastern Asia – China and the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, North Korea, South Korea and Mongolia; Western Asia – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Cyprus, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Syria, Turkey, the West Coast and the Gaza Strip, and the United Arab Emirates; North America – Bermuda, Greenland, Canada and the United States; Europe – excluding the countries of South-Eastern Europe and belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Source: Own study based on GUS (2015, p. 62).

In recent decades changes have also taken place in the global structure of production and trade in the apparel and textile industry. The total value of the global market in the apparel industry amounted to almost 1.3 trillion USD in 2014 (Pracownia Badań Rynków Zagranicznych, 2015). This segment represents a large part of the world economy and is also characterized by a huge potential for growth. The global distribution of imports and exports in the apparel and textile industry clearly shows a tendency to transfer garment production to the developing countries. The United States (US) and the European Union (EU) are the two principal importers. In 2003, the EU was the largest importer in the world, with imports amounting to 154 billion USD, and the US was in second position with 90 billion USD (United Nations, 2005).

The export structure of articles of apparel of textile fabrics is shown in Table 2. It presents the distribution of exports of both the developing and developed economies, using a comparison of the years 2005 and 2015. It can be noted that the value of exports of the developing countries is much higher than that of the developed economies – in 2005 it was more than double and in 2015 almost triple. The indicators also show the percentage of each the two country groupings of export and the percentage of the total world export. In 2005 developing economies were responsible for more than 67% of the world export of articles of apparel of textile fabrics and in 2015 that percentage grew to more than

Table 2. Export structure of articles of apparel of textile fabrics in 2005 and 2015

Category of economies	2005			2015		
	Value [millions of dollars]	% of the country grouping's export	% of the total world export	Value [millions of dollars]	% of the country grouping's export	% of the total world export
Developed economies	31 241	0.49	32.43	39 777	0.46	26.33
Developing economies	64 567	1.70	67.03	110 365	1.49	73.05

Source: Own study based on United Nations (2016, pp. 46–47).

73%. The data shows that developing economies have higher share in export of apparel than the developed economies, and it also shows that the value of exports has significantly increased over the ten year period examined.

Table 3 shows the export structure of articles of apparel of textile fabrics for individual economies. It also presents the percentage of such exports in the country's total exports. It can be noted that Haiti, Bangladesh and Cambodia are characterized by a high percentage of apparel exports. This means that the economies of those countries

Table 3. Export structure of articles of apparel of textile fabrics, by individual economies, 2014–2015

Country	Value [in thousands of dollars]	As percentage of country total	As percentage of world total
Haiti	508 847	51.0	0.33
Bangladesh	10 260 461	32.9	6.61
Cambodia	3 211 280	27.8	2.07
Sri Lanka	1 560 449	14.4	1.01
Lesotho	80180	9.6	0.05
Tunisia	1 327 102	8.6	0.86
Turkey	5 566 231	3.7	3.59
China	50 415 704	2.2	32.50
India	5 845 911	2.0	3.77

Source: Own study based on United Nations (2016, pp. 48–69).

significantly rely on the apparel industry and that they can be classified as highly dependent on apparel exports. Moreover, it is worth noting that countries with a high dependence on the apparel industry do not have high shares in total world's apparel exports. The country with the highest percentage of world exports is China (32.5%), which is also shown in Table 4.

Table 4 shows the major exporters of articles of apparel among the developing economies. It is noteworthy that the developing economies cover almost 72% of total world exports of apparel of textile fabrics. It can also be observed that the major exporters are developing Asian countries such as China, Bangladesh, Hong Kong SAR, Vietnam, and India. On the basis on this data, it can be stated that the production of apparel articles is being transferred to the developing countries.

Table 4. Major exporters for articles of apparel of textile fabrics, among developing economies, 2014–2015

Category	Value [in thousands of dollars]	As percentage of country total	As percentage of developing economies	As percentage of world total
World	155 135 8116	0.87	–	100.00
Developed economies	42 431 266	0.46	–	27.35
Transition economies	1 014 615	0.16	–	0.65
Developing economies	111 689 934	1.41	100.00	71.99
China	50 415 704	2.18	45.14	32.50
Bangladesh	10 260 461	32.85	9.19	6.61
China, Hong Kong SAR	8 577 076	1.66	7.68	5.53
Viet Nam	6 637 925	4.25	5.94	4.28
India	5 845 911	2.01	5.23	3.77
Turkey	5 566 231	3.69	4.98	3.59
Cambodia	3 211 280	27.77	2.88	2.07
Indonesia	2 288 075	1.40	2.05	1.47
Mexico	1 609 661	0.41	1.44	1.04
Sri Lanka	1 560 449	14.36	1.40	1.01

Source: Own study based on United Nations (2016, p. 77).

The above-described distribution of production in the apparel industry makes the international management of companies in the sector more and more complex, as it affects more countries and societies, and thus brings new challenges as well as barriers to overcome, especially in terms of social responsibility management.

4. Aspects of CSR in the textile and apparel industry

Interactions in the global economy and globalisation have changed the economic relations between countries. This has led, particularly in the apparel and textile industry, to the transfer of production to developing countries. For this reason there is a high risk of infringements in the area of the environment, as well as with respect to working conditions. A parent company is not always able to control the situation in the entire supply chain. As a result the apparel and textile industry is one of the most sensitive industries with respect to CSR aspects. Two core areas of CSR which exceptionally influence textile and apparel industry can be distinguished. The first is its impact on environment, and the second is connected with human and workers' rights, including working conditions.

Today almost every type of industry uses natural resources, and at the same time has a grave impact on the environment. Natural resources determine the development of the textile and apparel industry. The basis of production is cotton. Its cultivation, as well as transport, cleaning, storage and the treatment processes, determine the source of livelihood of over 300 million people (Portal Kupuj Odpowiedzialnie, 2010). At the same time, cotton cultivation requires constant irrigation, uses huge amounts of fresh water, and leads to soil degradation. Cotton production consumes about 6% of global fresh water use and occupies about 2.5% of the earth's cultivated surface (Płonka, 2013, p. 160). A good example of excessive cultivation of cotton can be seen in the Aral Sea area in Uzbekistan, where wasteful water consumption for the cultivation of cotton caused the degradation and near disappearance of the Aral Sea. Currently, the area of the lake is 25% of its original area, and it contains only 10% of its original amount of water (Płonka, 2013, p. 160). This has also caused the extinction of animals living in the lake and had a serious impact on the fishing industry, tourism, and the daily life of inhabitants of the region.

Another environmental factor connected with the textile and apparel industry is the use of harmful chemicals in the cultivation of cotton. The use of pesticides accelerates vegetation and helps guarantee the viability of production and continuity of production on an industrial scale. However, as the plants are sprayed harmful pesticides get into the groundwater and adversely affect ecosystems. Cotton production generates an annual consumption of pesticides estimated to be more than 2 billion USD. Moreover, the WHO has assessed almost half of them as dangerous and harmful to human health and ecosystems (Portal Kupuj Odpowiedzialnie, 2010). Damaging substances are used not only in cotton's cultivation, but also during processes of creating clothes. Before they make it to store shelves, the clothes are subjected to processes such as washing, dyeing, bleaching, or printing. Up to eight thousand various chemicals are used in these operations. The production of one t-shirt consumes 2,495 litres of water (Komisja Europejska, 2012). This water, including chemicals and dyes, comes back to the environment and causes contamination. Moreover, harmful substances also accumulate in the fibres of clothes. The use of pesticides and other harmful substances in the process of clothes production adversely affects not only the environment, but also has a damaging impact on humans. Workers on cotton plantations and in garment factories are highly exposed to these negative effects. But it should not be forgotten that they also affect the consumers who buy the final product.

The last environmental factor mentioned here is transport. If the production is transferred to developing countries, remote from the place of retail of the final goods, then obviously transportation plays an important role in the textile and apparel industry. It is estimated that the path of a single t-shirt covers between 18 and 50 thousand kilometres (Płonka, 2013, p. 177.). Hence the long supply chain negatively influences the environment because it causes huge emissions of CO₂ and other air contamination. Apart from the environmental burden, it also generates an additional cost, which is mainly reflected in the final price of the product. It is estimated that payments connected with clothes' transportation constitute 15% of the price of each t-shirt (Płonka, 2013, p. 177.).

The second core subject of CSR, and one which is particularly sensitive in the textile and apparel industry, is that of human and workers' rights and working conditions. The problems in this area are especially difficult and important because of the lack of the control over working

conditions when production is located in other countries. What is more, the production is usually located in developing countries where there are no guarantees of minimum wages or any social protection. According to Universal Declaration of Human Rights “everyone has the right to work, (...) the right to equal pay for equal work, (...) to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection (...) has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests” (United Nations, 1948).

Unfortunately, the reality is very different from what is contained in the Declaration. For example, in Bangladesh the legal minimum monthly wage in the textile industry is 5300 taka (50 Euros), while a decent wage in this country is estimated to be 25,687 taka (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2014). But wages are only a part of the problem. Other critical issues are working hours and working conditions. Workers are often exploited because their working hours are much longer than in the developed countries, and can reach even between 12 and 18 hours a day (Płonka, 2013, p. 147). Moreover, the longer working hours do translate into higher salaries. Instead, the factories are maximizing their profits by burdening workers with the low costs of labour.

It is well known that in many clothes factories safety regulations are not followed. There are no emergency exits or evacuation systems, and in the event of an accident or fire, employees have no possibility to get out of the factory. A notorious example of a violation of safety rules was the disaster in Bangladesh, which took the place on 24 April 2013 in Rana Plaza. It was the biggest catastrophe in the history of the textile and apparel industry. The collapse of the eight-storey building was caused by an utter disregard of the law. Long before the disaster there were cracks in the walls, four upper floors of the building were constructed without permission, and huge and heavy generators and air conditioners were located on the top floor. On the day of the catastrophe, the factory workers were frightened to enter the building because they were aware of its bad condition. Their strike was subdued by the supervisors and they had to start their working day because failure to do so would not only mean the loss of the daily salary but could even result in loss of their work. As a result of the catastrophe almost 1,200 workers perished (Rabij, 2016, p. 15).

The examples above show that there is a large number of malpractices in the textile and apparel industry. Exploitation of the environment

is the result of mass production and the desire to maximize profits, and the drive to keep costs to a minimum leads to a deterioration of working conditions and the exploitation of factory workers. This kind of approach obviously does not reflect the concept of CSR.

But despite the many wrong behaviours and examples a lot of positive actions can also be seen, taken by some companies, non-governmental organisations, and also by society or fashion designers. This situation shows that there are many opportunities to ethically improve the impact of the textile and apparel industry on society and the environment.

5. Barriers and challenges of CSR in the textile and apparel industry

The development of ethical standards and their introduction into modern management systems seem to be crucial to constant and sustainable development in general. However, there are many barriers to the implementation of corporate social responsibility in the textile and apparel industry, although there are also some solutions that should be taken to overcome them.

The main obstacle to make the textile and apparel industry more responsible is the geographical distance between the parent company and the place of production of textiles and clothes. To create a socially responsible firm, there is a need to make an impact and cooperate on all levels of the activity of the company. The distance causes the managers to be unable to control the daily conditions of productions and to communicate with all of the stakeholders, in particular with the workers in the factories or other production or transport workers. The trend to relocate the production of apparel and textiles in developing economies is mainly connected with the differences in production costs. The production is being transferred in order to maximize profits, and because of this companies are disincentivised to take care of the salaries and work conditions of workers. The challenge related to this situation is how to increase control and frequent audits in factories located in developing countries. One of the solutions that could be taken would be for the parent company to introduce a code of conduct for producers and suppliers. This could help to supervise the conditions of the work. There is also an opportunity for the development of small local businesses and

for innovative ideas which would make it much easier to control the production, quality of products, and work conditions. Transport contamination could be also limited, and the introduction of innovations in the textile and apparel industry could reduce the negative impact on the environment. Some actions could also be taken with respect to infrastructure and innovations in the process of production, as well as with respect to new and innovative textiles made using environmentally-friendly processes.

However, these solutions raise the issue of another barrier – the cost of implementing CSR activities in companies. In order to introduce social responsibility actions, a company needs to incur costs and involve human resources. Costs connected with CSR can be divided into two basic groups (Elementarz Społecznie Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2014):

- non-recurring costs – category includes qualified investments into the infrastructure needed to produce eco-products, or donations for charity;
- constant costs – for example, regular grants or subsidies for social projects, the fees associated with certification, and also trainings and costs connected with employing new staff members.

Another division of costs is closely connected with the position in the company. It presents costs related to groups of a firm's stakeholders (Wysokińska and Witkowska 2016, p. 159):

- directors – a higher number of briefings and meetings;
- shareholders – increased costs of reporting;
- managers – costs of trainings, a higher number of meetings and reporting;
- workers – costs of trainings, implementation of a policy of respect for human rights, necessity of improving internal communication;
- clients – there is a possibility of a price increase in the short-term;
- contractors and subcontractors – there is a possibility that the costs of supplies will increase in a relatively short time;
- local governments – there is a necessity for their constant cooperation with companies;
- the national government – costs related to enforcing compliance with new regulations;

- the environment (as a silent stakeholder) – increased investment in the control and mitigation of environmental damage.

For some companies the high costs that need to be incurred can become a factor which causes them to abandon the implementation of a CSR strategy in the firm. Especially this is true when the firm faces a crisis and costs need to be limited. It is obvious that in such cases the financial limitation will firstly affect additional costs, and it is quite possible that CSR activities will be considered as additional. Adoption of this attitude is the result of a wrong understanding of the idea of socially responsible management, and overcome this problem seems to be a challenge for any new management.

Another barrier connected with the incorrectly understood concept of corporate social responsibility is the comparison between CSR and public relations (PR). PR is a marketing tool and its aim is to create a positive image of a company and build social trust (Frączek, 2011, p. 116). Identifying CSR as a form of PR can lead firms to engage only in actions that improve the image of the firm, while real CSR takes responsibility at all the levels of the firm. Despite the aforesaid, it is also true that areas of CSR and PR have something in common. The key is good cooperation between the departments responsible for both CSR and PR and a good understanding the idea of socially responsible management and not confusing it with PR.

The growing social awareness also creates demand for environmentally-friendly services and products. Some companies use this trend to build their image and increase sales. They prepare marketing strategies and offers products and services under the banner of ecology, while in reality there is nothing in common between the products and environmental protection. This phenomenon is called greenwashing (Zalejski and Faszczewska, 2012, p. 96), and it would seem to be a large barrier to the development of corporate social responsibility. In the case of greenwashing a company lies and hides some information in order to sell a product and make clients believe that they have spent their money on something which has a lower impact on the environment. CSR should not be used as a gimmick to attract clients. Unfortunately in the case of the textile and apparel industry this is also applied. Companies use a double morality i.e. they follow some CSR rules in the parent company but do not introduce them in the branches in other countries.

6. Conclusions

Nowadays, due to the rapid social and economic changes in the world, there is a need to change the management approach. In particular, attention should be paid to management at the international level. Companies operating in many countries have an impact on a wider group of stakeholders. Given the structure of the textile and apparel industry, this is a particularly sensitive issue. The principles of corporate social responsibility provide an ethical approach to doing business, including dealing with social and environmental needs. On the basis of this study it can be concluded that main challenges and barriers to CSR in the textile and apparel industry are:

- making the textile and apparel industry totally transparent at every level of its activity;
- the geographical distance and lack of the control over production is a barrier to developing CSR;
- respect for human and workers' rights must be implemented;
- the costs of implementing CSR actions;
- the need for education and creating awareness in the managers of the companies, as well as in their customers.
- an innovative approach to the production and supply chain is needed.

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