

## Abstract



### Corporate Social Responsibility in the German Poultry Sector: Analyzing Public Preferences with Adaptive Conjoint Analysis

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## ***Research question***

This paper explores societal responses to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities of firms producing broilers in Germany. The aim of the study is to capture the preferences of the German consumers with regard to various CSR activities implemented by companies in the German broiler industry. The paper provides new insights into the importance of various CSR activities in the food industry as perceived by the wider public.

## ***Theoretical framework***

Empirical research has highlighted a growing gap between public perceptions of livestock farming and consumer preferences (ALBERSMEIER and SPILLER, 2008). In this regard, media have turned out to play an important role in affecting and influencing consumer preferences regarding livestock farming and the focus of societal debates. There are well-described processes through which mass media influence the transformation of isolated events into 'topics' and the development of complex topics into general understandings (KAYSER et al., 2011). Companies are striving to meet the expectations of society, as influenced by the mass media, in order to maintain trust and consumer confidence, justify their corporate actions and assure acceptance by the wider society – in other words, companies aim at safeguarding their future "license to operate" (RÖTTGER and SCHMITT, 2009).

One way to describe companies taking such actions to meet the expectations of the wider society is the concept of CSR. For this study, we refer to the pyramid model of CSR. In this framework, a company is said to take social responsibility when the four levels of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities are met (CARROLL, 1991; HEYDER and THEUVSEN, 2012). Based on an extensive literature review, 24 different CSR activities, six for each area of a firm's responsibility, have been identified. This provides the conceptual framework for the subsequent empirical study of consumer preferences regarding CSR activities in the broiler industry.

## ***Method***

An Adaptive Conjoint Analysis was carried to measure and evaluate consumer preferences. A representative online survey with 250 participants was carried out in February 2013. Univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses (including variance and regression analyses) provide in-depth insights into consumer preferences regarding CSR activities in the broiler industry.

## ***Findings***

The results show that, with regard to the economic, legal and ethical aspects of CSR, consumers most prefer activities that specifically relate to the product and its production processes (i.e., livestock farming). Aspects of CSR management that more generally address business operations or firm employees are less preferred with regard to economic, legal and ethical aspects of CSR. With regard to the philanthropic aspects of CSR, the respondents favour strong commitment to employees as a sign of a firm's commitment to the local population.

## ***References***

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