

Antecedents and Consequences of Multinational Service Ventures' Social Responsibility Engagement with Local Allies: A Focus on Propositional Development

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Abstract

Despite the importance of multinational service ventures' alliances with local firms for CSR engagement, research is little interested in this issue. Because many multinational service ventures have increasingly allied with local firms for their CSR performance, it is important to explain the role of the alliance between a multinational service venture and a local firm. Our study addressed an issue of multinational service ventures' CSR performance through alliances with local firms. Based prominently on the resource-based theory of the firm, the competence-based theory of the firm, and the resource-advantage theory of competition, we attempted to predict how a multinational service venture can be successful in CSR engagement based on an alliance with a local firm. Our study posited that local firms' CSR knowledge and CSR orientation positively influence multinational service ventures's CSR capabilities. In addition, we posited the positive moderating roles of alliance competence in the relationships between local firms' CSR resources and multinational service ventures' CSR capability. Moreover, our study posited that multinational service ventures' CSR capability is a source of competitive advantage. Finally, we concluded this manuscript with a discussion of scholarly and managerial implications, limitations of the study, and directions for a further study.

Keywords: Alliance, Competitive Advantage, Corporate Social Responsibility, Local Firm, Multinational Service Venture

JEL Classifications: F23, M16, M31

I. Introduction

Multinational service ventures have faced internal and external pressures for corporate social responsibility (hereinafter

refer to as CSR) in the sense that they may play an important role in many countries (Aguilera et al., 2007). In response to these pressures, multinational service ventures' social responsibility has become a critical topic in academic areas (Aguilera et al., 2007; Selsky and Parker, 2005).

Although many scholars have studied multinational service ventures' social re-

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sponsibility engagement, some issues have not been clearly addressed. Until recently, research has revealed the strategic role of social responsibility in a service venture (McWilliam, Siegel and Wright, 2006). Nonetheless, this trend of research overlooks the fact that many of multinational service ventures' social responsibility programs are implemented through alliances with local firms.

Despite the importance of alliances with local firms in multinational service ventures' success, researchers have little attended to the roles of these alliances in multinational service ventures' social responsibility engagement. Because multinational service ventures can benefit from working together with local firms, more studies on alliances between these two parties are necessary to explain CSR success (Arya and Salk, 2006). Specifically, it is entirely possible that a local ally's distinctive resources need for a multinational service venture to conduct successful CSR (Sagawa and Segal, 2000; Waddell, 1999; 2002a). Although a multinational service venture and a local firm hold different strategic orientations, collaborative synergies between the two parties can be largely augmented in working for CSR engagement (Smith, 2003; Waddell, 2002b).

The primary purpose of our study is to propose an empirically testable model that displays the roles of a local partner's resources, CSR capability, and alliance competence in a multinational service venture's success. The secondary purpose of our study is to illuminate contributions of the resource-advantage theory of competition (hereinafter refer to as R-A theo-

ry) to multinational service ventures' organizational thinking on success by means of CSR engagement.

We organize this manuscript as follows. In the following chapter, theoretical foundations are presented for multinational service ventures' success on the ground of CSR alliances with local firms. Next, we develop propositions explaining the roles of local allies' resources, CSR capability, and alliance competence in multinational service ventures' success. Finally, we conclude this manuscript with a discussion of scholarly and managerial implications, limitations of the study, and directions for a further study.

II. Theoretical Foundations

This chapter provides a review of three underlying theories: the resource-based theory of the firm, the competence-based theory of the firm, and the R-A theory. This review intends to provide foundations on which our propositions are structured.

1. Resource-based Theory of the Firm

The resource-based theory of the firm advocates that a firm with valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources can achieve a sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Even though multinational service ventures need these resources to succeed in target country-markets, in reality, they should

often fill resource-gaps for achieving a competitive advantage (Harrison et al., 2001). Accordingly, a multinational service venture should develop an alliance with a local firm. Such an alliance enables the two parties to aggregate, share, and/or exchange valuable, rare, inimitable, or non-substitutable resources. Allying with local firms, multinational service ventures can catch an opportunity to gain essential resources that lead to a competitive position in target country-markets (Das and Teng, 2000).

An alliance is a useful vehicle for a multinational service venture to garner values that it cannot easily and quickly obtain in a target country-market. Multinational service ventures can raise the chances of generating synergy when they ally with local firms that possess complementary resources. These resources are little identical but are concurrently supportive of each other (Sarkar et al., 2001). A complementary resource is defined as non-redundant, distinctive competence delivered by each member to the alliance (Varadarajan and Cunnigham, 1995). Because an alliance often helps one party achieve a competitive position by pooling complementary resources, a multinational service venture can develop valuable capabilities, increase efficiency and effectiveness, and obtain a competitive advantage by utilizing a local ally's complementary resources (Harrison et al., 2001; Sarkar et al., 2001). Accordingly, local allies' complementary resources are a critical factor for multinational service ventures to achieve strategic goals.

In addition to complementary re-

sources, idiosyncratic resources can be developed in an alliance between a multinational service venture and a local firm. These resources can be "developed during the life of an alliance, created by combining the respective resources of partners, and unique to the alliance" (Lambe, Spekman and Hunt, 2002, p.143). There may be a synergistic effect whereby a multinational service venture and a local firm create "more value in the integrated condition than the sum of the separate values of the resources with individual firms by integrating resources and developing idiosyncratic resources" (Das and Teng, 2000, p. 49). Accordingly, idiosyncratic resources created with a local firm are a critical factor for multinational service ventures to achieve strategic goals.

2. Competence-based Theory of the Firm

The competence-based theory of the firm provides an explanation of how firms can develop strategies and thus deploy resources effectively and efficiently (Lambe, Spekman and Hunt, 2002). A competence is defined as a firm's organizational capabilities of deploying tangible and intangible entities that enable the firm compete well in the marketplace (Sanchez, Heene and Thomas, 1996). Competences can be the glue through which resources are endowed together and deployed advantageously (Day, 1994).

Multinational service ventures may have many competences that enable them to conduct their value chain activities

well. A firm's distinctive competences often support a competitive position and enable it to coordinate diverse skills and integrate multiple streams (Day, 1994; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990). These distinctive competences have basically three attributes as follows. First, distinctive competences are a critical source of competitive differentiation. Second, distinctive competences may cover the present and future realm of business. Third, because distinctive competences are socially complex and ambiguous, competitors hardly duplicate them (Prahalad, 1993). In addition, because competence permeates the entire organization, they are tacit and uncodified, involve learning by doing, and are accumulated by experience (Hunt, 2000).

Distinctive competences enable multinational service ventures to be simply better than their rivals (Sanchez, Heene and Thomas, 1996). A multinational service venture can possess various competences, some of which is learning competences (Dickson, 1996). Multinational service ventures' competences can be regarded as their resources in the sense that they are socially complex and inter-connected, are either tangible or intangible entities, are available to the multinational service ventures, and allow the ventures to efficiently and effectively produce market offerings that have value for market segments (Hunt, 2000; 2002). A multinational service venture can gain capabilities that enable it to perform activities essential to move its offerings through its value chain (Day, 1994). In addition, competences are higher-order resources (Hunt and Morgan, 1995). If a

multinational service venture is able to combine lower-order resources in a manner that its competitors have a difficulty in precisely duplicating, it possesses a higher-order resource (Hunt, 2000).

3. Resource-Advantage Theory of Competition

The R-A theory deems firms combiners of resources that are heterogeneous and imperfectly mobile (Hunt, 2002). In addition, the R-A theory views competition as a continual struggle among firms that want to gain a comparative advantage in resources that would lead to a competitive advantage in their marketplaces (Hunt, 2010).

According to the R-A theory, a multinational service venture can occupy a position of competitive advantage because of its comparative advantage in resources. Drawing on the level of the relative-produce value of a multinational service venture for market segments and the level of the relative resource-costs for creating the value, the multinational service venture can occupy an advantageous, disadvantageous, and indeterminate position, which may influence its superior, inferior, and indeterminate financial position, respectively (Hunt, 2010).

III. Propositional Development

This chapter present propositions that may explain the relationships among local allies' resources, alliance competence,

CSR capability, and competitive advantage. These propositions depend prominently on the assumption that an alliance between a multinational service venture and a local ally is properly matched.

1. Local Allies' Resources and CSR Capability

From the perspective of a multinational service venture, a local ally's resources can be complementary resources. Multinational service ventures can benefit from successful alliances with local allies when the allies' resources are complementary to the venture (Googins and Rochlin, 2000). A multinational service venture should make a great effort to learn from its local ally, especially when it implements CSR in which it is not yet specialized (Druker, 1989). Accordingly, CSR capability can be an idiosyncratic resource if it is developed through an alliance that enable one party to combine its partner's resources that are respective and unique to the alliance. For multinational service ventures, their local allies' CSR knowledge and CSR orientation are complementary resources in the sense that alliances enable firms to absorb allies' knowledge (Arya and Salk, 2006) and to enhance their social recognition with the help of allies' CSR orientation (Stuart, 2000).

1.1 CSR Knowledge

Organizational knowledge is a critical source of acquiring its competitive advantage and comes from the experience

and expertise of individual persons (Edvinsson and Malone, 1997). Nonetheless, organizations contribute substantially to expanding knowledge in the sense that they may change personal knowledge into an organizational competence by supplying their employees with physical and social programs (Nonaka, 1994). In effect, organizations can be regarded as a social community with a high level of efficiency for creating and/or disseminating knowledge (Kogut and Zander, 1992). Nevertheless, not all types of knowledge can allow organizations to increase performance. New and hard-to-imitate organizational knowledge is crucial in attaining innovation (Teece, 1998).

Although multinational service ventures become aware of the significance of knowledge, they do not possess all types of knowledge they need (Harrison et al., 2001). Multinational service ventures' organizational knowledge can be transmitted within the social networks of employees who are not readily identifiable from the outside. Accordingly, multinational service ventures have difficulty in developing new knowledge alone and/or imitating the knowledge of others (Kogut and Zander, 1992). To overcome this problem, a multinational service venture should develop an alliance with a local firm in order to seek a way to gain valuable knowledge (Das and Teng, 2000) in the sense that inter-organizational relationships can be often regarded as a resource flow between the two parties (Van de Ven, 1976). Through strategic alliance, multinational service ventures can catch a new opportunity to acquire new knowledge from their allies (Eisenhardt

and Schoonhoven, 1996; Harrison et al., 2001). Accordingly, it is pivotal for a multinational service venture to find a local ally with appropriate knowledge when they create an alliance.

With respect to organizational knowledge for strategic alliances, knowledge-based and organizational learning theorists have emphasized the role of an ally's relevant experiences into consideration, too, in the sense that these experiences can be viewed as a proxy for knowledge stocks. Several studies have confirmed a positive relationship between organizational experience and performance (Anand and Khanna, 2000; King and Tucci, 2002). The more alliances a multinational service venture' organizational experience, the fewer difficulties it faces in allying with others (Koka and Prescott, 2002). Moreover, multinational service ventures with many of these experiences are more effective at managing specific processes than less experienced ones than are others (Das and Teng, 2002). Even alliance failure is attributable to a lack of experience (Lei and Slocum, 1992). Allying with local partners that possess significant experiences is important in the sense that multinational service ventures can attain an advantage of local allies' experiences. Accordingly, a multinational service venture can achieve better CSR performance when it learns the skills and capabilities of its local ally that possesses significant knowledge and experiences of CSR engagement (Hitt et al., 2000) and when it integrates the knowledge into its own organizational systems and structures (Inkpen, 1996). Thus, it is posited that:

P1: The local ally's CSR knowledge is positively related to a multinational service venture's CSR capability.

1.2 CSR Orientation

A multinational service venture's CSR capability can be influenced by its local ally's CSR orientation that links customer trust and customer-firm identification. Local firms with a strong CSR orientation often underscore CSR issues in their corporate culture not only because of their top managers' commitment to these issues but also because the issues are highly relevant to their partners' industry (Drumwright, 1994). This orientation gradually becomes fused and internalized within the organizational values and beliefs (Banerjee, Iyer and Kashyap, 2003). Accordingly, local firms with a strong CSR orientation can possess a great awareness of and sensibility toward CSR issues. Moreover, CSR issues tend to either formally or informally play a crucial role through persons acting according to the corporate values (Carter and Jennings, 2004). Furthermore, it is possible that because of increased sensibility toward a multinational service venture's CSR reputation, its local ally's CSR orientation should positively influence the instrumental and expressive mechanism. Therefore, it is posited that:

P2: The local ally's CSR orientation is positively related to a multinational service venture's CSR capability.

2. Alliance Competence and CSR Capability

Multinational service ventures with alliance competence can readily manage alliance resources. A multinational service venture with high levels of experience in alliance management may hold a precise view of the types of its ally's resource combinations that can generate super-normal returns (Dyer and Singh, 1998). Accordingly, alliance competence enables multinational service ventures to combine and synthesize their allies' complementary resources and, over time, to generate idiosyncratic resources (Heimeriks and Duysters, 2007; Jap, 1999). Alliance competence often plays a critical role during the process of alliance, especially in selecting allies, learning from experience, and employing new knowledge into practices that may increase chance of the alliance success (Kale, Dyer and Singh, 2002).

Learning is one factor that can enhance multinational service ventures' performance and competitive advantage (March, 1991). Accordingly, learning capabilities can improve performance (Özsomer and Gençtürk, 2003) and play a crucial role in increasing alliance performance in the sense that multinational service ventures ally with local firms to acquire new knowledge from their allies (Arya and Salk, 2006).

The success of a multinational service venture's CSR program depend deeply on its employee engagement in the sense that employee involvement leads to the venture's commitment to CSR (Brammer

and Millington, 2003; Pedersen, 2006). Multinational service ventures often implement CSR to solve social problems and to provide a good image to their stakeholders (Kotler and Lee, 2005). Multinational service ventures can improve their image by operating CSR programs associated with business activities in the sense that stakeholders can easily connect the image of the ventures' CSR engagement to that of their business activities. Multinational service ventures can benefit from CSR programs if the programs are similar to their business with respect to resource-mobilization, as well.

For multinational service ventures, experience is a critical source of learning (Levitt and March, 1988). A multinational service venture should acquire alliance experience to increase alliance performance in the sense that the more experiences it possesses, the better outcome it achieves (Heimeriks and Duysters, 2007). Alliance experience is essential but is not enough by itself. Multinational service ventures should make efforts to learn from allies, integrate learning and knowledge, and behave on the ground of the lessons in order to achieve great success (Kale, Dyer and Singh, 2002). A multinational service venture can learn through experience (Levitt and March, 1988) and acquire a great probability of success as it experiences many alliances. Accordingly, alliance competence can contribute to the ability for multinational service ventures to generate an idiosyncratic resource, such as CSR capability that cannot be imitated readily by rivals. Thus, it is posited that:

P3: Alliance competence positively moderates the relationship between the local ally's CSR knowledge and a multinational service venture's CSR capability.

P4: Alliance competence positively moderates the relationship between the local ally's CSR orientation and a multinational service venture's CSR capability.

3. CSR Capability and Competitive Advantage

A multinational service venture's competitive advantage can stem from its comparative advantages in resources (Hunt, 2000). Because an alliance can generate idiosyncratic resources (Anderson and Weitz, 1992; Jap, 1999), multinational service ventures' CSR programs created in alliances with local firms can be unique to the alliance, bear little value outside it, and are difficult for rivals to duplicate.

A multinational service venture's CSR program can be a source of a competitive advantage for several reasons. First, multinational service ventures' CSR programs can serve as signals that convey to their customers that the venture are concerned about social issues (Russo and Fouts, 1997). Using a multinational service venture's offerings, its customers may believe that they indirectly justify a cause and reward the venture that devotes resources to CSR. In addition, multinational service ventures' CSR programs may involve a reputation for quality and/or

reliability. In effect, multinational service ventures that actively support CSR are reliable and that their offerings are of high quality. Accordingly, reputation-building can be an integral element of strategy formulation for a multinational service venture (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Weigelt and Camerer, 1988). Second, multinational service ventures' CSR programs may be useful to either create new demand or charge a premium price for a current offering. A multinational service venture's differentiation by exploiting its CSR resources may involve investment in research and development, which lead to CSR-related process and service innovations. In reality, many customers want the offerings they purchase to contain certain socially-responsible attributes and want to know that the offerings they purchase are created in a socially-responsible manner. Third, although capital costs may be higher for multinational service ventures that provide CSR, these costs may not uniformly increase across these ventures. Using capital in the equipment of CSR attributes may lead to a scale of economies as long as capital investment may entail considerable fixed costs. Therefore, it is posited that:

P5: A multinational service venture's CSR capability is positively related to its competitive advantage.

IV. Discussion

Despite the importance of multinational service ventures' alliances with lo-

cal firms for CSR engagement, research is little interested in this issue (Burchell and Cook, 2006). Because many multinational service ventures have increasingly allied with local firms for their CSR programs, it is important to explain the role of the alliance between a multinational service venture and a local firm. Accordingly, our study addressed an issue of multinational service ventures' CSR performance by means of alliances with local firms. Drawing prominently on the resource-based theory of the firm, the competence-based theory of the firm, and the R-A theory, we aimed to predict how a multinational service venture can be successful in CSR engagement based on an alliance with a local firm. Specifically, we identified how local firms' CSR knowledge and CSR orientation influence multinational service ventures's CSR capabilities.

Our study contains interesting scholarly and managerial implications. With respect to scholarly implications, we theoretically integrated the resource-based view, the competence-based view, and the R-A theory into one framework. Specifically, the R-A theory provided a solid basis for a multinational service venture's alliance with a local firm for CSR performance. We believed that our study provided a better understanding of alliances for CSR activities.

Our study also include managerial implications. First, we indicated the importance of local firms' CSR knowledge. Local firms may have distinctive knowledge resources for CSR. Accordingly, if a multinational service venture allies with a local firm that can bring complementary knowledge of CSR, the venture can lever-

age the differences, create synergy, and, thereby, accomplish a competitive advantage through CSR engagement. Second, we suggested that local allies' strong CSR orientation positively influence multinational service ventures' CSR capabilities. Accordingly, in every CSR program, a multinational service venture should determine a local ally in compliance with the venture's CSR strategy. Third, we supported the competence-based perspective of alliance success in the context of intranational business. A multinational service venture that generates an alliance competence may combine its local ally's resources. Accordingly, for a multinational service venture, a competence-based alliance advantage tends to be sustainable over time.

The findings of our study revealed a clear picture on multinational service ventures' CSR activities in two ways. First, our study presented the success of an international alliance in the context of CSR from a view of multinational service ventures. Second, our study proposed what types of local allies' resources are desirable for multinational service ventures' successful CSR engagement.

Our study could be interpreted in light of several limitations of research. First, no empirical tests were performed in our study. Accordingly, a natural step for future research is to determine an adequate research method and empirically test the propositions in our present study. Second, our study included only local firms' CSR knowledge and CSR orientation as complementary resources for multinational service ventures' successful CSR engagement. There may be other types

of complementary resources for CSR the CSR engagement. Future research should consider those resources as researchable subjects. Third, in addition to local allies' CSR knowledge and CSR orientation and alliance competence, other predictors of multinational service ventures' CSR capa-

bilities could be identified. Accordingly, further research is needed to discover different predictors of multinational service ventures' CSR capabilities. Identifying new predictors would also help advance a preliminary mode of our study.

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