Strategic Behaviors in Sustainable Development: The Case of Tunisian Banks

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ABSTRACT

As part of the extension of the recent theoretical work from several sociopolitical approaches such as stakeholder and neo institutional, theory. This paper studies the strategic behavior of banks in sustainable development in the context of the Tunisian banking sector. The main mode of data collection is the questionnaire survey. Using a sample of 20 banks from Tunisia. Employing two different test method; crisscross sorting and scoring. According to the results of neoclassic theory, the authors’ research showed that socially responsible behavior present a response to legal constraints (laws, regulations), normative constraints (professional and industry standards) or cognitive cultural constraints (mimetic behavior). Consequently, banks in the context of reputational risk adhere to these practices, recognized as relevant and appropriate to the expectations of stakeholders. Results released showed that Tunisian banks have an adaptive behavior in SD and on CSR, which affirms the works of Jeucken (2001) (Kolk et al. 2001) and (Peeters 2003) and Serre, Gendron and Ramboarisata (2008).

KEYWORDS

Adaptive Behaviour, Banks, Corporate Social Responsibility, Proactive Behaviour, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

Indeed, some raise the issue of the true purpose of the banks involved in a strategy of sustainable development. However, empirical studies on the social responsibility of financial institutions are limited, recent, and mainly focused on environmentally and socially responsible behavior of financial institutions and their evaluation. Many studies investigate the behavior of banks in sustainable development (De Kolk et al. 2001) and (Peeters 2003), they studied the environmental responsible practices of 250 large multinational companies in the world. Their study was based on the analysis of sustainability reports related to each multinational corporation based on predefined indicators. They revealed that a relationship exists between the direct impact of an industry on the environment and the extent of the environmental publication. There is a difference between financial firms such as banks and insurance companies and other sectors such as mining, chemical, electronics, etc.
The study by Jeucken (2001) was interested in the inventory of activities intended to further the principle of sustainable development, including corporate social disclosure by thirty bank around the world. He evaluated the performance of these institutions on the following dimensions: communication, information, Environmental Finance and social issues. He concluded that most banks adopt adaptive behavior. And they have a little proactive behavior.

In the same way, De Serre, Gendron and Ramboarisata (2008) conducted a study that focuses on six major Canadian banks and four foreign banks considered a leader in the field of CSR for the years 2002 and 2003. This study showed that motivational factors that pushed the banks to adopt responsible practices is especially important regulatory pressure. That is to say it is reactive behavior meet new regulatory requirements. The study also revealed that Canadian banks have not yet fully grasped the opportunity presented by the CSR, their behavior remains adaptive contrast to non-Canadian financial institutions that follow a proactive behaviour.

THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

This article seeks to identify the behavior of banks in sustainable development and corporate social responsibility in the Tunisian context, in this meaning, we seek to verifying if banks consider the commitment in the policy of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility as a constraint or an opportunity, i.e. they adapt a proactive or adaptive behavior.

To solve this issue, we put the following assumptions.

**H1:** the commitment of banks in sustainable development policy by means of the corporate social responsibility is a proactive approach and present:
- An awareness of the necessity of taking into account social and environmental factors.
- A competitive edge and a differentiating factor.
- A means of communication and publicity of the citizenship of banks.

**H2:** the commitment of banks in sustainable development policy by means of the corporate social responsibility Is an adaptive approach and present:
- A set of legal obligations
- A process required by all stakeholders
- A way to preserve the reputation

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Our study focuses behavior of Tunisian banks in SD and CSR. We chose as their primary mode of data collection the questionnaire survey. These results were treated by the methods of simple sorting and crisscross sorting. In a second step, given the absence of reports of sustainable development for Tunisian banks, and in order to verify the results of the questionnaire survey, we used namely the reference documents and press releases on responsible business practices and were treated using the method of scoring.

**The Questionnaire Survey**

The questionnaire prepared consists of eight pages and includes four main parts:

- The first part was devoted to general information about the bank and the interviewee.
- The second part was used to assess the level of knowledge of SD and CSR by banks.
- The third part was used to study the degree of awareness of Tunisian banks of their social and environmental responsibilities and their role in sustainable development.
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