
A Study on the Relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility Strategic Process and Operational Performance of Multinational Manufacturing Enterprises under the Perspective of Environmental Management

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Abstract

Under the effects of economic globalization and environmental protection & social problems in the post-crisis era, the corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy and activities are gradually emphasized in multinational manufacturing enterprises. Accordingly, the theoretical relationship among CSR strategy, CSR activities, and operational performance is proposed in this study, and the moderation effect of external environmental management on the relationship is further discussed. Based on the survey data of 598 manufacturing enterprises from 22 countries and regions for 2013 International Manufacturing Strategy Survey (IMSS VI), the empirical research results reveal (1) significantly positive effects of CSR strategy on internal CSR activities and external CSR activities of multinational manufacturing enterprises, (2) remarkably positive effects of internal CSR activities and external CSR activities on efficient performance, flexible performance, and cost performance in the operational performance of multinational manufacturing enterprises, and (3) partially notable moderation of external environmental management on the relationship between CSR activities and operational performance of multinational manufacturing enterprises. On one hand, this study expands the theoretical research on corporate social responsibility; on the other hand, it presents certain practice value of the formulation and practice of CSR strategy in multinational manufacturing enterprises.

Keywords: environmental management, corporate social responsibility strategy, corporate social responsibility activities, operational performance, multinational manufacturing enterprises

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INTRODUCTION

Under the effects of economic globalization and social problems (e.g. environmental pollution, labor dispute, product safety, and public pressure) in the post-crisis era, multinational manufacturing enterprises have to concern about the generation and fulfillment of economic performance from the perspective of globalization as well as cope with the high requirements for CSR strategy and activities in the globally rising environmental impact and social pressure from environmental protection. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy and activities therefore are gradually emphasized in multinational manufacturing enterprises (Aksak et al. 2016, Cetindamar and Husoy 2007, Wu et al. 2016).

As a matter of fact, corporate social responsibility has been the concern in academia and industry since the proposal. Researchers studied the relationship between corporate social responsibility and corporate performance but generated mutually opposite theoretical points of view and empirical research results. For instance, some researchers regarded the significant effect of CSR behavior on financial performance of enterprises; other researchers pointed out the remarkably negative effect of CSR behavior on financial performance of enterprises; and, the other researchers considered that CSR behavior would not notably affect financial performance of enterprises. On one hand, it explained that the relationship between CSR activities and financial performance required deeper study. On the other hand, it revealed that there might be other factors, which were ignored in much researcher, in the

relationship between CSR activities and financial performance (Famiyeh 2017, Frynas and Yamahaki 2016, Guillamonsaorin et al. 2018).

Meanwhile, in the strategic decision making process, multinational manufacturing enterprises would follow the “competition strategy-manufacturing practice-operational performance” process. However, most research on corporate social responsibility focused on the chain of “CSR activities-corporate performance” but did not show necessary concerns about competition strategy and operational performance. In this case, the strategic decision making process is followed to study the chain relationship of “CSR strategy-CSR activities-operational performance” in this study. Meanwhile, since CSR strategy is generated from an enterprise responding to environmental management, the effect of environmental management on the relationship between CSR practice and operational performance of multinational manufacturing enterprises in the situation with distinct environmental impact is discussed in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW, RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS

Definition of Corporate Social Responsibility

There is not a consistent idea about the original definition of corporate social responsibility. The idea, in existing literatures, could be traced back to 1920s (Sheldon 1924), but was really concerned in early 1950s. The definition of corporate social responsibility focused on an enterprise, being the composition of the social system, concerning about social responsibility, in addition to the economic benefits (Wartick and Cochran 1985). Nevertheless, as the importance of corporate social responsibility for industry and academia stopped at the stage of “the necessity to induce emphasis”, it was defined as businessmen responding to relevant policies, regulations, and environmental impact, according to social goal and value, and taking specific actions. Carroll’s (1979) definition concluded the argument about the definition of corporate social responsibility and was supported and proven after a long period.

With constantly increasing importance of corporate social responsibility, researchers gradually realized that corporate social responsibility was a primary factor in competition advantage. Doane (2005) defined corporate social responsibility as the obligation of an enterprise to all stakeholders in the business activity. Laczniak & Murphy (2006) indicated that a lot of enterprises started to stress on the importance of social responsibility to

enterprise development and include it into the corporate performance evaluation system. In this case, research on the effect of corporate social responsibility on financial performance, since 1990s, has become the mainstream. Meanwhile, the dimensions of corporate social responsibility have been proposed, including the mainstream categories of economy, society, law, and morale. Nonetheless, a lot of such definitions are viewed from corporate strategy.

Corporate social responsibility is defined in this study as a multinational manufacturing enterprise’s obligation to all stakeholders in the manufacturing process. CSR strategy, in the competition level, mainly intends to realize the environmental protection and social responsibility of enterprises. Regarding specific CSR activities, Maignan and Ferrell (2003) constructed a CSR practice frame and considered that CSR practice contained various activities, such as prohibition of employment discrimination, practice of behavior criteria, and sponsor for communities and schools. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) also specifically divided social responsibility practice into community participation, employee support, diversity, product manufacturing, and environmental protection. Referring to such CSR practice, it is considered in this study that CSR practice of multinational manufacturing enterprises could be divided into internal CSR activities and external CSR activities. Internal CSR activities refer to the responsibility of internal shareholders and employees of an enterprise, e.g. creation of profits for shareholders, provision of safe working environment for employees, training of employees, and fair labor contracts with employees. External CSR activities refer to the responsibility of an enterprise for other external stakeholders, including consumers, suppliers, governmental sectors, and local communities. Specifically speaking, it should provide qualified products and services for consumers, keep the promise to suppliers, complete governmental tax payment, sponsor communities, and protect environment.

Theoretical Analysis of Multinational Manufacturing Enterprises’ CSR Strategic Process

Hart (1995) first included corporate social responsibility in strategy management and regarded it as a key dimension of competition strategy. He considered that, under the continuous emphasis on environmental protection, CSR content should be taken into account for the expansion with resource-based view. He therefore proposed to include strategic CSR management into resource-based view. Sharma and

Vredenburg (1998) further expanded Hart's (1995) theory and facilitated social responsibility strategy as a critical research item in strategy management. Following such a concept, CSR strategy of multinational manufacturing enterprises should be analyzed from strategy and competency. Referring to the strategy operation model proposed by Schroeder (1986), CSR strategy of multinational manufacturing enterprises in this study is analyzed following the chain of "CSR strategy-CSR activities-operational performance". Nath & Sudharshan (1994) encouraged researchers studying corporate environment, organizational structure, competitive strategy, and the consistency between competitive strategy and competency strategy. Whipp and Rosenfeld (1989) discovered that the consistency between strategy and operation was obvious in successful enterprises. It conformed to the research result of Smith and Reece (1999), who considered that an enterprise should acquire continuous competitive advantage by the integration of competitive strategy and competency strategy. Such studies provided reliable proofs that organizations with consistent, connected, and mutual support of strategy in various levels and strategy priority would present better performance than others. In fact, strategy consistency in CSR strategy also induced researchers' emphasis. De Jong and Van der Meer (2017) and Yuen, Thai and Wong (2017) indicated that CSR activities should be consistent with CSR strategy for better operational performance. Meanwhile, according to traditional top-down strategy, CSR strategy would remarkably affect CSR activities.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study.

H1: CSR strategy shows notably positive effects on CSR activities of multinational manufacturing enterprises.

Research on the relationship between CSR activities and performance mostly focused on the effect of corporate social responsibility on financial performance. For instance, Chen and Wang (2011), Yu and Choi (2014), DiSegni et al. (2015), and Famiyeh (2017) regarded the notably positive relationship between CSR activities and financial performance that enterprises positively supporting and practicing CSR strategy acquired significantly higher profits than other enterprises in the same trade. However, the research objects contained all enterprises, specifically multinational manufacturing enterprises; corporate social responsibility not only could remarkably enhance

financial performance of enterprises, but could also affect the operational performance of cost, efficiency, quality, and delivery. According to stakeholder theory and resource-based view, Famiyeh (2017) indicated that including CSR activities into the strategy practice of an enterprise could enhance the competitiveness, promote the operation capability, and improve the corporate performance. Vilanova et al. (2009) also discovered that CSR activities could improve internal and external organizational image and reputation and reinforce the operation capability and competitive advantage through the promotion of organizational value and process change.

Smith and Higgins (2000) considered that the practice of CSR activities in multinational manufacturing enterprises could have customers pay higher prices for products and services. Porter and Kramer (2006) indicated that multinational manufacturing enterprises could acquire more positive customer feedback and behavior through CSR activities of more effective and environmental-protection application of energy and materials, higher employee encouragement, and entering new segmentation market, e.g. "green" consumers. Representative (2008) stated that CSR activities could remarkably enhance operational performance of cost reduction, customer relationship, employee satisfaction, and innovation ability. From the viewpoint of external CSR activities, manufacturing enterprises with CSR strategy practice tended to practice higher standard of external CSR activities, such as stricter quality and environmental protection control to suppliers and recall of defective products or those with excessive pollution. Such activities would reduce the risks of the enterprise being blamed by the government or environmental protection organizations and paying fine.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study.

H2: CSR activities reveal notably positive effects on operational performance of multinational manufacturing enterprises.

H2a: Internal CSR activities appear significantly positive effects on operational performance of multinational manufacturing enterprises.

H2b: External CSR activities present remarkably positive effects on operational performance of multinational manufacturing enterprises.

Theoretical Analysis of Effects of External Environmental Management on Multinational Manufacturing Enterprises' CSR Strategy Process

In regard to the effect of external environmental management on CSR strategy of multinational manufacturing enterprises, researchers mainly preceded analyses based on legitimacy. According to legitimacy, the motivation of an enterprise practicing corporate social responsibility was the positive response to external environmental management. Such positive response allowed the enterprise being supported by stakeholders for rapid development. An enterprise had to concern about corporate social responsibility in order to survive and develop in the social system. For this reason, multinational manufacturing enterprises, under the impact of external environmental management, should legally use various resources under the frame of legal policies, e.g. provision of safe and non-pollution products and services, legal employment of employees, and production process conforming to environmental protection standards. Multinational manufacturing enterprises might appear external environmental management when stakeholders regarded the operation process not conforming to the expectation and being able to damage the profits. Current external environmental management in CSR strategy and activities focus on environmental impact and public pressure.

Effects of environmental management on the relationship between CSR strategy and CSR activities

Cho et al. (2007) considered that external environmental management of enterprises was generated from political groups, communities, and the public and would generate distinct CSR strategy and activities. Waddock and Graves (1997) stated that public pressure came from cultural, legal, and political environment and such external environmental factors would facilitate enterprises making CSR strategy and practicing CSR activities. The research on CSR strategy of enterprises and the practice of CSR activities after Exxon Valdez oil spill revealed the significant enhancement of CSR strategy of enterprises and the practice of CSR activities. As a result, larger external environmental management impact would appear when external stakeholders of multinational manufacturing enterprises paid more attention to the behavior and presented higher expectation to corporate social responsibility. In this case, multinational manufacturing enterprises should more positively and strictly make CSR strategy and practice CSR activities in order to

conform to public expectation and maintain the legitimacy. When external stakeholders paid less attention to the behavior of enterprises and showed lower expectation to corporate social responsibility, the relationship between CSR strategy making and CSR activities would be weaker due to less external environmental management impact. In such a situation, the legitimacy of enterprises could be maintained and the operation goal could be fulfilled (Lindblom, 1994; Patten, 2002). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study.

H3: When multinational manufacturing enterprises receive larger external environmental management impact, the effect of CSR strategy on CSR activities notably increases, comparing to those with less external environmental management impact. In this case, environmental management shows remarkable moderation on the relationship between CSR strategy and CSR activities.

Effects of external environmental management on the relationship between CSR activities and operational performance

In regard to the effect of external environmental management on the relationship between CSR activities and operational performance, an enterprise with external environmental management pressure impact would positively and actively practice CSR activities to enhance stakeholders', e.g. investors and suppliers, understanding of the enterprise and improve the relationship between the enterprise and such stakeholders to affect the operational performance of flexible performance, cost performance, and efficient performance. On the other hand, it could enhance the image of enterprise in consumers' mind, increase the reputation and customer satisfaction, and further promote operational performance. Meanwhile, multinational manufacturing enterprises, under larger external environmental management, would more positively and actively practice CSR activities in order to cope with external environmental management and maintain the legitimacy to further affect the operational performance. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study.

H4: Multinational manufacturing enterprises with larger external environmental management impact would notably increase the effect of CSR activities on operational performance, in comparison with those with less external environmental management impact.

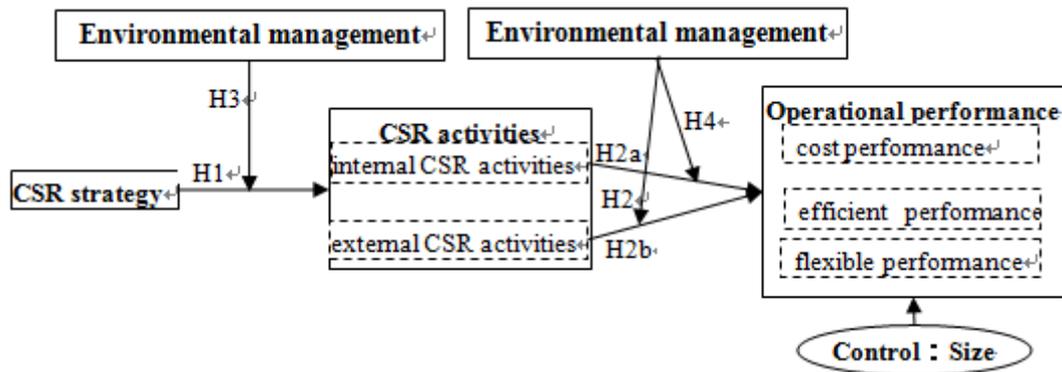


Fig. 1. The relationships of the proposed hypotheses

Environmental management therefore appears significant moderation on the relationship between CSR activities and operational performance.

Control Variable

In the research on the factors in operational performance, other variables, such as organisation size (Cheng et al. 2016, Swink et al. 2007) might result in effects. For this reason, organisation size is regarded as a control variable in the theoretical model.

Theoretical Model

According to the relationship among external environmental management, CSR strategy, CSR activities, and operational performance of multinational manufacturing enterprises to propose the research hypotheses, the final theoretical model is shown in Fig. 1.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Survey

The data used in this study were acquired from the sixth version of International Manufacturing Strategy Survey (IMSS VI). The survey about the development of manufacturing enterprises in the three years by 2012 was preceded from June 2013 to June 2014. The complete survey data were announced in September 2014. The surveyed manufacturing enterprises were covered in International Standard Industry Code 25-30 (ISIC 25-30) with the employees more than 50.

An originally English-written questionnaire should be translated into native language by researchers in the field, for the survey in other countries, and then translated into English by different researchers for the comparison. It aims to ensure the content consistency of the questionnaire in different countries.

According to the research objective, 598 multinational manufacturing enterprises are selected from 931 manufacturing enterprises from 22 countries. Meanwhile, the sampled enterprises are mainly in the machine manufacturing and distributed in 6 industries.

Variable Measurement

The variables in this study are measured through items responding to IMSS VI. Each item is measured with Likert 5-point scale.

Referring to Lyon and Maxwell (2007) and Kumar et al. (2018), external environmental management impact of multinational manufacturing enterprises is mainly measured for the degree of external environmental management pressure faced by enterprises. With Likert 5-point scale, the higher score reveals the larger external environmental management pressure.

Referring to Ward et al. (2010) and Vachon, Halley and Beaulieu (2013), the importance of environmental friendliness, social development and welfare, and safer and healthier process, when multinational manufacturing enterprises win orders from customers in the three years, is measured for the CSR strategy. Similarly, the higher score in the Likert 5-point scale shows the higher importance.

Referring to DiSegni et al. (2015) and Famiyeh (2017), the practice of internal and external CSR activities (e.g. internal practice of environmental certificate, social certificate, reduction of energy consumption activities, reduction of pollutant emission and recycle activity, and work-life balance policy; external practice of environmental and social certificate of suppliers, corporate social responsibility training for employees of suppliers, and cooperation with suppliers for sustainability) of multinational manufacturing enterprises in the three years is measured for the CSR activities. With Likert 5-point scale, the higher score

Table 1. Regression coefficients

Independent variable	Dependent variable				
	Step1a	Step1b	Step2a	Step2b	Step2c
	Internal CSR activities	External CSR activities	Efficient performance	Flexible performance	Cost performance
Control variable					
organisation size	.0187***	0.182***	-0.069	-0.049	-0.018
Independent variable					
CSR strategy	0.418***	0.554***			
internal CSR activities			0.209***	0.175**	0.121*
external CSR activities			0.300***	0.147*	0.183**

Note: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001

presents the higher application of such activities in the enterprise.

Referring to Samson and Terziovski (2017), the improvement of operational performance of manufacturing enterprises, comparing to the three years, (including cost, quality, delivery, innovation, service, flexibility, and environmental protection) is measured for the operational performance. Moreover, in consideration of different improvement directions of cost and efficiency, operational performance is divided into efficient performance and cost performance. With Likert 5-point scale, the higher score of efficient performance shows the better performance improvement, and the higher score of cost performance reveals the better cost reduction.

To ensure the contextual validity of the research result, organisation size, as a control variable, is included in the model. Referring to Peng et al. (2013), the logarithm of the number of total employees of a manufacturing enterprise is used for measurement of organisation size.

Reliability and Validity Test

Cronbach’s α is used for measuring the reliability of variables. The reliability test result through SPSS19.0 reveals the reliability of environmental management, CSR strategy, CSR activities, and operational performance being 0.750, 0.842, 0.911, and 0.906, respectively, conforming to the basic reliability requirement.

Exploratory factor analysis is applied to test the data validity. Common factors with the cumulative variance rate not less than 40% and the factor loading higher than 0.5, showing the achievement of basic validity requirement, are extracted. The exploratory factor analysis, through SPSS19.0, reveals the validity conforming to the basic requirement.

RESULTS

Regarding the construction of theoretical model and questionnaire survey, regression analysis is used for testing the theoretical hypotheses. In the regression analysis process, stepwise regression analysis is first applied to test the relationship among CSR strategy, CSR activities, and operational performance.

The regression analysis result, **Table 1**, shows notably positive effect of CSR strategy on internal CSR activities and external CSR activities of multinational manufacturing enterprises that H1 is proven. Furthermore, internal CSR activities and external CSR activities of multinational manufacturing enterprises present significantly positive effects on cost performance, flexible performance, and efficient performance in operational performance that H2 is proven.

To test H3 and H4, external environmental management is regarded as a moderator in the regression equation to test the moderation. The steps are shown in **Table 2 & 3**.

The research results in **Table 2 & 3** do not show moderation of external environmental management on the relationship between CSR strategy and CSR activities that H3 is refused. Meanwhile, external environmental management appears remarkably positive moderation on the relationship between CSR activities and efficient performance, while no moderation on the relationship between CSR activities and flexible performance, and notably negative moderation on the relationship between CSR activities and cost performance. H4 is therefore partially proven.

Table 2. Test result of moderation effect of external environmental management on the relationship between CSR strategy and CSR activities

Step	Variable	Dependent variable-Internal CSR activities			Dependent variable-External CSR activities		
		equation 1	equation 2	equation 3	equation 1	equation 2	equation 3
1	control variable						
	organisation size	0.190***	0.173***	0.174***	0.144***	0.135***	0.136***
	argument						
	CSR strategy	0.414***	0.342***	0.333***	0.523***	0.483***	0.474***
2	moderator						
	external environmental management		0.158***	0.154***		0.087*	0.084*
3	external environmental management*CSR strategy			-0.044			-0.045
	R ²	0.223	0.241	0.241	0.309	0.313	0.314
	ΔR ²	0.222	0.019	0.002	0.309	0.004	0.001
	Sig. of R ²	0.000	0.000	0.254	0.000	0.030	0.215

Note: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 3. Test result of moderation effect of external pressure on the relationship between CSR activities and operational performance

Step	Variable	Dependent variable-Efficient performance			Dependent variable-Flexible performance			Dependent variable-Cost performance		
		step1	step2	step3	step1	step2	step3	step1	step2	step3
1	control variable									
	organisation size	-0.063	-0.070	-0.085	-0.045	-0.054	-0.055	-0.017	-0.016	-0.011
	argument									
	internal CSR activities	0.208***	0.194***	0.204***	0.173***	0.152***	0.157***	0.120*	0.125*	0.122*
2	external CSR activities	0.294***	0.282***	0.268***	0.141***	0.126***	0.125***	0.177**	0.180**	0.158**
	moderator									
3	external environmental management		-0.063	-0.074		0.093*	0.096*		-0.021	-0.011
	external environmental management*internal CSR activities			-0.107			0.000			-0.177**
	external environmental management*external CSR activities			0.125*			0.029			0.073
	R ²	0.202	0.203	0.208	0.075	0.080	0.078	0.068	0.067	0.080
	ΔR ²	0.202	0.001	0.005	0.080	0.007	0.001	0.068	0.001	0.013
	Sig. of R ²	0.000	0.142	0.090	0.000	0.041	0.799	0.000	0.650	0.009

Note: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Under the perspective of environmental management, the relationship among CSR strategy, CSR activities, and operational performance of multinational manufacturing enterprises is analyzed and studied. The empirical research results reveal that

(1) CSR strategy presents significantly positive effects on both internal CSR activities and external CSR activities of multinational manufacturing enterprises to prove H1. On the other hand, it shows the consistent research result in the field of strategy (Malshe et al. 2017, Srivastava et al. 2017). It explains that multinational manufacturing enterprises, when encountering environmental management impact, should stress on the formulation and practice of CSR strategy to better cope with environmental management impact and cultivate core competitive advantage.

(2) Internal CSR activities and external CSR activities of multinational manufacturing enterprises show remarkably positive effects on efficient performance, flexible performance, and cost performance in operational performance to prove H2. Besides, it also reveals consistent research result with the relationship between CSR activities and operational performance in the field of corporate social responsibility (Famiyeh 2017, Vilanova et al. 2009). It explains the important function of internal and external CSR activities on operational performance of multinational manufacturing enterprises.

(3) External environmental management does not appear notable moderation on the relationship between CSR strategy and CSR activities of multinational manufacturing enterprises. The research result refuses H3, mainly because CSR strategy is actually the response of multinational manufacturing enterprises to

market environment and CSR activities would change with CSR strategy. The relationship reflects the consistency of internal strategy of manufacturing enterprises, but would not change with external environmental management. H3 is therefore not proven.

(4) External environmental management shows partially significant moderation on the relationship between CSR activities and operational performance in global manufacturing enterprises to prove H4. Besides, the moderation of external environmental management on the relationship between CSR activities and operational performance is not exactly the same. Specifically speaking, external environmental management reveals remarkably positive moderation on the relationship between CSR activities and efficient performance, but no moderation on the relationship between CSR activities and flexible performance, and notably negative moderation on the relationship between CSR activities and cost performance. Such research results explain that the larger environmental management impact would present larger effect of the practice of CSR activities on the efficiency of manufacturing system. On the other hand, it also explains that, under large external environmental management impact, the effect of CSR activities on cost performance would be weakened due to the key practice and large amount of costs. The result is consistent with the research field of corporate social responsibility (Famiyeh 2017).

This study expands the research on corporate social responsibility and presents certain practice value of the formulation and practice of CSR strategy in

multinational manufacturing enterprise. In the practice of corporate social responsibility in multinational manufacturing enterprises, multinational manufacturing enterprises, according to the research results, should (1) stress on CSR strategy making and CSR activities practice, which are consistent, (2) concern about external CSR activities and internal CSR activities, which could notably enhance operational performance, and (3) precede scientific evaluation of external environmental management impact, especially environmental impact and social impact and invest organization resources in the practice of CSR activities according to situations, especially under the situation with large environmental management impact, as the effect of CSR activities on cost performance would be weakened under the situation.

This study shows the following limitations. (1) This study focuses on corporate social responsibility of multinational manufacturing enterprises, while other types of manufacturing enterprises are not involved. (2) This study merely stresses on operational performance of multinational manufacturing enterprises, but not financial performance and strategy performance. Such points would be further discussed in the future research.

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