Motivations for Corporate Social and Environmental Reporting: New Zealand Evidence

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Purpose:
This paper investigates corporate motivations for voluntarily reporting social and environmental information in New Zealand. The extant literature provides numerous theories to explain why companies report social and environmental information. This paper contributes further evidence to the ongoing debate about which theory explains social and environmental disclosures.

Approach
Using an approach inspired by Wilmhurst and Frost (2000), a survey is used and then extended to match corporate survey responses with content analysis results of actual company reporting. The results of the survey and the content analysis are examined both individually and collectively to gather more context for corporate motivations.

Findings
The survey results reveal that New Zealand companies are generally new reporters of social and environmental information with under-developed and under-utilized systems for processing and recording this information. Typically they do not rely on the guidance of reporting frameworks to structure their sustainability reporting and they do not have this information assured. The driving force for a sustainability agenda within these companies is usually a member of senior management. Community concerns and shareholder rights are the most important factors that influence the companies’ decision to report. The content analysis of sustainability reports reveals that there is a varying level of commitment to sustainability reporting. A comparative analysis reveals that reporters do not typically report consistent with what they say is important to their decision to report. Overall the results suggest that accountability is not the reason why companies voluntarily report social and environmental information.

Research Implications
For researchers the value is in further revising analysis techniques and expanding existing research methods used in this area. The study brings together important CSR topics from across the literature, including reporting levels and characteristics, internal CSR systems, CSR assurance and stakeholder engagement to.
**Social Implications**
The implications of this research for the wider New Zealand society is that it offers perspectives on the current state of CSR reporting. The results suggest that the current poor quality of reports and internal systems that produce reports, indicate that users of the reports must approach the disclosures with caution and cannot yet confidently rely on reports to comprehensively disclose company performance and impacts.

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