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Restriction or Impetus? An Empirical Study of Entrepreneurial Social Responsibility of SMEs in Western China

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Abstract

When it comes to strategic management, corporate social responsibility has been playing an increasingly important role in recent years. The fulfillment of social responsibilities helps maintain good social network and adds value to enterprises, but also incurs high cost and distracts management. Those prior findings were mainly based on the study of mature enterprises, while researches based on small and medium sized enterprises(SMEs) are relatively less. This paper, using hierarchical regression analysis, finds the relationship between social responsibility fulfillment of SMEs and their entrepreneurial performance. Data from 200 employees of SMEs in western China suggest that social responsibility fulfillment of SMEs has positive effect on entrepreneurial performance. Further, different types of responsibilities influence the entrepreneurial performance to varying degrees. The findings from this study provide several suggestions for SMEs in western China to cope with their social responsibility appropriately.

Keywords: Small and Medium Sized Enterprises; Corporate Social Responsibility; Entrepreneurial Performance

1 INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility has always been a key issue, especially in the study of enterprise development strategy. The impact of social responsibility undertaken by enterprises in the process of development upon enterprise growth has become the focus of scholars. Enterprises that can base themselves on the market for a long time will necessarily display enough social responsibility consciousness. Therefore, SMEs must properly handle the role of social responsibility in the enterprise strategic planning if they want to continue business. At present, the academic circles at home and abroad mostly focus on the study of corporate social responsibility of the mature enterprises, while the research on corporate social responsibility of SMEs is less. Now that the state encourages entrepreneurship, the number of SMEs is increasing day by day. Thus, the study of social responsibility is of great significance for extending the life expectancy of enterprises. Meanwhile, it also has important research value for the development of both the enterprises group and social economy. For the entrepreneurs themselves, it is also necessary for them to set up correct view of social responsibility, grasp right entrepreneurial opportunity, and promote enterprise success through the full development of enterprises.

Due to restrictions, such as scale, SMEs often need to concentrate all the resources and ability available to themselves into the core business activities, such as product market positioning, product manufacturing, etc. (Barringer and Greening, 1998). Among the restrictions, SMEs are especially sensitive to the social responsibility related issues. The small enterprises operated by family and friends have to bear the risks/rewards by themselves. Different from large enterprises, their relationship with the local institutions are often more direct and close (Mariolina Longo, 2005). In addition, as SMEs enter the market shortly, it is difficult for them to grasp the market size, price elasticity, the characteristics of the potential competitors, and other important information (He Wei, 2009). As the independent entrepreneurial SMEs lack resources, they should avoid competing with the enterprises directly, and adopt differentiation strategy (Qu Yanjun, Lin Song, Zhang Wei, 2010). But in the west region of China with

underdeveloped economy, vast territory, many ethnic groups and more restrictions on natural environment and resources, what kind of social responsibility the SMEs need to undertake and how the performance of social responsibility will affect the enterprises, are inevitably different with the case of SMEs in the ordinary sense. The study of these enterprises is beneficial to the formulation of the relevant policies by the state to support entrepreneurship, and stimulate the western economic development. Considering the poorer entrepreneurial atmosphere and conditions in western China, SMEs in western China are selected as the research object.

2 THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Theoretical Background

Since 1920s, many scholars from different fields in the western countries have conducted deep research into the corporate social responsibility theory from different perspectives. Enterprises should make corresponding contributions to social welfare in the realization of their own interests. Social responsibility means that policymakers also have a duty to take measures to protect and improve social welfare while considering their own interests (Keith Davis and Robert L. Blomstrom, 1975). The gold tower model of social responsibility suggests that corporate social responsibility is society's economic, legal, moral and charity expectations of enterprises in a certain historical period (Archie B. Carroll, 1979). By the 1990s, the domestic scholars have also carried out the corresponding research of corporate social responsibility by combining with the actual situation of China while beginning to bring in the related research results abroad. A formal definition of corporate social responsibility recognized universally is as follows: while creating profits and taking responsibility for the shareholders' interests, an enterprise should also undertake responsibility to its employees, society and environment, including abiding by business ethics, employee health, production safety, and rights of laborers (Wang Maolin, 2005). The concept of corporate social responsibility can be illustrated from three various levels. In the narrow sense, it refers to the legal liability and economic responsibility undertaken by the enterprises in the operating process (Deng Jian and Ren Wenju, 2005). From the medium level, the interests of stakeholders should also be considered. In the broad sense, it refers to all the responsibilities and ethical behavior that shall be and can be undertaken by the enterprises in the process of operation. To sum up, the views of the Chinese and foreign scholars as to the measurement of social responsibility are mainly divided into two schools, with one in favor of evaluation from the four levels of economic, legal, moral and charity expectations, another considering it more reliable to evaluate corporate social responsibility fulfillment from the perspective of the stakeholders.

It is of great significance for the evaluation of the development of SMEs to study their growth performance. By developing the calibration algorithm recurrently selected by entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurs can further correct management strategy and promote the enterprise's growth performance by constantly updating knowledge and analyzing the cause of the failures (Minniti, 2001). The enterprise leadership behavior's impact on enterprise performance is influenced by the enterprise developing stage (Ensley, 2006). The related evaluation index system of the small and medium-sized listed enterprises had been modified and a new model of using Grey correlation Analysis method for evaluation had been put forward (Chen Xiaohong, She Jian and Zou Xiangjuan, 2005). Establishing the financial evaluation index system of enterprise growth ability is a sound choice, including corporate earnings growth, income stability, cost control level, capital integrity and preservation, expansion potential and capital operation efficiency (Zhang Bingkun, 1998). As a whole, the academia have focused on the enterprise financial performance in the enterprise operation performance evaluation for a long time and often consider profit margins and sales as the main indicators for evaluating the enterprise growth, while ignoring the importance of innovation for enterprise growth. There is also lack of measurement index development of enterprise's innovation and growth performance.

For the relationship between social responsibility and entrepreneurial performance, there are extensive study at home and abroad. Most of the existing research thinks that social responsibility that SMEs can fulfill is limited, and excessive social responsibility fulfillment will exert negative influence upon the enterprise operating performance. In order to create enterprise value through the implementation of corporate social responsibility, an enterprise needs to integrate social and environmental features into the product features (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001). Product

development like this often needs a lot of resources. Usually, the implementation of social responsibility costs are high (Brammer and Millingto, 2008). SMEs cannot be mentioned in the same breath with the mature enterprises with relatively rich resources (Peng Huatao, 2006). As they will inevitably face such problems as lack of entrepreneurship resources and entrepreneurial environment uncertainty in the growth process, the investment they can make for corporate social responsibility is limited. Compared with moral responsibility and public welfare activities, SMEs pay more attention to the economic responsibility and legal liability (Yang Xiaojuan and He Zhaohui, 2010).

However, many domestic and foreign researchers think that the implementation of social responsibility by SMEs helps increase their competitive strength and improve entrepreneurial performance. Stinchcombe (1965) argues that SMEs lack popularity and acceptability, and cooperation relationship with other influential organizations. Besides, the outside world also lacks understanding of SMEs. Enterprises can seize the opportunity to improve relations with stakeholders by performing social responsibility, obtain economic returns from their influence by relying on a good relationship with the stakeholders (Barnett, 2007). Compared with mature enterprises, SMEs are at a disadvantage in terms of brand reputation (Tian Maoli, 2007). Thus, it will change the stakeholders' understanding of SMEs if these enterprises can undertake social responsibility and remedy their disadvantages in the competition in such aspects as brand reputation.

2.2 Hypothesis and Research Model

Based on the existing research, plus the scarce entrepreneurship resources in the western region of China, this paper argues that it is necessary to verify the relationship between CSR and entrepreneurial performance of the western SMEs. This research adopts Duygu Turker's (2009) point of view, and carries out dimensional classification of social responsibility of SMEs from the aspects of the following six stakeholders: employees, customers, government, natural environment, future generations and NGO. In terms of entrepreneurial performance, the viewpoint of Tian Xiaoming, Jiang Qinfeng and Wang Chongming (2008) is adopted, and the operation performance of SMEs is more comprehensively evaluated from the three aspects: financial performance, innovation performance and growth performance. Table 1 shows the measures, their components and sources.

TABLE 1 THE MEASURES IN THE MODEL

Measure	Component	Source
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Employee	Duygu Turker (2009)
	Customer	
	Government	
	Nature Environment	
	Future Generation	
	NGO	
Entrepreneurial Performance	Financial performance	Tian Xiaoming, Jiang Qinfeng and Wang Chongming (2008)
	Innovative performance	
	Growth performance	

This research put its efforts on proving the relationship between CSR and entrepreneurial performance of the western SMEs. Following model<Fig.1> for hypothesis is below;

H1. Social responsibility fulfillment of SMEs has positive effect on corporate entrepreneurial performance.

Then, we make the further hypothesis to figure out the relationships among the components of measures. We assume that corporate social responsibility fulfillment in terms of employee, customer, government, natural environment, future generation and NGO have positive impact on financial performance respectively.

Similarly, we also assume corporate social responsibility fulfillment in terms of employee, customer, government, natural environment, future generation and NGO have positive impact on innovative performance respectively.

Finally,we assume corporate social responsibility fulfillment in terms of employee, customer, government, natural

environment, future generation and NGO have positive impact on growth performance respectively.

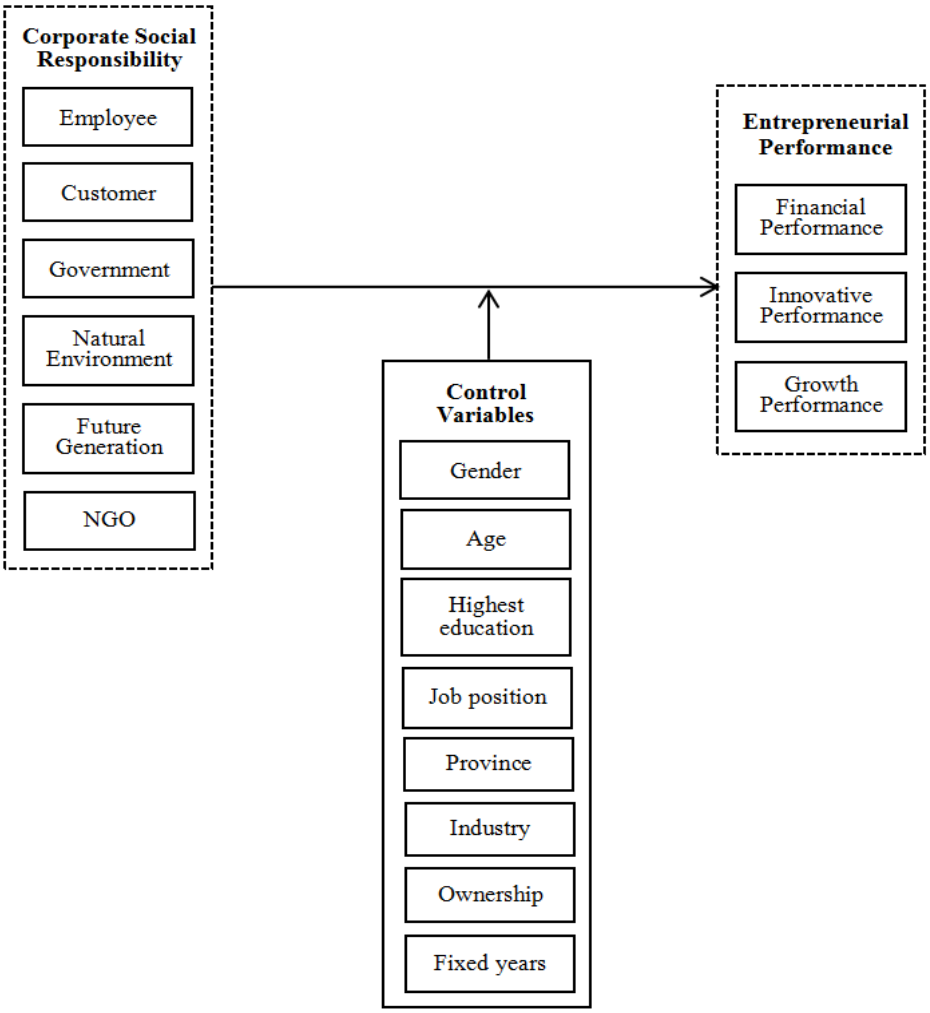

FIG.1 RESEARCH MODEL

3 METHOD

3.1 Sample and Data

All the questionnaires given in this research are electronic ones. Pre-survey and formal questionnaire survey is conducted concerning SMEs in western China. In the process of pre-survey, different SMEs in Gansu Province are selected first, and the questionnaires are given out to 45 employees in different posts. 42 effective questionnaires are collected, and the collecting rate is 91.11%.

In the formal survey, some SMEs are selected mainly from the 11 different provinces in western China (Qinghai, Gansu, Guangxi, Chongqing, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan), and these enterprises are involved in different fields, including food, energy and environment, information communication technology, modern household and biochemical technology. These are particularly popular industries in the entrepreneurial enterprises. Besides, due to their different technical characteristics and development levels, they are able to provide information more objectively. In the research, the questionnaires are distributed to 223 employees with different posts. And 200 effective questionnaires are collected, with the collecting rate of 89.7%. The data are collected between August 2016 and November 2016.

3.2 Variables and Measures

The research methods from a lot of literature are referred to, and the measuring tool proved to be highly effective is used. Among them, the original measurement scale of social responsibility is obtained from foreign literature.

Therefore, two management graduates with outstanding English competence are invited to carry out two-way translation of the scale in a parallel and double-blind way, and the translated sentences with big differences with the original English expressions are discussed and modified on the basis. In order to further enhance the accuracy of item expression, several professors who study enterprise ethics are invited to give evaluation and suggestion, which helps complete the final version of the questionnaire.

Dependent variables. In this paper, the SME performance measurement scale is the one from the paper of Tian Xiaoming, Jiang Qinfeng and Wang Chongming (2008) entitled "Empirical Research on the Relationship between Enterprise Dynamic Capabilities and Entrepreneurial Performance – with 270 Incubated Enterprises as Examples". There are a total of 10 items, among which financial performance (1 to 3 items), innovation performance (4 to 7 items), growth performance (8 to 10 items) are surveyed as the dependent variables. The respondents are required to evaluate the relevant indicators of their own enterprise according to 7 levels of degree, from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high).

Independent variables. In this paper, the measurement scale of corporate social responsibility is exactly the one from the paper of Duygu Turker (2009) entitled "Measuring corporate social responsibility: A Scale Development Study". The fulfillment of SME social responsibility is mainly measured from the perspective of stakeholders. The survey is carried out by selecting six main stakeholders, that is, employees (1 to 4 items), customers (5 to 7 items), government (8 to 9 items), natural environment (10 to 11 items), future generations (12 to 13 items) and other NGO (14 to 15 items) as the independent variables. The respondents are required to evaluate the relevant issues of their own enterprise according to 7 levels of degree, from 1 (does not conform completely) to 7 (completely conform)

Control variables. At the same time, there are also some control variables that can impact the evaluation of corporate social responsibility fulfillment and entrepreneurial performance: the respondents' gender, age, highest education level, job position, the fixed years of the enterprise, its province, industry and ownership of enterprises.

4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The reliability of SME social responsibility and entrepreneurial performance are respectively 0.865 and 0.911, and their KMO value are respectively 0.710 and 0.710, all above 0.7. This shows that the questionnaire has good reliability and validity. In the exploratory factor analysis, variance setting percentage of the factor is greater than 60%. Except for several items, most items have good expected factor load. Then the items with factor loading value less than 0.5 are removed, and the rest of the data is analyzed with the aid of SPSS 21.0.

In order to test the hypothesis, the linear regression analysis is used. Table 2 provides the mean value,standard deviations, and Table 3 offers correlation coefficient of the measured variables, without showing the following variables such as the fixed number of years, province, industry and ownership nature of the enterprise. The data in Table 2 shows that the financial performance of SMEs and their social responsibility fulfillment to employees, customers, natural environment and future generations are positively significantly correlated, while there is no significant correlation between their financial performance and their social responsibility fulfillment to government and nongovernmental organizations. There is no significant correlation between the corporate social responsibility fulfillment to employees, customers, government, natural environment and future generations and their innovation performance. It is worth noting that the SME social responsibility fulfillment to NGO is significantly negatively correlated. Moreover, the data shows that there is no significant correlation between the growth performance of SMEs and their social responsibility fulfillment to employees, customers, government, natural environment, future generations and NGO.

Table 4 shows the regression analysis results between the independent variables and dependent variables. First of all, the corporate social responsibility and entrepreneurial performance are assigned a value respectively, and then the corresponding regression analysis is carried out. Model 1 explains 12.9% of entrepreneurial performance ($P < 0.01$), and the β of the independent variables indicates that social responsibility fulfillment of SMEs has significantly positive impact on their entrepreneurial performance. Therefore, the hypothesis H1 is tenable. This also shows that the majority of the enterprise surveyed think that for SMEs, to fulfill certain social responsibility is beneficial to

entrepreneurial performance and can accelerate the development of SMEs. Model 2 explains the impacts of fulfilling social responsibility to different stakeholders on the entrepreneurial performance. It is apparent that employees have most positive influence on the dependent variable--entrepreneurial performance. Besides, future generation and customers also have considerate importance on improving SME entrepreneurial performance. However, government and natural environment seem to affect less on SME entrepreneurial performance, especially NGO, which influence the dependent variable negatively. Model 3 demonstrates the relationships between different aspects of social responsibility and SME financial performance. The β indicates that the independent variables such as employees, customers, natural environment and future generations have significantly positive impact on the dependent variable--financial performance, while government and NGO have no significantly positive impact on financial performance.

TABLE 2 MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR VARIABLES

Item	Mean	S.D	Item	Mean	S.D
Corporate Social Responsibility			Entrepreneurial Performance		
1.Employee	4.99	1.42	7.Financial performance	4.65	1.63
2.Customer	4.56	1.72	8.Innovative performance	4.47	1.73
3.Government	4.11	1.96	9.Growth performance	4.03	1.90
4.Natural Environment	4.50	1.75			
5.Future Generation	4.17	1.90			
6.NGO	3.89	1.87			

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

To SMEs, does the fulfillment of social responsibility limit or motivate its growth in terms of entrepreneurial performance? Our study addresses this question, indicating that the social responsibility fulfillment of SMEs would positively influenced the entrepreneurial performance in general. Moreover, our findings add to practice and suggestions for SMEs and their stakeholders in underdeveloped regions of western China in terms of strategic position, as discussed next.

TABLE 3 CORRELATIONS FOR VARIABLES USED IN REGRESSION ANALYSIS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Corporate Social Responsibility								
1.Employee	1							
2.Customer	0.363*	1						
3.Government	0.078	-0.235*	1					
4.Nature Environment	0.225*	0.065	-0.156	1				
5.Future Generation	0.147*	0.103	0.087	-0.196*	1			
6.NGO	0.100	0.057	-0.012	0.131	-0.376*	1		
Entrepreneurial								
7.Financial Performance	0.356*	0.297*	0.074	0.223**	0.147*	-0.004	1	
8.Innovative Performance	0.008	0.914	-0.054	-0.076	0.048	-0.145*	-0.272*	1
9.Growth Performance	0.011	-0.038	0.074	0.001	0.010	0 .095	-0.105	-0.630*

Note:Correlations significant at *p＜0.05； **p＜0.01 (two-tailed test).

5.1 SME Concerns for the Interests of Each Stakeholder are Different

The data analysis above shows that, SMEs have higher degree of concern for the benefits of employees, customers and future generations, the corresponding social responsibility fulfillment is relatively good, and it is more helpful to the improvement of enterprise entrepreneurial performance. employees and customers have more direct impact upon the realization of the enterprise operation objectives, especially SMEs are badly in need of help from these two stakeholders; at the same time, for the sake of future development of the enterprises themselves, they also give a certain degree of concern to the benefit of future generations, which also helps achieve the basic profit target of the enterprises. However, small and medium-sized SMEs have much lower degree of concern for the interests of

government, natural environment and NGO, and their fulfillment of the corresponding social responsibility is poorer. The improvement of the enterprise entrepreneurial performance is restricted by NGO to a certain extent. Due to their small scale, the influence of small and medium-sized SMEs upon the surrounding population is relatively smaller compared with large mature enterprises. Meanwhile, due to the shortage of funds, their social responsibility fulfillment to more indirect stakeholders is poorer. These account for the relatively poorer performance of SMEs in compliance with government laws and regulations, natural environment protection and NGO help, which needs further attention and improvement, and weigh pros and cons in terms of cost benefit and responsibility assumption; meanwhile, it is necessary to continue to strengthen the concern for the interests of employees, customers and future generations.

TABLE 4 INDEPENDENT MODELS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL PERFORMANCE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL PERFORMANCE_FINANCE,ENTREPRENEURIAL PERFORMANCE_INNOVATION,ENTREPRENEURIAL PERFORMANCE_GROWTH

Independent Variable	**MODEL 1 Entrepreneurial Performance**		**MODEL 2 Entrepreneurial Performance**		**MODEL 3 EP_Financial Performance**	
	β	***t*-value**	**β**	**t-value**	**β**	***t*-value**
Corporate Social Responsibility	0.241**	5.425				
1.Employee			0.093**	3.186	0.228**	2.711
2.Customer			0.052*	2.195	0.220**	3.266
3.Government			0.027	1.365	0.113*	1.987
4.Natural Environment			0.028	1.273	0.195**	3.048
5.Future Generation			0.037*	1.710	0.099	1.600
6.NGO			-0.024	-1.149	-0.017	-0.271
Model						
R^2	0.129**	—	0.169**		0.213**	—
F	—	29.433		6.546	—	8.711

Note:Standardized coefficients(β) are reported; significance levels based on one-tailed t-tests or F-tests.
*p＜0.05； **p＜0.01

5.2 Entrepreneurial Performance is Affected by the Social Responsibility Fulfillment of SMEs to Varying Degrees

Proper attention to the stakeholders' interests demand can expand the market share of the enterprise, enhance its reputation and promote profit growth, so as to more effectively implement enterprise management goal. However, related performance in the aspect of customer service, employee services and opinion implementation is poor. Therefore, it is necessary to further strengthen the attention and resolution to the stakeholders' interests demand. Meanwhile, due to relatively small scale and shortage of funds of SMEs, there will inevitably be lack of capital and manpower to carry out more indirect social responsibility of the stakeholders in the research and development of new products in order to enhance their own competitiveness. Attention to the related interests of government, natural environment and NGO provides no significant help for the realization of the profit goal from a short-term perspective. But in the long term, to follow the government laws and regulations, protect natural environment and assist NGO will necessarily be beneficial for the long-term development of the enterprises. Thus, SMEs need to weigh the pros and cons between their social responsibility and new product development investment.

5.3 Suggestions for SMEs

First of all, SMEs should not only concern the shareholders' interest return needs in carrying out strategic positioning, but also should focus more on the interest demand of the stakeholders in a wider range. In order to realize the long-term development goal, enterprises should fulfill social responsibility to more stakeholders, so as to help promote their growth in the future. At present, the social responsibility performance is not ideal enough, especially in terms of the basic conditions that need to be satisfied, such as environmental protection and abidance by the laws and regulations. Compared with the realization of short-term profit goals, the management needs to perform these basic responsibilities to realize the long-term survival and development of the enterprises. As a result of the restrictions of existing scale and capital of SMEs, the surplus manpower and material resources that can be used to solve the related

demands of the stakeholders are obviously not abundant after making research and development, and investment into the new technologies and new products that can improve the market competitiveness. This requires that the management weighs out the optimal decision on capital and employees. Secondly, the enterprises should develop and voluntarily disclose their social responsibility report. By making social responsibility report, SMEs can more clearly recognize the importance of the expectations from stakeholders for SMEs own development, so as to establish the corresponding countermeasures to perfect the internal control system and risk assessment, and make reasonable forecast about the future development as well as potential obstacles of the enterprises. In addition, disclosure of social responsibility to the public can increase the investors' investment confidence to the enterprise, improve the trust of consumer in the products or services, and strengthen the role of corporate image in the views of the public, so as to help expand enterprise reputation and promote its development and growth.

5.4 Suggestions for Stakeholders

First of all, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of the government supervision and guarantee system. Government sectors shall carry out positive guidance and regulation towards SMEs, so as to build good macro environment for their healthy development. On the one hand, they should provide the corresponding technical, financial and policy support; on the other hand, they must carry on strict punishment of the illegal behavior of SMEs, and make efforts to promote the growth of SMEs. Secondly, the relevant departments of the various industries should formulate specific social responsibility provisions relevant to the industries, and regulate the social responsibility behavior of SMEs. As the enterprises of different industries have different influence upon different stakeholders, and the degree of attention to the interest demands is also different, it is necessary to examine the issue from the angles of industry and stakeholders, and develop different social responsibility behavior norms with distinct industry characteristics, so as to urge SMEs to perform their duties.

5.5 Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

While analyzing the relationship between entrepreneurial performance and social responsibility fulfillment of SMEs, the selected social responsibility measurement scale items are not comprehensive, as they only contain six stakeholders, and some important stakeholders such as shareholders and suppliers are not included within the measuring range. Furthermore, in measuring enterprise entrepreneurial performance, the indicators selected also cannot fully reflect the enterprise entrepreneurial ability and its performance, and both need to be further measured in-depth. Secondly, Amos is not used in the paper to modify the model. Thus, in the future study, it is necessary to continue the analysis of variance against the sample. Also, in order to make this research become more thorough, it is necessary to use Amos for the in-depth study of the relationship between corporate social responsibility and entrepreneurial performance.

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