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THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON THE CUSTOMER COMMITMENT AND TRUST IN THE RETAIL SECTOR

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Abstract: The present paper aims at confirming the influence of CSR policies on building up customer relationship through improving trust and commitment, and at the same time to study the influence of these values on satisfaction and loyalty. To achieve this purpose, a causal model that establishes the relationship between those variables has been developed and empirically tested. In order to verify the proposed hypothesis a structured survey was developed. The survey was given to a sample of 501 customers (valid responses) of modern distribution retail stores (supermarkets and hypermarkets) in Spain. All hypotheses are supported, thus confirming that the consumer perception on CSR policies carried out by the retailer influence on trust and consumer commitment to the company. As these variables affect satisfaction and loyalty, these results also confirm the indirect influence of CSR on customer satisfaction, through these relational variables. Therefore CSR is an essential tool for developing a long-standing relationship between the customer and the company. The originality is that there are very few works that address the study of the relationship between CSR and relational variables commitment and trust. The sample, consumers of retail establishments, is

another originality. And the value is that CSR improves the competitiveness of retailing companies through the relational variables.

Keywords: *corporate social responsibility, retail, trust, commitment, loyalty.*

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Over the last decades, companies and researchers have concentrated their efforts in the search for ways to differentiate from their competitors. Quality management systems, product innovation or reengineering process systems are clear examples of these efforts. However, these approaches have not given the expected results due largely to their focus on internal management. Nowadays, the efforts to achieve sustainable competitive advantage are based on the development of customer-oriented management systems that increase customer trust and commitment to the company, and consequently customer loyalty.

It is within this new paradigm of management with customers where we can place Corporate Social Responsibility (hereafter CSR) as an element to increase customer satisfaction through the strengthening of relational variables. Specifically, socially responsible actions allow to acquire a higher level of commitment with customers and the society in general, as well as to increase customer trust of the company, and consequently they strengthen the positive aspects of the purchase option. On the other hand, these options help to reduce the negative aspects. That is to say, there is an increasing number of customers who penalize the purchase of products from retail companies whose practices are not responsible. Therefore, the objective is to build up the company's reputation by basing this reputation on social values (Dawkins and Fraas, 2013), thus increasing customer satisfaction as well as increasing customer loyalty.

Research as the one carried out by Martínez, Carbonell and Aguero (2006) supports the above conclusions, as it highlighted that 74% of consumers are receptive to messages on the social actions carried out by companies and 59% of them would be willing to rectify their purchase behavior depending on social variables.

In view of this situation, the present paper aims at confirming the influence of CSR policies for building up customer relationship through improving trust and commitment, and at the same time the influence of

these values on satisfaction and loyalty is studied, especially in times of crisis. To do so, a causal model in the area of commercial distribution that establishes the relationship between those variables has been developed and empirically tested. This empirical study is preceded by a thorough study of the literature which will enable us to identify these variables.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In recent years there has been a significant increase in citizens' and consumers' concern about responsible management of companies and public institutions. Given this situation, CSR is seen as a new approach to business management which is more respectful with all the stakeholders and particularly, with the society in general.

However, CSR is not a new concept. In 1953 it was described by Bowen as the obligation of companies to make their own decisions and to define their policies according to the values and objectives of society. In this first stage, CSR was viewed as a company obligation. Carroll (1979), specifically qualifies this social obligation in the following aspects: 1) Economic obligation, which consists in being feasible both economically and productively (which is a basic objective of any company), since there is no activity without economic feasibility and consequently there will not be any responsible actions; 2) ethical and legal obligations, that is to say, complying with the existing legislation as well as with the rules and ethical internal values of the company; and 3) philanthropic obligation as a way to return to the society part of what it has been given to it.

This view of CSR as an obligation gave rise in the 90s to a model of CSR as an extended obligation to all the stakeholders with whom the company relates (Brown and Dacin, 1997). Under this approach, the obligations of CSR are extended to all the stakeholders who affect the company activities in a direct or indirect way (Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Abreu, David, and Crowther, 2005). They are called stakeholders as the answer to satisfy the traditional management systems whose objective is only to satisfy shareholders.

This wider view of companies obligations towards their stakeholders was criticized by some researchers (Swanson 1995), because they main-

tained the concept of obligation. That is to say, CSR was seen as a set of compulsory obligations and consequently it was driven by the company's own interest. According to Swanson (1995), CSR must respond to the company's positive commitment towards improving the society beyond an obligation. Thus, the company will systematically foster responsible actions by promoting values such as equality, freedom or business opportunities among its partners. Moreover, it will have a proactive attitude in improving the society, and not only a repairing one (Jones 1995; Roitstein 2004).

However, for these actions to be correctly applied they must be developed as part of the company management strategy (Alvarado 2008). That is to say, they are not specific actions as donating or installing a water treatment plant in the company, but CSR must go beyond and become part of the company's strategy. Only in this way will the objectives of CSR be achieved.

This variety of approaches to CSR can be seen in the literature definitions. One of the first ones was developed by Bowen (1953), who links CSR with the company's obligation to carry out the policies, make the decisions and follow the lines of action according to the objectives and values of society, while recently Smith (2003) has maintained the concept of obligation but by making it extensive to all the stakeholders who are related to the company.

From the marketing point of view, Alvarado's definitionshould be noted (2008: 130): 'The process and set of marketing activities, both proactive and strategic, which a business company carries out and that involve its stakeholders' social and environmental concerns, so that the damages are minimized and the long-run positive impact of the company on society is maximized'.

Following these contributions on CSR, this paper focuses on analyzing this variable from the point of view of customer relationship management, understanding CSR as a proactive and strategic management process that aims at integrating the stakeholders' concerns with whom the company relates, leading to a clear link between competitiveness and CSR (Murillo and Vallentin, 2012). Following recent research (Singh, García de los Salmones and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008; Pérez, 2011), four groups of stakeholders are taken into account: customers, shareholders, staff and society.

RELATIONAL VARIABLES

Secondly, the main relational variables of the exchange are studied in the literature, since they are the second axis of this research.

In the last decades there has been a switch in paradigm in perceiving interchange. Academic literature has developed in the interpretation of interchange, which is the central axis of marketing, from a transactional approach to a relational one. The transactional approach views interchange as something punctual and discreet, where only the short run is considered and neither future interchanges nor continuity in the relationships are considered. On the other hand, the relational approach considers interchange as a continuous process in time, which allows to archieve higher benefits like: strong flexibility and high capacity to respond to changes, fast order-delivery cycle, obtaining higher profits, improving service, cost reduction, quality improvements among others (Bovel and Martha, 2000; Rinehart, Eckert, Handfield and Page, 2004). An analysis of the literature enables us to identify trust and commitment as the main components of relational marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sanzo, Santos, Vázquez and Álvarez, 2003; N'Goala, 2007).

Trust, as seen by relational marketing, is defined as 'the belief or expectation that some kind of effects will be produced (fulfilling of obligations, expected behavior, positive results, satisfaction of needs) either for or by one or all the parties that take part in an interchange relationship, and that results in the intention to develop this relationship (Sanzo *et al.* 2003). Therefore, according to Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpandé (1992), trust involves the following: the belief that the other party will follow the intended course of action; the intention to behave and commit oneself according to this belief; uncertainty –insofar as the other party's behavior is uncontrollable– and vulnerability to the consequences of the other party's actions.

However, trust is a key variable both in transactional and in relational marketing. The difference lies in the fact that while in the former trust relies on things (products), in the latter trust relies on the company (Reinares and Ponzoa, 2002). Therefore, trust in the relationship is based on consumers' beliefs, feelings and expectations towards the company, with particular importance of the company's reputation (Ganesan, 1994), which gives CSR a primary position, insofar as CSR actions carried out by the company can significantly improve the company's image (N'Goala,

2007; Pérez, 2011). These arguments allow us to define the first hypothesis of our work:

H1: Improving the distributor's social responsibility image influences customers' trust in a direct and positive way.

Regarding commitment, this is the second key variable in the development of relationship marketing. Trust is thus seen as the willingness by both parties to undertake the efforts and sacrifices that are necessary to ensure the continuity of the relationship for the sake of future benefits (Sanzo *et al.*, 2003; Rinehart *et al.*, 2004). The definition of commitment rendered by Moorman *et al.* (1992: 316) 'commitment represents a long-term wish to maintain a valuable relationship', clearly shows the three key elements included in this concept. Firstly, commitment must be long-term, that is to say, the parties must want to continue with the relationship beyond current transactions (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987). Secondly, commitment reflects a wish, that it to say, it must be based on the personal predisposition to continue with the relationship beyond the legal obligation. And thirdly, commitment must be aimed at achieving superior customer satisfaction. The parties will keep the relationship only if they believe that this relationship will allow them to obtain long-term benefits resulting from the resolutions adopted (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

CSR actions carried out by companies help to improve commitment, especially the emotional one, since they develop the customer's emotions and feelings towards the company (Brammer, Millington and Rayotn, 2007; N'Goala, 2007; Bravo, Matute and Pina, 2011). This presumption enables us to specify the following hypothesis:

H2: Improving the image of the distributor's social responsibility influences the customer's commitment in a direct and positive way.

SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY

Finally, as part of the literature review, a study of the chain of consequences satisfaction-loyalty is carried out.

In the literature on services there is a general consensus revolving around satisfaction as a phenomenon linked to cognitive judgments and

to the emotional nature of the answers. The former correspond to a mental process of assessment of an experience in which several comparison variables intervene; the latter relate to expressing several positive or negative feelings which arise as a consequence of that assessment. For many academics, the combination of these two effects is seen as an intrinsic feature of satisfaction, thus taking for granted that satisfaction is an affective answer which derives from a cognitive judgment (Giese and Cote 2000) with respect to other assessments satisfaction can be interpreted from the point of view of a specific transaction, or even from a cumulative vision (Boulding Kalra, Staelin and Zeithaml, 1993; Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). While there is an increasing number of researchers in literature who favour the first approach, (Giese and Cote, 2000) some key contributions like Fornell Johnson, Anderson, Cha and Bryant (1996) or Anderson, Fornell and Lehrmann (1994) consider satisfaction as a global assessment made over the consuming experience in a long period of time or over a set of experiences of the same kind.

An indirect study on the influence of the image of CSR over satisfaction is proposed in this paper, by analyzing this as a consequence of the variables of commitment and trust, in such a way that building up trust and commitment by the consumer will result in an increase in customer satisfaction (Sanzo *et al.*, 2003). These approaches enable us to put forward the following hypotheses:

H3: Building up trust has a direct and positive influence over customer satisfaction.
H4: Building up customer commitment with the company has a direct and positive influence on customer satisfaction.

Finally, customer loyalty has been viewed as "*sine qua non of an effective business strategy*" (Heskett, 2002:355). Academics and practitioners understand that loyalty and satisfaction are inextricably linked; however, this relationship is also claimed to be assymmetrical, and although loyal customers are usually satisfied, satisfaction does not universally translate into loyalty (Oliver 1999). Basically, two different perspectives are suggested: one point of view is that loyalty is simply another word to express customer retention: "*a customer who continues to buy is a loyal customer*" (Buttle and Burton, 2002:218), thus evaluating effective, evident behaviour which involves repeat purchase/
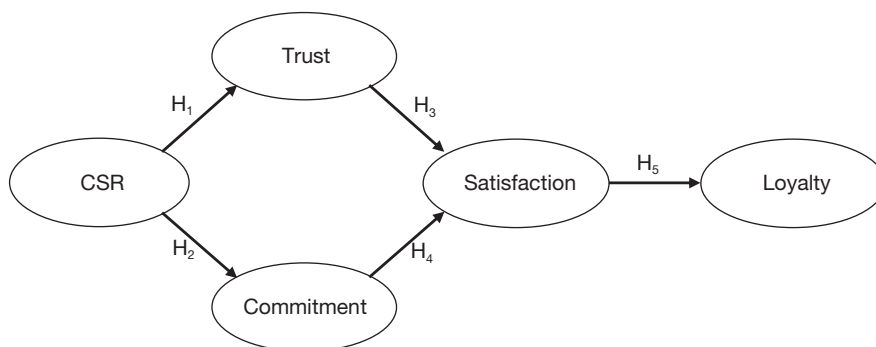
Figure 1. The causal model.

consumption. A second point of view is that customer loyalty has an affective component in which feelings are important (Dick and Basu, 1994; De Ruyter, Wetzels and Bloemer, 1998; Oliver, 1999). This last way of approach to loyalty in terms of attitude has been widely accepted after the proposal by Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996), and is analysed on the basis of intention to frequent a service provider, continue buying the same type of service or brand in the future, recommendation, and so on. These conclusions allow us to state the following hypothesis:

H5: The higher the level of customer satisfaction, the higher the level of loyalty.

The hypotheses put forward after the literature review enable us to identify in Figure 1 the model of causal relations which are under investigation in this paper. In it, both the background and its consequences studied so far are considered.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In order to verify the proposed hypotheses a structured survey was developed. The survey was given in 2013 to a sample of customers of modern distribution retail stores (supermarkets and hypermarkets) of food, personal care and home care articles in the province of Valencia, in Spain. Al first a stratified random sampling was used over the loca-

tions and after that with random sampling phone numbers for each location.

Before conducting the survey, it was reviewed by both academic and business experts. The questionnaire was pretested on 30 consumers. This was done with computer-assisted telephone interviews.

The final sample consists of 501 people and is mainly composed by women (73%) with secondary education (73%) and the average age is between 35 and 54 years (51%). These data are consistent with the profile of our population: members of a household who usually purchase food products, and personal and home care.

The scales used when measuring the different variables of the model are described in Appendix A. To validate these proposed scales, various analyses were made to assess their psychometric properties. Tables 1 and 2 show the correlations between constructs, Cronbach's alpha (α), composed reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), correlation between constructs (Table 1) and correlations between each indicator and its construct (loadings), and those between each indicator and all the other constructs (cross loadings) (Table 2).

The values in bold in the diagonal in Table 1 are the square roots of the average variances for each indicator explained by their construct (square root of the AVE). The values outside the diagonal show the correlations between constructs.

Table 1 shows that the alpha coefficients for the five constructs are sufficiently high, above the threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Composed reliabilities (CR), which are considered to be a most accurate measure of construct reliability, by avoiding the assumption of equal weighting of the indicators (tau equivalence), are all over 0.90. Comparison of the square root of the AVE (in bold in the diagonal in Table 1) with the correlations between constructs indicates that each construct is more closely linked to its own indicators than to the other constructs. Furthermore, all AVE exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Chin, 1998). Reliability of the proposed scales is therefore confirmed.

Discriminant validity of the scales in our study was verified using Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) first criterion: correlations between constructs significantly below 1. All the constructs satisfy the criterion (see Table 1).

Table 2 provides the correlations of each item to their intended construct (loadings) and to all other constructs (cross-loadings) which allowed

Table 1. Correlations between constructs, consistency and reliability tests

	Alpha	CR	AVE		CSR	COM	TRU	SAT	LOY
CSR	0.950	0.955	0.572	CSR	**0.756**				
Commitment	0.860	0.905	0.704	COM	0.217	**0.839**			
Trust	0.897	0.921	0.661	TRU	0.325	0.595	**0.813**		
Satisfaction	0.953	0.977	0.955	SAT	0.263	0.488	0.680	**0.977**	
Loyalty	0.885	0.916	0.688	LOY	0.311	0.656	0.671	0.705	**0.829**

Bold figures in diagonal are the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct

us to assess convergent validity. Although there was some cross-loading, all items loaded more highly on their own construct. The reliability and validity of all the scales has been proved.

Scale reliability was assured by eliminating indicators when the Cronbach's alpha increased. The final questionnaire was reduced to 33 indicators. Four CSR-related items, two Commitment-related items, one satisfaction-related item and four loyalty-related items were deleted: CSR1, CSR3, CSR6, CSR8, COM3, COM5, SAT3, LOY6, LOY7, LOY8 and LOY9, thus maintaining a high content validity regarding the scales originally proposed.

The hypotheses were tested using the Partial Least Square technique and in Figure 2 the estimated model is shown. All paths are significant and the model accounts for 10.55% of the variance for Trust, 4.77% of the variance for Commitment, 47.51% of the variance for Satisfaction and 49.74% of the variance for Loyalty.

In Table 3 the estimated coefficients for the proposed model are shown and, for each coefficient, the 95% confidence interval and the associated p-values. The extremes for the confidence intervals have been calculated with bootstrap (Efrom and Tibshirani, 1993) with 1000 re-samples, each one with 501 individuals obtained by sampling with replacement from the original sample. From the p-values, all paths are significative with α=0.05.

From Figure 2 and Table 3 all hypotheses are supported, thus confirming that the consumer perception of CSR policies carried out by the retailer influence on trust and consumer commitment to the company. As these variables affect satisfaction and loyalty, these results also confirm the indirect influence of CSR on customer satisfaction, through these relational variables.

Table 2. Item to scale correlations

|	CSR	COM	TRU	SAT	LOY
CSR 2	0.581	0.204	0.333	0.283	0.316
CSR 4	0.686	0.229	0.310	0.243	0.258
CSR 5	0.661	0.215	0.339	0.265	0.310
CSR 7	0.597	0.147	0.169	0.110	0.168
CSR 9	0.777	0.092	0.158	0.161	0.194
CSR 10	0.786	0.078	0.141	0.122	0.129
CSR 11	0.792	0.166	0.209	0.183	0.197
CSR 12	0.808	0.125	0.207	0.159	0.188
CSR 13	0.823	0.201	0.327	0.253	0.306
CSR 14	0.813	0.137	0.159	0.145	0.191
CSR 15	0.770	0.121	0.125	0.118	0.182
CSR 16	0.724	0.161	0.140	0.083	0.161
CSR 17	0.728	0.116	0.173	0.142	0.153
CSR 18	0.796	0.098	0.201	0.177	0.189
CSR 19	0.828	0.127	0.221	0.174	0.203
CSR 20	0.861	0.172	0.300	0.241	0.286
COM 1	0.148	0.757	0.375	0.317	0.467
COM 2	0.174	0.880	0.506	0.423	0.572
COM 4	0.198	0.873	0.552	0.467	0.605
COM 6	0.200	0.839	0.541	0.411	0.542
TRU 1	0.246	0.528	0.810	0.491	0.547
TRU 2	0.239	0.551	0.767	0.545	0.556
TRU 3	0.269	0.436	0.798	0.537	0.518
TRU 4	0.251	0.516	0.873	0.566	0.605
TRU 5	0.300	0.452	0.823	0.556	0.516
TRU 6	0.275	0.432	0.803	0.609	0.529
SAT 1	0.248	0.469	0.678	0.977	0.679
SAT 2	0.267	0.485	0.652	0.977	0.699
LOY 1	0.348	0.440	0.558	0.657	0.765
LOY 2	0.206	0.503	0.497	0.517	0.741
LOY 3	0.206	0.592	0.527	0.533	0.873
LOY 4	0.228	0.583	0.603	0.589	0.899
LOY 5	0.275	0.603	0.577	0.597	0.857
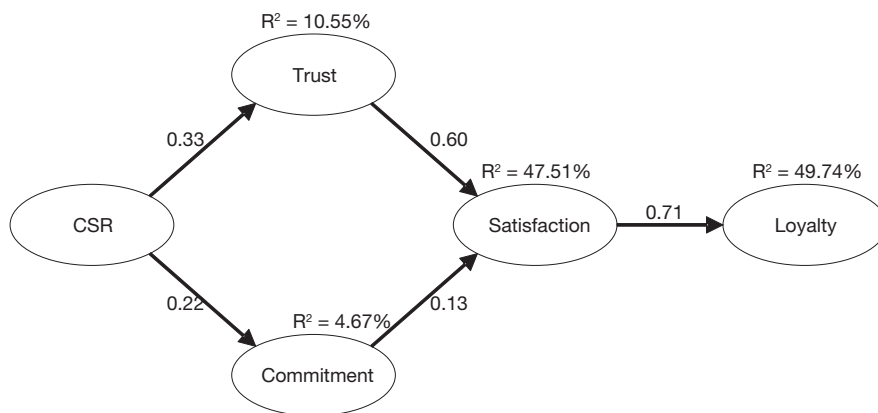
Figure 2. The causal model estimated

Table 3. Estimated coefficients for the structural model and its confidence intervals

	Coeff.	95%CI		p-value
CSR – Commitment	0.217	0.143	0.293	0.0000
CSR – Trust	0.325	0.255	0.407	0.0000
Commitment – Satisfaction	0.128	0.044	0.207	0.0018
Trust – Satisfaction	0.604	0.526	0.680	0.0000
Satisfaction – Loyalty	0.705	0.662	0.750	0.0000

In Table 4 we show, for each endogenous construct, the amount of explained variance (R2), with the associated 95% bootstrap confidence interval. From these values, we show that Commitment and Trust are both in part explained by CSR. The strength of the satisfaction-loyalty chain is also confirmed: the variance of the satisfaction and loyalty constructs is explained by about 50%.

Table 4. Explained variance (R^2) for each endogenous construct. Estimation and confidence interval.

	R^2	95%CI	
Commitment	4.67%	2.05%	8.58%
Trust	10.55%	6.51%	16.57%
Satisfaction	47.51%	39.19%	55.99%
Loyalty	49.74%	43.82%	56.17%

CONCLUSIONS

A particular approach to Corporate Social Responsibility is put forward in this paper, as it is linked to relation variables of trust and commitment. Traditionally, CSR has been studied as a determining factor of corporate image or the company's reputation, while other researchers have focused on its influence on satisfaction. However, there have been limited academic studies addressing the influence of CSR on relational variables, which are seen from the marketing point of view as key variables in company differentiation and generation of value, thus resulting in a clear opportunity for research. This paper aims to analyze the capacity that CSR strategies have to build up trust and customer commitment to the company, as well as the effect of these variables on satisfaction and loyalty. The latter is one of the essential objectives of any company, especially in times of crisis.

In order to achieve this objective, an empirical model of causal relations between the above variables was tested in 2013, on a sample of 501 customers of supermarkets and hypermarkets.

The results obtained have been confirmed in the hypotheses put forward. Therefore, improvement in customer perception on CSR policies developed by retailers enhances customer trust in the company, while at the same time the customer's commitment to the company is built up. That is to say, CSR is consolidated as an essential tool for developing a long-standing relationship between the customer and the company. Inasmuch as CSR policies build up the customer's trust and commitment to the company, the customer feels more involved in the company, becomes an ally who recommends the company to other consumers, offers recommendations for improvement, is open to new products, forgives mistakes and endeavors to keep the relationship.

Secondly, building up trust and commitment enhances customer satisfaction. This increase has a direct impact on growing customer loyalty, both at the attitudinal and behavioural levels. That is to say, CSR has proven to enhance, in this case in an indirect way, customer satisfaction and loyalty to retailers.

Another relevant conclusion is the scale validation used in measuring the variable CSR in the field of retail distribution. The selection of this sample, customers of food, personal care and home retail stores, is another important innovation of this study since the studies ad-

dressing CSR in this area are scarce. Furthermore, in recent years there has been an increasing number of policies carried out by modern retail distribution (supermarkets and hypermarkets). The process of cleaning which has been applied to the database has enhanced the reliability of the initial scale for the sample analyzed.

The customer's positive perception of CRS policies carried out by supermarkets and hypermarkets is alwo worth mentioning, as the high average score, as the high average score given to the CSR scale by the respondents show (see Appendix 2). Specifically, most indicators get average scores higher than 7 out of 10. The most highly valued aspects are: honesty with customers, complying with the legislation; skilled staff, handling customers' complaints, or treatment for workers. As a consequence, retailers should take these into account as key elements in their business strategy.

The above conclusions allow the identification of some recommendations in managing retail companies. Firstly, it is advisable to invest in social responsibility actions in order to meet the main stakeholders' needs with whom the company relates, mainly with customers (satisfying their needs, knowledge about them, etc.), staff (social recognition policies, improved working conditions, fair salaries, possibilities of promotion ...), society (environmental protection, improving infrastructures, altruism, social commitment...) and of course, with shareholders (profit maximization, cost control...). Nevertheless, it is not enough to apply some specific measures, but companies also need to incorporate CSR into their management strategy.

Secondly, companies must strengthen policies in order to build up customers' trust and commitment to the company, especially in times of crisis. These policies increase the relationship between the customer and the retailer, thus helping to maintain this relationship over time. They are, consequently, essential variables to achieve customer satisfaction and to keep their loyalty to the retail stores. The results show that CSR policies not only improve the company's image, but also build up that confidence at the same time as they strengthen the customer commitment to the company.

Finally, future research should consider testing the multidimensionality of the construct RSC, thus making possible to establish new direct relations between this construct and the rest of variables.

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