



Social commitment or self-interest? Effect of responsible practices performance motivations of firms on the consumer decision-making process

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ABSTRACT

10 Due to the increasing dynamism of global economic activity, all kind of organizations are nowadays concerned for maintaining their involvement with demands and changes of society. Particularly, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained increasing importance within both public and private organizations, it being the subject of much investigation and debate among both researchers and practitioners. In this sense, discussion of CSR implications for consumer behavior has been a common topic in recent marketing literature, demonstrating in some cases, a link between CSR and positive responses by consumers and inconclusive effects in others. In the context of such controversy, experts call for further investigation about the consequences of CSR on consumer behavior. Within this line of research, the present paper analyzes the influence of motivations attributed to CSR practices in business settings on four stages of consumer decision-making process. For that purpose, it was conducted a survey study which reached a final sample of 400 Spanish consumers. Regression analysis revealed that, while expectations of social-oriented goals in responsible firms is positively related to consumers' goodwill over the various stages of their purchase decisions and actions, the potential effects of profit-based considerations are more complex.

KEYWORDS

Corporate social responsibility (CSR); consumer behavior; decision-making process; social orientation; profit orientation

1. Introduction

30 Over past decades, responsibility has gained increasing importance within both public and private organizations, it being the subject of much investigation and debate among both researchers and practitioners (Ibrahim, Angelidis, and Howard 2006; De Clercq and Voronov 2011; Park, Lee, and Kim 2014).

35 Particularly, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been defined as a concept whereby companies are 'responsible for their impacts on society' by integrating 'social, environmental, ethical human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close cooperation with their stakeholders' (European Commission 2011, 1). In relation to the latter, the European Commission (2001) identifies two distinct groups of stakeholders,

internal and external. From this view, within the company, socially responsible practices primarily involve employees and relate to issues such as human capital investment, health and safety, change management, while environmentally responsible practices relate mainly to the management of natural resources used in the production. On the other hand, CSR extends beyond the doors of the company into the local community and involves a wide range of stakeholders, including business partners and suppliers, customers, public authorities, and NGOs representing local communities, as well as the environment.

According to this new paradigm of economic functioning, enterprises are more and more convinced that improvement of social settings through their own activity has a great potential to contribute to the objectives pursued. In this sense, all kind of organizations around the world are nowadays concerned for maintaining their reputation and consolidating their involvement with social demands and changes, in order to send a signal to the various stakeholders with whom they interact. Even private enterprises – as organizational paradigms of ‘selfish’ search for their own benefit – are aware of the need of satisfying the expectations of objective publics other than investors and clients.

From this viewpoint, widely accepted among academics and experts, it is assumed that consumers’ demands and expectations have to be satisfied beyond the specific need which originated the relationship with the organization. In words of Baker (2006, 197–198), ‘distinction between success and failure in competitive markets may be reduced to two basic issues, first, an understanding of marketing needs, and, second, the ability to deliver added value.’

In consequence, business managers are now aware that issues such as collaboration with social causes, guarantee of fair relationships with stakeholders, fair trade, environmental awareness, work insertion of marginal collectives, health and safety at work are, among others, new matters to be fulfilled by enterprises in the satisfaction of consumer needs (Bigné-Alcañiz, Currás-Pérez, and Sánchez-García 2009; Vázquez et al. 2011; Vázquez, Lanero, and García 2012). Hence, responsible initiatives to influence consumers and differentiate product offerings have become quite common in current marketplaces (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006; Keh and Xie 2009; Luo and Du 2015).

In line with this premise, many authors have investigated the implications of responsibility for marketing in organizations, concluding that contribution to social and environmental causes may induce consumer goodwill towards the company (Brown and Dacin 1997; Jones 1997; Handelman and Arnold 1999; Lorge 1999; Maignan 2001; Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006; Korschun, Bhattacharya, and Swain 2014), and thus remarking the importance of considering the way that corporate decisions are perceived by the public (Roberts 1993, 1995, 1996; Mohr, Webb, and Harris 2001; Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006; Ellen, Web, and Mohr 2006; Webb, Mohr, and Harris 2008; Vlachos et al. 2009; Öberseder et al. 2014).

However, studies to date have treated CSR mainly as a corporate issue (Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Murphy 2013), with scarce focus on specific facets of consumer behavior and little knowledge about the influence of perceived responsibility over the different stages of the consumer decision-making process (Valor 2010). To fill this gap in previous literature, the objective of this paper is twofold. First, it is intended to analyze the consideration of CSR criteria over the subsequent stages of the decision-making process by examining a sample of consumers, and second, it is sought to study the influence of motives attributed to socially responsible practices by firms over the stages of this process, those being determining factors of consumer behavior. From this view, it is assumed that the identification of consumers’

expectations of social responsibilities to be fulfilled by enterprises could be used as guidance for marketing decision-making in organizations.

Next paragraphs review the previous literature on CSR and consumer decision-making, expose an empirical study carried out with a sample of Spanish consumers, and finally discuss some main conclusions and considerations.

2. Business responsibility practices and consumer behavior

Discussion of CSR implications for consumer behavior has been a common topic in recent marketing literature. In general, major evidences reveal that socially responsible initiatives may induce consumer goodwill towards the organization, whereas irresponsible companies would be punished (Brown and Dacin 1997; Jones 1997; Handelman and Arnold 1999; Lorge 1999; Maignan 2001; Klein, Smith, and John 2004; Darke and Ritchie 2007; Lange and Washburn 2012). In this line, studies demonstrate the link between CSR and positive responses by consumers with respect to specific stages of consumer behavior, including identity attractiveness towards the company (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001; Marin and Ruiz 2007; Marin, Ruiz, and Rubio 2009; Lii and Lee 2012; Korschun, Bhattacharya, and Swain 2014), corporate attitudes (Brown and Dacin 1997; Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006; Singh, García de los Salmones, and Rodríguez 2008; Tangari et al. 2010), loyalty, commitment, and trust (Lacey and Kennett-Hensel 2010; Matute-Vallejo, Bravo, and Pina 2011; Park, Lee, and Kim 2014), positive evaluation of products (Folkes and Kamins 1999; Biehal and Sheinin 2007), and purchase intentions (Murray and Vogel 1997; Maignan 2001; Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006; Bigné-Alcañiz et al. 2012; Ayadi and Lapeyre 2014; Shin, Ki, and Griffin 2017).

Nevertheless, some other results point that the effects of corporate social reputation on consumer behavior remain inconclusive or, at least, more complex than expected. In this respect, some studies report explicit declarations by consumers that CSR is not a factor in their purchasing decisions (Carrigan and Attalla 2001; Castaldo and Perrini 2004; Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Murphy 2013), for instance, Brown and Dacin (1997) demonstrated that consumers' opinions about a company's ability to produce quality products had stronger effects on their evaluations than social responsibility associations. Likewise, tangible aspects such as price, innovation, guarantees and other information about the product are known to affect buying decisions directly (Fombrun 1996; Maignan and Ferrell 2001; Page and Fearn 2005; Castaldo et al. 2009; Ayadi and Lapeyre 2014; van Doorn et al. 2017), whereas ethical and social concerns seem to be relatively unnoticed and of secondary importance for most consumers (Castaldo and Perrini 2004; Sen, Bhattacharya, and Korschun 2006; Singh, García de los Salmones, and Rodríguez 2008; Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Murphy 2013).

In the context of such controversy, experts call for further investigation about the consequences of CSR on consumer behavior (Marin and Ruiz 2007; Öberseder et al. 2014) within two lines. On one side, these prescriptions for research include the convenience of investigating the effect of CSR on consumer behavior considering separately the specific stage of the consumer decision-making process since there appears to be a certain misfit between the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of the decision process (Singh, García de los Salmones, and Rodríguez 2008; Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque 2015), and on the other, the necessity of paying attention to consumers' perceptions of what firms do and also why they do it (Gilbert and Malone 1995; Skarmeas and Leonidou 2013).

Following two sections present the consumer decision-making process theory and preceding evidence about those drivers and motives that may lead companies to perform responsible activities.

2.1. The consumer decision-making process

Throughout the related marketing literature, many models have been proposed to explain the way in which people make consumption decisions and choose between products and brands. One of the most influential has been the consumer decision-making process model by Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell, which represents a general road map of consumers' minds when purchase decisions are made (Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel 2006).

A simplified version of the model is shown in Figure 1. According to the model, consumers typically go through seven major stages when making decisions: need recognition, search for information, pre-purchase evaluation, purchase, consumption, post-consumption evaluation, and divestment. The model also shows how different internal and external forces interact to affect how consumers think, evaluate, and act.

Particularly, the model states that the starting point of any purchase decision is a customer need. Need recognition occurs when an individual senses a difference between the ideal and the actual states of affairs. Once need recognition occurs, consumers begin searching for information and solutions to satisfy their unmet needs. Search refers to a receptivity of information that solves problems or needs, rather than a search for specific products.

According to the authors, search may be internal (i.e., retrieving knowledge from memory according to previous experiences) or external (i.e., collecting information from peers, family and the marketplace). At the same time, search may be passive or active. Sometimes, consumers search passively by simply becoming more receptive to information around them,

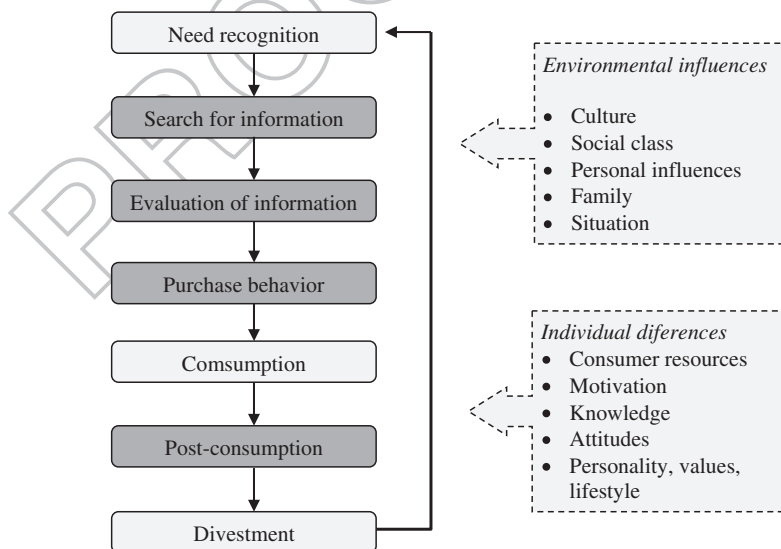


Figure 1. The consumer decision-making process. Source: Adapted from Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (2006).

whereas at other times, they may engage in active search behavior, by researching consumer publications and on the Internet, paying attention to ads, visiting shopping malls, etc.

The next stage of the consumer decision-making process is evaluating alternative options identified during the search process, in order to develop preferences and select from various products or services. To do that, consumers employ different evaluative criteria, defined as the standards and specifications used to compare different products and brands.

After assessing the information available, consumers make decisions on whether or not to purchase the product or service. If the purchase is made and the consumer takes possession of the product, its consumption and use will determine the experiences of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that will serve as guidance for future buying decisions.

Parallel stages within the consumer decision-making process have been suggested and/or studied by other authors to explain the influence of business responsibility actions on consumers, but respecting them all in any case the basic sequence cognition–affection–behavior previously pointed out, as in Singh, García de los Salmones, and Rodríguez (2008), Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Gruber (2011), Grimmer and Woolley (2014), or Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2015). For instance, Valor (2010) considers four stages to explain responsible buying decisions, namely antecedents of responsible purchase, information acquisition, evaluation of alternatives, and purchase behavior.

Briefly, the author acknowledges the role of personal and cultural values and efficacy perceptions as basic triggers of the consumer responsible decision-making process, together with the availability of information on firm's responsible practices and their social and environmental impact, and the assessment of the information recovered. At this point, the purchase behavior would occur when the consumer is willing to sacrifice economic criteria (such as price, quality, brand, promotion and the like) in consideration of non-economic social or environmental strengths.

In view of previous models of the consumer decision-making process and their possible adaptation to responsible consumption, this paper will consider a sequence of four stages at the time of conducting the empirical approach covering thus pre-consumption, purchase-consumption and post-consumption phases in which consumers go through in their consumption patterns according to joint linkages between authors revised (Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel 2006; Valor 2010; Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Gruber 2011), which are: information search behavior, information assessment, purchase effort, and post-purchase satisfaction.

2.2. Attributions of business responsibility motives

As noted above, sometimes people may care less about what firms are doing that about why they are doing it (Gilbert and Malone 1995; Skarmeas and Leonidou 2013). In this respect, firms have been found to engage in socially responsible behaviors not only to fulfill external obligations such as regulatory compliance and stakeholders demands, but also due to self-interest considerations such as increased competitiveness and improved stock market performance (Drumwright 1994; Waddock and Smith 2000; Klein and Dawar 2004; Basu and Palazzo 2008; Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Murphy 2013). In fact, many companies advertise their ethical practices to distinguish their products and achieve competitive advantage (Castaldo et al. 2009; Keh and Xie 2009; Luo and Du 2015), and by this mean, the availability of information on corporate responsible practices is considered a key determinant of

consumers' assessments, decisions and purchase behaviors (Pomeroy and Dolnicar 2009; Valor 2010).

Such a kind of evidences makes it unlikely that consumers blindly accept CSR initiatives as sincere actions and thus reward the firm. Rather, citizens may perform responsible consumer behaviors as a mean to express personal values and beliefs (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001; Mohr and Webb 2005) but may also tend to be skeptical of firms' self-interested reasons for engaging in CSR activities (Webb and Mohr 1998; Speed and Thompson 2000; Forehand and Grier 2003; Porter and Kramer 2004; Luo and Bhattacharya 2006; Vanhamme and Grobbsen 2009; Skarmeas and Leonidou 2013) and eventually to punish firms and brands that are perceived as insincere in their social involvement (Brown and Dacin 1997; Barone, Miyazaki, and Taylor 2000; Ellen, Mohr, and Webb 2000; Maignan 2001; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001; Klein, Smith, and John 2004; Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz 2006; Darke and Ritchie 2007; Lange and Washburn 2012).

From this view, many authors suggest that the specific attributions that underlie perceived motivations are likely to influence the evaluation of the firm (Boush, Friestad, and Rose 1994; Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Ellen, Mohr, and Webb 2000; Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006; Vlachos et al. 2009; Skarmeas and Leonidou 2013), thus altering the relationship between CSR practices and consumer responses (Godfrey 2005; Barone, Norman, and Miyazaki 2007; Valor 2010; Leonidou and Skarmeas 2017).

Within this line of research, different models about motivators to engage in responsible practices have been proposed. In simple terms, Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill (2006) characterized firms' drivers as profit-motivated, those that emphasize firm benefit, or socially motivated, those that focus on the benefits to people outside the company, and found that promotion of high-fit, socially motivated initiatives improves consumers' perceptions towards companies, while promotion of low-fit, profit-motivated initiatives has the opposite effect. Following the same perspective, with similar findings, other authors have identified this double attribution to CSR-related activities as well. Forehand and Grier (2003) appointed profit-motivated drivers as firm-serving motives and socially motivated ones as public-serving motives, whereas Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Murphy (2013) named them as self-centered and other-centered motives, respectively, and also Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017) who used the terms extrinsic and intrinsic attributions.

In a more complex model, Ellen, Web, and Mohr (2006) differentiated four types of firms' motives to contribute social causes. Briefly, values-driven motives relate to benevolence-motivated giving. Stakeholder-driven motives relate to support of social causes solely because of pressure from stakeholders. Strategic-driven motives support attaining business goals (e.g., increase market share, create positive impressions) while benefitting the cause. Finally, egoistic-driven motives relate to exploiting the cause rather than helping it.

Based on this taxonomy, Vlachos et al. (2009) examined whether, how and when suspiciousness influences consumers' evaluation and reaction to CSR. The authors hypothesized that values-driven attributions would have a positive effect on consumer trust, patronage intentions and positive recommendations, whereas stakeholder-driven, strategic-driven, and egoistic-driven would negatively affect those criteria. Findings revealed that most consumers ascribe mixed motives to corporate engagement in responsibility initiatives and the negative effects of CRS seem to be more profound than previously recognized, since increasingly suspicious consumers entertained multiple attributions of CSR motives, which were mainly negative and directly influenced both internal and behavioral consumer responses.

Centered on this revision, the present study is intended to analyze the influence of perceived underlying motivations behind firms' responsible practices over the four stages of the consumer decision-making process (recalling, information search, information assessment, purchase effort, and satisfaction). In this sense, it is assumed that consumers will tend to support socially oriented motivations (i.e., values-driven) and punish profit-oriented motivations (i.e., strategic-driven and egoistic-driven). Concretely, all these considerations pointed directly before can be summarized in the following research hypotheses. With regard to the information search step:

H1a. The perception of underlying social-based motivations behind companies' responsible practices lead consumers to search for additional CSR-related information.

H1b. The perception of underlying profit-based motivations behind companies' responsible practices lead consumers not to search for additional CSR-related information.

Referring the information assessment stage:

H2a. The perception of underlying social-based motivations behind companies' responsible practices lead consumers to evaluate positively CSR-related information.

H2b. The perception of underlying profit-based motivations behind companies' responsible practices lead consumers to evaluate negatively CSR-related information.

In relation to the purchase decision step:

H3a. The perception of underlying social-based motivations behind companies' responsible practices lead consumers to acquire their responsible products/services.

H3b. The perception of underlying profit-based motivations behind companies' responsible practices lead consumers to reject their responsible products/services.

And finally, concerning the post-purchase stage:

H4a. The perception of underlying social-based motivations behind companies' responsible practices lead consumers to continue purchasing their products/services in future occasions and to recommend them to other people.

H4b. The perception of underlying profit-based motivations behind companies' responsible practices lead consumers to reject purchasing their products/services in future occasions and not to recommend them to other people.

3. Methodology and results

3.1. Sampling

In order to address the purpose previously pointed, a self-reported questionnaire was administered to randomly selected individuals from the general population of the Spanish region of León during May and June 2013.

Finally, it was reached a total sample of 400 citizens, reaching thus a representative sample size for a significance level of 95.5% (being $e = \pm 5\%$; $p = q = 0.50$). This sample comprised 215 females (53.8%) and 185 males (46.3%), aged 18–75 years old ($M = 44.4$). By age group, 30% were aged 18–35 years old, 30% were 36–50, and 40% were 51–75 years old. Among the total, 38.8% of respondents had coursed university studies, 24.3% had attended a vocational school, 17% had finished secondary studies, 17.8% had received elementary education, and 2.3% were uneducated.

3.2. Measures

All respondents answered voluntarily to a survey composed of two general sets of scales for measuring the consumer decision-making process based on responsibility criteria and attributions of responsibility practices in business.

5 First, a scale of 16 items were used to ask individuals about possible firm's motivations to act in a socially responsible way, in reference to the two categories of drivers established by Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill (2006). In these terms, eight items defined a social orientation (e.g., 'to give back something to the society', 'to respond consumers' expectations'), and the remaining eight items defined profit motivations (e.g., 'to take advantage of the cause', 'to improve their reputation'). Participants reported their agreement with each sentence on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

10 Next, participants were presented a list of 12 items defining four stages of the consumer decision-making process. Particularly, three items were used to ask participants about their search behavior for information concerning responsibility in business (e.g., 'I pay attention to advertising messages on responsible brands'). Four sentences were devoted to measure the relative weight given by consumers to CSR criteria when evaluating the information recovered and making purchase decisions (e.g., 'I think that socially responsible products are of better quality'). Two more items assessed participants purchase efforts in evaluation of responsibility (e.g., 'I am willing to pay a higher price for a product from a socially responsible firm'). And finally, three items inquired respondents about their satisfaction in reference to CSR considerations (e.g., 'I am satisfied with my experience with products of socially responsible firms'). Again, participants reported their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale.

15 Moreover, a final section gathered information about the most basic demographic variables, these were: age, gender, and level of education.

3.3. Data analysis

Once data were collected and processed, Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients, descriptive values and correlations were calculated for each one of six scales with the intent to check the reliability and validity levels using the software SPSS version 21.0.0.

20 After that, four step-wise linear regression models were conducted to test the effect of perceived social and profit drivers of CSR on consumers' patterns concerning each one of the stages in the decision-making process (information search, information assessment, purchase effort, and satisfaction). In each case, gender, age and educational level were entered as control variables in the first step of the analysis. In a second step, perceptions of social and profit motivations were added as independent variables.

4. Results

4.1. Correlation, reliability and descriptive values

40 Table 1 gathers means, standard deviations, correlation coefficients, and reliability indexes for the study variables/scales. In general terms, the four facets of consumer behavior analyzed were strongly and positively correlated among them, thus showing congruence between the various purchase habits of respondents according to responsibility criteria. In this sense,

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among the study variables.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Mean | SD |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|
| 1. Perceived social orientation | (.80) | | | | | | 3.36 | 0.62 |
| 2. Perceived profit orientation | .16** | (.75) | | | | | 3.84 | 0.53 |
| 3. Information search | .20** | .16** | (.77) | | | | 3.23 | 0.85 |
| 4. Information assessment | .29** | -.08* | .49** | (.85) | | | 3.06 | 0.89 |
| 5. Purchase effort | .29** | -.09* | .48** | .66* | (.83) | | 2.87 | 1.13 |
| 6. Satisfaction | .31** | .01 | .62** | .72** | .65** | (.70) | 3.16 | 0.86 |

Note: Cronbach alpha reliabilities are in parentheses.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; Source: Authors.

mean scores in the consumer decision-making scales were moderated, with values between 2.87 and 3.23 in a five-point scale.

Similarly, the two measures of motives attributed by consumers to business responsibility were positively correlated, being their mean scores 3.36 – perceived social orientation – and 3.84 – perceived social orientation – (five-point Likert scale), thus pointing to the coexistence of different components in the participants' conceptualization of firms' motives to operate in a responsible manner. However, as seen, mean values were slightly higher for profit-driven motives ($M = 3.84$), thus showing the predominance of a vision of business responsibility as profit motivated.

Cronbach alpha values obtained for the six scales were adequate, over the recommended minimum of .60 (Loewenthal 1996).

Furthermore, social-oriented motives were significantly and positively correlated to the four stages of the consumer decision-making process analyzed, but seemed to be more decisive for consumer behavior in terms of information search ($M = 3.23$), satisfaction ($M = 3.16$), and information assessment ($M = 3.06$), in comparison to the lowest mean score obtained for the purchase effort scale ($M = 2.87$).

Opposite, attribution of profit-oriented motivations to companies' responsible practices was only positively correlated to information search behavior, whereas correlations with information assessment and purchase effort were negative and only marginal and no relation was found with satisfaction. In short, this pattern of results backs up the idea that consumers' perception of firms' responsibility depends on the specific motives attributed to that performance.

4.2. Linear regression modeling

As mentioned in previous lines, four step-wise linear regression models were conducted to test the effect of social and/or profit-oriented responsible activities of companies on consumers' perception, just as much as stages in the decision-making process have been proposed.

Model 1 (in Table 2) tested the effect of the control and independent variables on consumers' information seeking behavior. Level of studies was the only socio-demographic variable found to have a significant influence in the overall model ($\beta = .135$, $p < .01$), while both attributions of social ($\beta = .186$, $p < .001$) and profit motivations ($\beta = .120$, $p < .05$) reached statistical significance with a positive effect. Therefore, hypothesis 1a is accepted whereas hypothesis 1b is not only rejected, but it proves, furthermore, the opposite effect, that is, the perception of underlying profit-based motivations behind companies' responsible

Table 2. Regression analysis.

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|------------------------|--------|-----------------|---------|--------------|---------|
| | Information search | | Information assessment | | Purchase effort | | Satisfaction | |
| | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 1 | Step 2 |
| <i>Step 1 (Control variables)</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | .073 | .071 | .019 | .022 | .077 | .079 | .070 | .045 |
| Age | .040 | .056 | -.020 | -.038 | -.063 | -.083 | .007 | .007 |
| Educational level | .135** | .127** | .082 | .092 | .108 | .119 | .102* | .115* |
| <i>Step 2 (Independent variables)</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Perceived social orientation | | .186*** | | .316** | | .567*** | | .315*** |
| Perceived profit orientation | | .120* | | -.128* | | -.295** | | -.048 |
| F*** | 12.28 | 10.26 | 37.91 | 22.79 | 20.08 | 16.42 | 4.22 | 24.41 |
| ΔF | | 5.91 | | 7.08 | | 8.35 | | 44.14 |
| R ² | .058 | .072 | .087 | .103 | .092 | .111 | .011 | .110 |
| ΔR ² | | .014 | | .016 | | .019 | | .099 |

* $p < .05$;
** $p < .01$;
*** $p < .001$;
Source: Authors.

practices also lead consumers to search for additional CSR-related information. Collectively, such variables explained 7.2% of the variance in the dependent variable ($F = 10.26, p < .001$).

In models 2 and 3 (Table 2), none of the control variables caused a significant effect. Perceptions of social motivations had a significant positive effect on both information assessment ($\beta = .316, p < .001$) and purchase effort ($\beta = .567, p < .001$), while profit-based attributions caused a negative influence on both dependent variables ($\beta = -.128, p < .05$ and $\beta = -.295, p < .01$, respectively). Thus, hypotheses 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b are supported. Overall, both types of perceived drivers explained 10.3% of the variance in consumers' information assessment ($F = 22.97, p < .001$) and the 11.1% in purchase effort ($F = 16.42, p < .001$).

Finally, model 4 (Table 2) tested the effect of the control and independent variables on consumers' satisfaction. Again, the level of education had a statistically significant effect in the overall model ($\beta = .115, p < .05$), while evaluation of socially motivated drivers in CSR actuations were positively associated with positive perceptions of consumer, which means that hypothesis 4a is accepted. Opposite, profit-based attributions were not significant in this case. Consequently, hypothesis 4b is not supported. In sum, the model explained the 11% of the variance in the dependent variable ($F = 24.41, p < .001$).

5. Discussion

The implications of sustainability and responsibility for consumer behavior and marketing have represented a quite common topic in recent literature. In general, main conclusions in

this sense remark that, while it is true that socially responsible initiatives may induce some consumer goodwill towards the organization, the effects of CSR on consumer behavior are more complex than expected. Particularly, those motives that consumers attribute to organizations to behave in a responsible manner seem to be a key point to take into consideration when **analyzing** the relationships between CSR and consumer behavior.

In order to throw some light on the subject, this paper has been aimed to **analyze** the underlying motives (social or profit-based) attributed by consumers to business responsible actuations and their effect on various facets of consumer behavior referring to four stages of decision-making process, namely information seeking, information assessment, purchase effort, and satisfaction. Socio-demographic variables of gender, age group, and educational level were also considered. In reference to these pursuits, some main conclusions can be stressed.

Initially, it should be noted that the present study assesses the existence of a positive relationship between the four stages of the consumer decision-making process contemplated, point that, taken together with the internal consistency indexes (Cronbach's alpha coefficients), supports the basic structure of pre-consumption, consumption and post-consumption stages when investigating about consumer behavior.

Likewise, in relation to the first objective set in the introducing paragraphs above, it can be concluded that the availability of positive references on firms' responsible practices has a positive but moderate impact (mean scores range from 2.87 to 3.23) on consumers' assessments of products and brands, which is generalizable to men and women and different age categories. This fact derives in specific buying decisions, habits, and patterns such as, for instance, consumers who are concerned about responsibility practices of companies but continue to pay quite attention to the physical properties of products, price and other tangible aspects entirely separated from CSR issues.

Aside from the above, it should be noted that responsible concerns go somewhat unnoticed by individuals at the time of purchase. Revising mean scores for the four stages in the decision-making process, the stage 'purchase effort' shows the lowest mean score ($M = 2.87$), below information search ($M = 3.23$), information assessment ($M = 3.06$), and satisfaction ($M = 3.16$), in other words, participants tend to search for responsible information, evaluate it, and be satisfied after acquiring responsible products/services in a greater degree than they purchase responsible products or services, which embodies an inconsistency itself and may be indicative of social desirability (Thompson and Phua 2005) existing behind the responses of participants. This is a matter of concern that has not been controlled in the present study, and represents thus one of its main limitations to be overcome in future scenarios.

Furthermore, this study also confirms that consumers do have varying perceptions of those motives that may underlie CSR practices of companies (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006; Ellen, Web, and Mohr 2006; Vlachos et al. 2009). In this tune, findings prove the coexistence of different firms' motives to behave in a socially responsible way as perceived by consumers, in this case, according to social and profit-based considerations (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006). More precisely, participants in general terms pointed to perceive that companies perform CSR activities due to profit-based reasons ($M = 3.84$; $SD = .53$) rather than social-based ones ($M = 3.36$; $SD = .62$).

Related to that, and referring to the second purpose of this study, indicated in previous lines, results suggest that subjacent motives attributed by consumers to companies' CSR

practices have a noteworthy effect on the specific stage of the consumer decision-making sequence.

Particularly, while expectations of social-oriented goals in responsible firms is positively related to consumers' willingness over the various stages of their purchase decisions and actions, the potential effects of profit-based considerations are more complex. It can be assumed that the perception of social-based motives behind responsible activities stimulates always positively consumers to search for and evaluate CSR-related information, to acquire responsible products/services, and also to repeat the same purchase in future situations and/or recommend it to other people, but in reference to profit-based motives, the effects over each stage are more erratic.

Around this latter point, profit-based motives attributed to CSR actuations lead consumers to search for additional information about the firm and its products, but the results in terms of information assessment and purchase effort are negative, in the same line as specified by Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill (2006). Further, although not statistically significant, consumers showed some tendency not to be prone to report good purchase experiences on this matter maybe as a mean to express personal values and punish irresponsible firms as Valor (2010) suggested.

Finally, it is worth mentioning as well that consumers' behavior patterns in relation to CSR criteria seem to be consistent across groups of people regardless of their gender and age as noted earlier. However, some evidences point to a certain effect of the educational level on consumers' information seeking and satisfaction stages. Such aspect confirms the level of studies as a likely useful segmentation variable when analyzing the influence of CSR on consumer behavior.

In line with the above considerations, two basic ideas could be observed from the entrepreneurial and market-oriented point of view. On one hand, different businesses should take into account that CSR practices have a sure visibility among consumers, which is greater in case of high-educated individuals. Therefore, an appropriate CSR policy, including the convenient selection of diffusion resources for its communication, should not be neglected, especially for its influence over consumers at the time of search for information.

Apart from that, companies must not forget that consumers evaluate in parallel their CSR practices wondering what sort of possible underlying motivations are behind their performance. In this sense, companies should bear in mind that consumers tend to reward perceived social-oriented motives underlying these responsible practices, and punish perceived profit-oriented motives. For all this, once again, a suitable management of communication of organizational CSR practices is decisive for products/services success.



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