

Are Customers Rewarding Responsible Businesses? An Overview of the Theory and Research in the Field of CSR

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Abstract. *Many researchers consider corporate social responsibility (CSR) a key element in developing sustainable businesses today. The benefits for companies and communities are very diverse. From a company perspective, some benefits are non-financials while, on the other hand, many of them have a financial dimension. An important outcome considered in this context is the increase in sales. The present paper analyses the most reliable worldwide studies on how consumers are actually influenced by the social-responsible actions of companies. It aims to understand in what degree people are responsive to CSR actions and to see how much of the intended attitude towards responsible businesses is translated into actual behavior. Items considered are trust, purchase behavior, and loyalty in the case of responsible businesses and boycott in the case of irresponsible ones. The research developed worldwide in the last five years show that people are extremely concerned with CSR and they try to be responsible by rewarding companies that are responsible or by sanctioning the ones which are perceived as irresponsible. There is a difference between intentions and actual behavior, partly justified by the fact that people feel they are not sufficiently informed on the responsible companies. Nevertheless a larger part part of the respondents are actively recognizing and rewarding CSR contributions of companies. Research shows that country differences exist. The most responsive countries are the ones with emerging economies. Countries in Europe and North America are more reserved. Differences in reactions are to be registered also by taking into account the age of the respondents, as well as the domain in which companies get involved through their CSR strategies.*

Keywords: *corporate social responsibility, CSR, customer responsibility, purchasing behavior*

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is still a controversial topic, from a practical perspective. The theory in the field is relatively in agreement in recommending CSR as a modern and ethical management approach – companies are indebted to the society, therefore being responsible is not an option but an obligation to the society (Crane, Matten & Moon, 2008; Crişan, 2013,

pp.56-59; Freeman, 2010, p.43; Younkins, 2001). Even more, increasingly legal regulations are encouraging or even imposing CSR in the wider societal framework. Nevertheless, there are still many businesses that are adopting and implementing "CSR" campaigns as instruments to increase awareness or to develop their image, since CSR could be an effective marketing or public relations tool (Zbucnea, 2008; Borțun, 2011), or an instrument of competitive advantage (Crișan, Reveiu & Andrușenco, 2011). This could be just a step in a wider and more profound acceptance of CSR by the business world, since Kotler and Lee (2005, pp.7-9) present the "traditional" model of CSR referring to the practices before the 1990s: *doing good to look good*. The next step in the development of CSR would be *doing well and doing good*, which emphasizes the necessity to corroborate the benefits of the society with those of the companies.

We also stress that there is always the risk to society that companies do not properly understand CSR, and they use it in order to appear "social" and "green" (Gond & Herrbach, 2006, p.363; Bazillier & Vauday, 2010; Wang și Anderson, 2008), which is also trendy (Pînzaru 2009, 113). Such practices are risky both from a legal perspective, but also because society (represented by NGOs) and customers tend to be critical and probably sanction such practices. Even more, Dodd and Supa (2011) argue that understanding the impact of CSR on consumers would lead to a profound understanding of CSR as a management strategic tool, not just a mere marketing instrument. Nevertheless, CSR plays nowadays an important part in the strategy of a company, due to its various benefits, but also outside constraints.

Not just the "trends" and changing mentalities are part of the equation but also the economic crises. On one hand, the economic crises, induced a deduction of the budgets allocated to CSR, on the other hand it generated an additional impulse to differentiate convincingly and less constly from the competition. The economic crises lead to various modifications in the business environment, state regulations, as well as in the marketing strategies of companies (Pînzaru, Galalae, & Zbucnea, 2010; Pînzaru, Anghel, & Dinu, 2013.)

The theoretical support for commercial benefits of CSR

The benefits for a company developing and implementing CSR strategies are both financial (Gössling, 2012; Margolis et al., 2007) and nonfinancial (European Alliance for CSR, 2006). Vogel (2005, p.2) shows that at the origin of ac-

tual CSR practices could be various reasons: strategic, defensive, or altruistic. No matter the reason, the bottom-line seems to be positive from an economic perspective (Kotler & Lee, 2005, pp.10-18). Nevertheless, some would argue that the companies following CSR strategies are not necessary more profitable (Hansen et al., 2013; Vogel, 2005, p.13; Zadek, 2007, p.99). Still, a review of the literature in the field developed by DB Climate Change Advisors (2012) shows that the large majority of academic studies considers that the impact of CSR on cost of capital, corporate financial performances and on market-based performance is rather positive. We also mention that the positive impact of CSR is not limited to the companies developing this practice. A series of important benefits could be registered for society, local communities, environment, and various stakeholders (Henriques & Richardson, 2004, p.38). Nevertheless, the literature is not optimistic in the ability of social-responsible companies to actually solved the problems humankind actually is confronting with (Zadek, 2007, pp.99-100).

Since companies are financially responsible to their shareholders and investors, CSR cannot be implemented in a company ignoring this aspect. At the same time, in the contemporary society and economy, maximizing the profits can not be obtained without considering the interests of various stakeholders (Jamali, 2008, p.5; Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Sen, Bhattacharya & Korschin, 2006). The pressure from media, various concerned and sometimes powerful nonprofit organizations or large and influential social groups (Frederick, 2006), as well as different stakeholders, put a lot of pressure on businesses. Inevitably, not all stakeholders are to be considered, but just the most relevant and influential ones, respectively the ones with high cooperation potential and those with high menace power (for a larger discussion see Crişan, 2013, pp.94-97). CSR is to a company one of the leverage managerial tools it possesses. The commercial benefits it could generate are diverse. Even more, the economic dimension of CSR could be considered an important trigger for the development and implementation of CSR strategies.

Kotler and Lee (2005) specify the following benefits of a company implementing CSR: increased sales and market share, brand development, image expansion, benefits related to the employees, reduces operational costs and growth in the appeal to the investors and partners. These directions are validated by the Grant Thornton Research (2011, 3) which shows that the main factors which make companies develop and implement a CSR strategy are economic: the attitude of the public / brand consolidation (56%), cost management (56%) and hiring / retention of employees (56%). The following motives are:

tax advantages (45%), legal pressures (40%), saving the planet (36%) and investor relations (35%).

Achieving the above-mentioned benefits depends on the way CSR is communicated and reported. Since reporting is important in ensuring visibility to the CSR efforts (Gond & Herrback, 2006), increasingly more attention is given to this aspect. Nevertheless, the issue is complex in terms of aims, procedures, degree of transparency, regulation and self-regulation and others (Henriques, 2007, pp.69-100).

Ogilvy (2010) shows that due to the various business implications of CSR, disclosing it is not just a matter of transparency, but also a matter of being business-wise in the context of the relationships of a company with consumers, employees, partners, stakeholders and such. Since communicating and reporting CSR is beneficial, and the competition between companies is also manifest in the field of establishing good business practices, reporting CSR is increasingly more done worldwide (KPMG, 2011, p.17). Even more, companies are more and more reporting quantitative and qualitative data on their performances (KPMG Advisory, 2010, p.3). This could be related with the signaled commercial benefits, in the context of a larger acceptance of the image that the company promotes (Ernst&Young, 2011, p.13).

Still, Vogel (2005, pp.30-33) shows that it is difficult to exactly trace the impact of CSR on profits. This is related not only to the wide diversity of studies and data-sources that can not be compared due to their heterogeneity, but also to their reliability in terms of selection of criteria or objectivity. We consider that such situations are bound to appear because in most cases companies considered in CSR samples are also dynamic companies, which could be considered models in terms of investments and strategy of research and development, productivity performance and such – elements which influence the profits to a wide degree.

Not just stakeholders and customers are relevant for maximizing the CSR-related effects for a company. *An augmented consumer perspective* could be beneficial in many ways: influencing non-consumers generate side effects on the brand perceptions, on actual consumer behavior, as well as on the image of the corporation as a social responsible one. By increasing consumer equity, corporates can obtain long-term benefits and extent social responsibility (Lemon & Seiders, 2007). Therefore, there is a complex set of factors to be considered when designing CSR strategies, and consumers and their opinions are at the core of the process.

This high impact of non-consumers could be related to the normative beliefs identified by Dodd and Supa (2011). The consumers' behavior in terms of CSR related purchase is highly stimulated when their referents consider that they should act as such. The above-mentioned study confirms that buying responsible – or at least the intention to do so – is also a social-desirable action. It also shows that there is a positive relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility and the consumer purchase behavior.

In the context of our overview to highlight that the public considers in a wide degree (82%) that companies should be involved in social and environmental matters is also relevant (Cone, 2013, p.8). Just 6% of the public considers that business is not responsible for any social-, environment-, or society-related issue and they just exist to make profits. Furthermore, the public appreciates both the actual impact companies might have, as well as the force that consumers could be in determining companies to be responsible. 22% of respondents consider that companies have made significant positive impact on social and environmental issues (Cone, 2013, p.28). Of course, since the study is developed globally, significant differences between countries exist. For instance, the most skeptical are the French (12%) and the British (9%), while the most appreciative are the Chinese (38%) and the Indians (37%). The appreciative attitude of consumers is validated by the Edelman GoodPurpose Study developed in 2012, which shows that 28% of the consumers worldwide consider that companies are performing well in addressing social issues (Edelman, 2012, p.16). In this later study, again, the French are the most critical (13%), while the Indians the most enthusiastic (58%). These variations could be related with the specific focus of each research. The involvement of companies in social matters is increasingly more accepted since there is a reconciliation between social values and the business system, an approach of the contemporary society that gains increasingly more since the 1990s (Vogel, 2005, p.28).

Another significant fact is that 27% consider that consumers themselves have significant positive impact through their purchasing decisions (Cone, 2013, p.28). Again large variety of figures is to be observed worldwide from Brazil (54%) to China (11%). Another variation is related with the characteristics of the respondents. Some of them are highly influenced by CSR attitudes and have high CSR related expectations, while others are not so connected to CSR issues (Cone, 2013, p.19).

The last general aspect related to consumers worldwide we mention is that the public is not critical at all to companies that do good, and have a benefit result-

ed from this action. The Edelman GoodPurpose study in 2012 shows that, in 5 years, the percentage of consumers considering that "it is OK for companies to support a good cause and make money at the same time" increased from 57% to 76% (Edelman, 2012, p.9).

CSR as a factor of buying decision - a worldwide radiography

Many theoretical studies present the commercial benefits of CSR, therefore a lot of attention has been given to investigating how much it actually influences the purchasing processes. The stakes are extremely important to a company, but also to society. An overview of the studies developed worldwide in the last years show a rather strong impact of CSR practices on customers. A relatively large number of studies are relevant for better understanding this issue. We present them in the following table, signalling the organization which developed it, the year when it was done, the countries considered in the survey, as well as the reference necessary to retrieve the information by those interested in more complex and detailed data.

Table 1. The worldwide studies on CSR

No.	Organization	Year	Countries	Reference
1	Edelman	2008	Canada, Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, India, China, Japan, Germany, Italy	Edelman (2008). GoodPurpose. Mutually Beneficial Marketing, http://edelmaneditions.com
2	Edelman	2009	Canada, Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, India, China, Japan, Germany, Italy	Edelman (2009). GoodPurpose. Mutually Beneficial Marketing Takes Flight, http://purpose.edelman.com/past-studies
3	Edelman	2010	Canada, Mexico, Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, India, China, Japan, UAE, Germany, Italy, Malaysia	Edelman (2010). GoodPurpose. Citizens Engage! http://purpose.edelman.com/past-studies
4	Cone Communications – Echo	2011	The United States, Canada, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Russia, China, India and Japan	Cone Communications – Echo (2011), The Corporate Responsibility Opportunity Study, www.conecomm.com/globalcrstudy
5	Nielsen	2012	56 countries	Nielsen (2012). The Global Socially-Conscious Consumer, www.nielsen.com
6	Edelman	2012	Canada, Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Singapore, India, China, Japan, UAE, Germany, Italy, Indonesia, Malaysia	Edelman (2012). GoodPurpose. Global Consumer Survey, http://purpose.edelman.com

7	Cone Communications – Echo	2013	The United States, Canada, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Russia, China, India and Japan	Cone Communications – Echo (2013). Global CSR Study, www.conecomm.com/global-CSR-study
8	Nielsen	2013	58 countries	Nielsen (2013). Consumers Who Care, www.nielsen.com

We mention that these are not the only worldwide studies on CSR. Some of the studies were not considered because they refer only to the “green” component of CSR (for instance TNS Global 2008, developed in 18 countries). Since the research undergone indicate there is a different reaction of consumers considering the domain of involvement of a company (e.g. Cone Communication – Echo 2011, 2012 or Edelman 2009, 2010, 2012), it is difficult to compare these studies focusing on environment related issues with more general ones. Therefore we selected only the research developed worldwide (in at least 10 countries varied from the point of view of geographic location and economic development) by established research organizations to ensure the relevance and accuracy of data.

The impact on buying decision can be evaluated considering several issues. On one hand there is an impact on the image of the company that can generate trust. On the other hand there is a direct impact on the buying behaviour. This can be manifest in increased sales and loyalty. Some research also consider other issues, such as how much consumers want to engage with a company beyond their purchases (e.g., donate their own money or volunteer with the company), or advocate for and recommend a company, would like to work for a company or would appreciate if a company operates in their neighbourhood (Cone, 2011; Edelman, 2012).

Trust

Consumers are more likely to trust companies which are responsible, as illustrates the following table.

Table 2. Trust in companies that are perceived as social-responsible

Impact of CSR on trust	Research
65%	Edelman (2009, p.25)
65%	Edelman (2010, p.21)
49% trust companies focusing their CSR efforts on water 51% - economic development 52% - education 54% - poverty & hunger and health & disease 56% - human rights 57% - environment	Cone Communication – Echo (2011, p.11)

66%-83%	Edelman (2012, p.29)
94%	Cone Communication – Echo (2013, p.19)

There is just an apparent difference between the results of Cone Communications – Echo study in 2011 and the one in 2013. In the first case just data on those who strongly agree that they trust a company more due to CSR is given, while in the second study all those agreeing and strongly agreeing with the item are presented.

Again, there seems to be a difference between the Cone Communications – Echo and Edelman GoodPurpose researches. We can not explain this difference based on the limited information available to us. The differences could be related to the sample of countries, for instance. The Cone Communication – Echo studies were developed in 8 countries, while the Edelman research in 16 countries. Another important issue identified by all the studies, is that relatively large differences between countries exist. The Edelman GoodPurpose study in 2012 demonstrates that the rapid growing economies (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and UAE – called the *bull markets*) are more responsive to the CSR actions of companies compared with the developed economies (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States – called the *bear markets*). Figures show that 83% in the first case trust ethical brands compared to 66% in the second group of countries. The people in the first group of countries want brands to do more for them than provide a product in a larger degree than people in the second group of countries (75% vs. 57%) (Edelman, 2012, p.29).

Increased sales

For a company, the economic aims of CSR are sales-related. Therefore, it is important that trust should lead to purchases. All the studies show such an outcome.

Table 3. Purchase pattern related to CSR awareness

Intention to purchase	Actual purchase	Research
78%		Edelman (2007)
	66%	Edelman (2010)
93%	65%	Cone Communication – Echo (2011, p.21)
66%		Nielsen (2012, p.3)
76%	66%	Edelman (2012, p.12, 20, 32)
92%	67%	Cone Communication – Echo (2013, p.25)

As in the case of the previous item – trust – the Cone Communication – Echo research indicate higher values in tremens of intention to purchase. This difference could be related wither with what it is reported or with the way questions were formulated. No matter the situation, the figures for actual purchase behaviour are in agreement, indicating that two-thirds of the population worldwide has bought from companies because they consider them social-responsible.

The Nielsen report stands out as an exception, but it is possible that it directly presents the actual behaviour of the respondents. If it presents the intention to buy, than the corresponding actual purchase figure would be a smaller one, under the level indicated by the other studies. Since the Nielsen research is the one developed in a larger number of countries all over the world, it could more accurately present the global situation, indicating that it would be a significance difference between the developed and emerging countries selected by Edelman and Cone Communication / Echo studies and the rest of the world. Therefore, more attention should be given to this issue.

We stress that there is a difference between the intensions to reward companies that are socially responsible and the real actions on this direction (the actual buy). The Edelman GoodPurpose Study in 2012 is more detailed from a geographical perspective and it shows that the cause-related purchases of people in *bull markets* buy more products related to social causes (according to their declaration) than those in *bear markets* (84% vs. 57%).

The Nielsen report in the same year presents a different point of differentiation. It shows that there are large differences from a geographic point of view (which is also in part an economic differentiation). Those who seem most responsive to CSR activities of companies are from Latin America (77%), followed by Middle East and Africa (75%), by Asia and Pacific (70%), by North America (64%) and by Europe (55%) (Nielsen, 2012, p.3).

Studies (Bueble, 2008, p.10; Sen, Bhattacharya and Korschin, 2006) show that the impact of CSR is less effective when connected with low awareness of CSR actions or a lesser transparency of CSR actions. Another reason for the increased intention compared to actual behaviour might be related to the suspicion of false statements on CSR involvement. The TNS Global study (2008, pp.15-16) shows that people do not necessarily buy from companies which promote themselves as green if they believe that these companies are not genuinely interested in the environment.

Another reason for cautiously considering the figures in the Table 3 is that some studies present much lower figures (Vogel, 2005, p.48). In 2004, an European survey shows that 75% would buy considering social and environmental reasons, but only 3% actually did this. In the United States figures reported are a bit higher, of 10-12%. Not having access to the mentioned studies we can not comment on the results, except drawing the attention on the increased responsibility of people over time. It is likely that people are becoming more responsible, including when they are consumers. In the same time, the difference between the figures provided by the research in 2004 presented by Vogel and the later ones considered by us is to be primarily explained by the social-desirability effect. People declare what they would like to be heard or what they believe they are doing.

Not only might buyers be interested in purchasing from responsible companies, but they might accept to pay more for this.

Table 4. Willingness to pay higher prices for the products of social-responsible companies

Willingness to pay extra	Research
70%	Edelman (2007)
58%	Edelman (2008, p.15)
41%-56%*	Edelman (2010, p.24)
43%	Edelman (2012, p.31)
46%	Nielsen (2012, p.3)
50%	Nielsen (2013, p.4)

** depending on the market segment*

Not only do companies benefit from increased sales due to their CSR activity, but they could also gain more from each customer. Still, we do not have corroborating data on the actual purchase in this context.

The decrease in values between 2007 and 2012 could be related to the worldwide economic crisis. In the last 3 years, probably also related to the economic stability and even development in various countries, it has increased. It is in fact the indicator that has increased the most amongst the ones taken into account in our paper.

It also worth mentioning that the declared willingness to pay more varies upon countries and the amount of extra-money given. For instance, the Edelman GoodPurpose Study in 2010 shows that 41% of the respondents would

pay an extra 10% for appliances, while 47% would pay 5% extra for them. For clothing and beverages both figures are higher (Edelman 2010, p.24). The Nielsen study in 2012 shows that even if the Latin Americans declare in the largest degree that they would purchase from social-responsible companies, they are not the most willing to pay extra for this. The hierarchy worldwide from this perspective is as follows: Asia & Pacific – 55%, Middle East & Africa (53%), Latin America (49%), North America (42%) and Europe (32%) (Nielsen, 2012, p.3). The Nielsen study in 2013 also shows some differences in regard to age groups: the young respondents (up to 40 years old) are more likely to spend more (Nielsen, 2013, p.4) than old ones (above 40 years old).

We observe that those declaring they would pay more are not necessary the most affluent people in the sample, coming either from less developed or emergent economies, or being younger (therefore probably with a reduced budget compared to the other segments). Maybe these groups declare they would pay more either because they would like to do this (but they do not necessary pay more because they do not possess the necessary funds) or because they are more eager to comply with the current social trends and expectations. If the later reason for the figure is valid, then the 43% declaring that they actually paid more for social-responsible products (Nielsen, 2013, p.8) should be cautiously considered. Therefore further studies focusing on the actual behavior are recommended.

Another issue to be considered is not just the commercial advantage of companies perceived as responsible, but also the negative impact of being perceived irresponsible. Customers might just boycott those companies and turn to competition when buying products and services they need.

Table 5. Degree in which consumer sanction irresponsible companies

Intention to boycott	Actual action	Research
37%		Edelman (2010, p.28)
93%	56%	Cone Communication – Echo (2011, p.21)
44%		Edelman (2012, p.20)
90%	55%	Cone Communication – Echo (2013, p.24)

Again, the Edelman research shows lower figures than the Cone Communication – Echo research. Still, data clearly show a negative image generated by irresponsible acts of companies that is highly risky from the perspective of sales. This indicator is also subjective to social-desirability issues, and it could

be possible that the actual figures are somewhat lower, but even if 1 out of 3/4 consumers would really sanction irresponsible companies, the importance of being accountable is clear.

Still, it is important to mention that some other surveys, such as one developed in UK in 2004, show much lower figures, of just 2% (Vogel, 2005, p.48).

We draw attention to the fact that people consider that they are not very informed regarding the CSR actions of companies. By inference they also consider that they are not very informed about the irresponsible actions of a company as well and would not react promptly in such cases. The distance people feel when relating with the business environment is not surprising, considering that Anghel (2013) argues that people are not knowledgeable enough in terms of understanding economic processes and instruments. This, in addition to the multitude of external information and stimuli people have to cope with, leads to the actual of perceived lack of information of the general public.

In some cases, the indignation related with the irresponsibility of companies might be so great, that the scandals associated generate important changes of the strategy of those companies and a lot of additional costs. Sometimes, these implications are extremely deep and affect the company at global level. It worth stressing that such situations affect more high-profile companies, which sometimes are more virtuous than others (see, for instance, the Nike case - Vogel, 2005, pp.80-81). Still, the long-term financial impact of such actions seems to be low (Vogel, 2004, p.51; Zadek, 2007, pp.86-87).

Loyalty

The importance of loyalty is stressed in many economic studies. Therefore, understanding the degree to which social-responsible companies affect the loyalty of consumers (either in the creation or maintenance of this loyalty) is very important for actual CSR practices.

Table 6. Loyalty strength related to the social-responsible image of a company

Impact on trust	Switch brands to one similar in quality but responsible	Study
	67%	Edelman (2009, p.27)
	62%	Edelman (2010, p.26)
44% are more loyal to companies focusing their CSR efforts on water 45% - economic development		

47% - education 48% - health & disease 49% - human rights 51% - environment 54% - poverty & hunger		Cone Communication – Echo (2011, p.11)
	73%	Edelman (2012)
93%		Cone Communication – Echo (2013, p.19)

We stress again that the difference between the data offered by the Cone Communication – Echo studies is related to the way the report-items are selected: just people strongly agreeing are presented in 2011, while those agreeing and strongly agreeing are added in 2013. Still, it is interesting to observe that in 2013 compared to 2011 a larger degree of respondents declared that they would not switch brands with similar price and quality in the benefit of one associated with a good cause: 18% in 2013 and 12% in 2011 (Cone Communication – Echo, 2013, p.20). This might be related with a certain skepticism regarding the actual impact of CSR strategies. The study also shows that since ”competition” in the field of CSR is also strong, offering an array of options to consumers, people are pickier in choosing what to buy also considering the involvement of a company in a relevant field from the costumer’s perspective 2011 (Cone Communication – Echo, 2013, p.19).

Of high importance for companies should be the declaration of consumers that 3 out of 4 would leave a brand and buy another that is social-responsible. This declaration is supported by another fact, i.e. that the most important factor influencing the selection of products to buy is the social-responsible image (42% according to the Edelman research, 2010).

Conclusions and implications

Research developed worldwide supports the theories about the impact of CSR on consumer behavior. Additionally, it shows not only that CSR truly influences consumers in terms of trust, loyalty, advocacy and purchasing behavior, but also that this impact is rather high. Still, one must bear in mind that the figures refer in many cases to intentions, hypothetical behavior not to actual reaction. Also, the opinions expressed are object of social-desirability risks. Therefore, more attention should be given in future research to actual behavior.

Another issue that must be taken into consideration is that the respondents in all the analyzed studies are, probably, not representative for the entire population of the countries included in the sample. All the studies were conducted online and in some countries the "average citizen" does not necessarily have a regular Internet connection. We consider that figures identified are to be critically evaluated, and to be aware that the actual population in some countries around the globe might not be so committed to social-responsibility when part of that society is still struggling with basic needs and with gaining enough for subsistence. Still, the surveys could be reliable especially for developed countries and it indicated some relevant trends worldwide in the field of CSR.

With these methodological notes in mind, it is clear that the studies considered show that people trust social-responsible companies to a wide degree. An increased trust in the company from two thirds of the market gives that organization an important competitive advantage because trust triggers purchase. Still the reality at the "shelf" is not so optimistic, since consumers complain that they feel they are not informed enough on the companies that are truthfully social responsible (Nielsen, 2013). Therefore the following scenario is plausible: consumers trust social-responsible companies but they consider they do not have relevant information on them when actually buying products. Therefore, the real buying behavior could be influenced more by other factors (design and innovation – 31%, brand loyalty – 27% – according to Edelman, 2010, p.23), which are less relevant for customers than social purpose (42%), but are easier to evaluate when buying. In this context, reporting and making consumers and non-consumers, as well as various stakeholders aware of the CSR strategies and activities of a company is a must.

As expected, the actual purchase related to social-responsibility is lower than the intention to purchase. Still, the figures worldwide are high: 2 out of 3 people declared that they have bought products because the companies producing them are social-responsible. Some significant variations exist between continents and economies. The more developed countries in Europe, as well as the United States and Canada prove to be less influenced, probably more sceptical towards the genuine engagement of companies. At the opposite pole are the emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil which declare they are actively encouraging / rewarding the social-responsible actions of companies. Even more, these countries are also the ones willing to pay more for social-responsible products. The same polarization is noted in terms of the age of respondents. Persons up to 40 years old declare they take into consideration more CSR actions than older people. Another element influencing

the actual attitude towards companies is the domains in which they are active. The most appreciated involvements, which implies the highest commitment seems to be environment, while some of the least appreciated fields seem to be the involvement in arts.

In a relatively large degree (almost 1 out of 2 persons) declare they would pay more for companies that are social-responsible. This item is one of those that have increased significantly in the last 3 years. The amount of additional money they would give depends on the type of products considered (the more expensive and technical, the less likely to pay more), but regional differences also exist. Since those declaring they would pay more are not the most affluent in the sample, we recommend a focused research on the actual buying behavior and we draw special attention to the risks related with the social-desirable answers in such contexts.

Respondents worldwide are also ready to boycott companies who prove irresponsible in a large degree. One out of three persons declares s/he has stopped buying a product in this context, but this answer is also under social-desirability risks. The number of those switching brands to one similar in quality but related to a good cause is twice as high.

There is no doubt that people worldwide are interested in and are monitoring issues related to corporate social responsibility. Furthermore, they are considering these aspects when buying and relating to companies. On the other hand, there is a significant difference between the declared intentions / behavior and the actual behavior. At least in part this difference could be related to the low profile of responsible / irresponsible actions of companies. We consider that companies do not maximize the commercial benefits related to the CSR strategies they implement.

We also consider that the studies developed up to now are too much CSR-centric. It would be relevant to investigate the response of consumers to CSR in a more complex framework: psychological, social, and economic.

It is certain that there is a relationship between CSR and consumer loyalty and favor. However when it comes to understanding the depth of this connection, we are faced with insurmountable difficulties. Since research has all to often lacked detail, and possible correcting factors (such as differences between intention and actual purchase, between types of economies involved, or between rich and developing countries) are of a strong enough nature as to affect

the overall conclusions, it is wrong to attribute a general correlation between CSR and consumer loyalty and favor. This correlation will differ depending on each factors mentioned above. More detailed studies are necessary, which will transform the generic relationship (between CSR and consumer loyalty and preference) into a more meaning contextualized one.

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