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Does doing good do well? An investigation into the relationship between consumer buying behavior and CSR

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged globally as an important field of study as corporations increasingly recognize the positive consequences of ethical behavior in their business operations. However, despite a growing body of literature, results and definitions remain somewhat contradictory and fractured. Taking a marketing business ethics perspective, this article examines the influence of CSR in firms and its impact on consumer buying behavior through a systematic examination of state of the art literature over the past two decades (2000–2020). Our review identifies a theoretical connection between CSR initiatives and positive consumer reaction yet a lack of material relevance. Most publications have assumed linear and rational decision-making, and comparative studies addressing contextual factors e.g. culture are lacking. Following from this, our paper addresses the results and implications of CSR activities concerning these elements and creates a new framework through which consumer behavior can be analyzed.

1. Introduction

According to Smith and Langford (2009), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly a subject of interest among researchers and practitioners. Sharma and Kiran (2013) even state that CSR strategies have become a common focus for implementation in business environments since the 1950s, emphasizing its practical uses. From a marketing point of view, the implementation of such approaches is now seen as strategic, encompassing all the stakeholders' interests along with emphasizing responsibility (Chakraborty & Jha, 2019). CSR can be defined as companies "proactively offering social benefits or public service and voluntarily minimizing practices that harm society, regardless of legal requirements" (Vitell, 2015, p. 767).

Implementing CSR initiatives for successful business performance seems to be on the rise, with consumers supporting the shift and theorists reporting a significant difference in brand attitudes and perception with varying company engagement in CSR

(Jin et al., 2017). The uptake of CSR and consequent study of reactionary consumer behavior is thus of utmost strategic importance, as businesses can use this knowledge to appease and attract stakeholders. As such, over the last two decades, there has been a growing body of literature surrounding the relative importance and implications of CSR adoption in organizations and the marketing of such initiatives, becoming its own subsection in marketing literature (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971) and with the evolution of environmental, social and governance regulations, even a compulsory part of company's reporting.

Given the worldwide increasing importance of responsibility, both environmentally and socially, there has been a multitude of empirical investigations into the role of such ethical behaviors and consumer interactions with it. This article aims to examine the literature on how much consumers care about the ethical behavior of companies, and the ensuing translation to buying behavior. Despite this increase in interest, there remains no cohesive definition and a lack of contextual focus. This article thus aims to uncover the perception of consumers towards CSR activities of companies and consequential buying behavior by the use of a comprehensive literature search and review covering the years 2001–2019 which intends to define CSR and its discretionary aspects as well as current thought on its resulting impact. For this, an evidence-informed, systematic review to separate literature into themes for analysis (Tranfield et al., 2003) is used. Through a critical evaluation of existing literature, this article conceptually links the ideas of CSR and marketing to create a model out of the extant research, analyzes its relative importance for competition and highlights current gaps where there is scope for future research.

The contribution of this article is threefold: 1) It analyzes the current state of literature on the field by segmenting relevant studies and systematizing them around the themes that they address; 2) It derives a framework for understanding and predicting consumer behavior around CSR initiatives. This multidisciplinary approach will allow direction for further empirical research and explain why responsible products still own a relatively small share of the market despite consumers' stated values and intentions; 3) It suggest theoretical and managerial strategies which will have real-world implications and allow for the creation of competitive advantage.

2. Methodology

This study aims to extend and collate academic literature in the field of consumer behavior and CSR.

In order to draw conclusions on the influence of CSR initiatives on the consumer decision-making processes, a systematic literature review (SLR) has been conducted from existing empirical and theoretical studies. The following literature review is thus compiled through Tranfield et al. (2003) suggestion of a systematic and evidence-informed search with the aim of managing diverse body of knowledge to synthesize and code it for a specific inquiry.

The SLR is associated with several advantages, including detecting themes, theoretical perspectives, or common issues within a specific research discipline or methodology, or for identifying components of a theoretical concept (Ward et al., 2009).
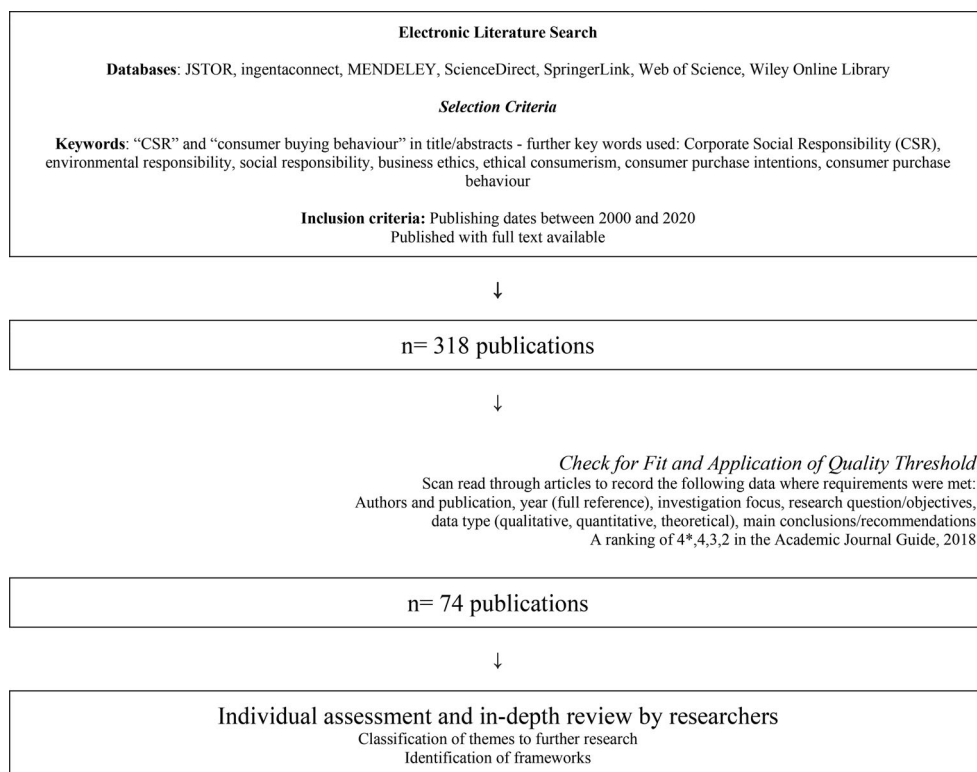
Figure 1. A diagrammatic representation of the method used.
Source: author illustrations.

This allows for a mapping of the current state of research, synthesis of the body of knowledge and uncovering of gaps in the knowledge for future research. In addition, it provides an overview of the timeline of a topic as well as creating the ability to critique study or sample characteristics that have an influence on the phenomenon being studied. For example, where studies conducted in different cultural contexts have rendered different results (Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2010).

An investigation was undertaken through several databases including JSTOR, ingenta connect, MENDELEY, ScienceDirect, Springer Link, Web of Science and Wiley Online Library using a wide range of synonyms and taking into account various spellings and Boolean operators. Keywords were considered in order to fit the aims and scope of the research and chosen on the basis of an exploratory search and prior experience (see Figure 1).

After an initial selection of 318 publications, a check for fit and quality was then implemented, allowing a comprehensive, transparent and replicable selection. Following this exclusion, 244 articles were excluded mainly because they were not wholly applicable to the research question or were published in low ranking journals. This resulted in a final sample of n = 74 high-quality and relevant articles, whose principal topics, data, results and conclusions were synthesized. As suggested by Kraus et al. (2020), only articles published in ABS2 ad higher journals are considered as high enough quality and therefore included within the review ("quality threshold").

To identify the main subsections of research in CSR-literature, a list of recurrent themes was drawn up from the articles searched. Subsequently, information gathering was clustered around these themes in an inductive manner to form a new framework.

3. State of the art of current research

3.1. Impact of CSR on stakeholders

The problem with CSR implementation and definition comes from the conflicting demands of stakeholders (Perry et al., 2015). Peloza and Shang (2011, p. 130) thus call for an increased focus on the "source of stakeholder value provided by CSR activities" as it is an opportunity for marketers to create differentiation, competitive advantage and improve financial performance (Schreck, 2011). However, the dimensions of CSR are diverse so to be effective each must be strategically aligned to the company's targets (Zaitsev & Dror, 2020).

Kozlowski et al. (2012) state that stakeholders and their diverse interests and responsibilities must be identified to provide the groundwork of appropriate CSR initiatives. Lopatta and Kaspereit (2014) sample using GES sustainability ratings and panel data highlighted the increasing tendency for management to invest in positive perception, especially in the context of post-financial crisis. At a national scale, governments focus on the legality of companies, local authorities care about the benefits of business to their communities, shareholders care about maximisation of profits and consumers may be searching for a number of things including quality, agreeable price points and potentially additional factors like ethics and philanthropy (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

In reaction, researchers often segment CSR studies by stakeholder groups in order to study its impacts. Dickson et al. (2012) in their study found that although the stakeholders varied in expectation outcomes, they were aligned in their environmental concern. This is true for customers, workers and shareowners - particularly when there is increased transparency about the practices (Belal & Roberts, 2010). However, in 20 long interviews where perceived ethicality of businesses was under measure, Brunk (2010, 2012) found large discrepancies between the consumer and business perspectives. Since CSR behavior has a large impact on employee behavior, internal factors can be seen as just as relevant to the uptake in firms (Bradu et al., 2014).

4.2. Customer perception and intended buying behavior

Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) concluded that at a global level there are positive reactions between an organization's CSR activities and buyer responses. Yeo et al. (2018) correspondingly found that there were positive associations with CSR and intended buying behavior in a quantitative study of 295 participants. This reaction was said to include the behavior surrounding the mental, physical and emotional state of choosing, buying, using or regretting the purchase of a product or service. Similarly, Servera-Francés and Piqueras-Tomás (2019) found in their study of 408 Spanish supermarket consumers that investing in CSR policies led to increased consumer value, satisfaction and loyalty, helping sustain competitive advantage. This was

supported by Crespo and Inacio (2019) findings that CSR associations are essential for managing, and for the differentiation of global brands. Notably, in their cross-national study of 804 respondents in 57 countries, Anastasiadou et al. (2019) found the provision that CSR only made a difference when mediated by commitment.

CSR in terms of the consumer has mostly been meant in terms of operational and marketing functions. It is therefore of the high importance that marketers utilize this knowledge to adopt appropriate strategies and inform both potential and existing consumers about their policies. Wei et al. (2018), agreed from the results of their survey that all CSR initiatives created a halo effect which were also associated with the 'willingness to pay a premium'. However, one of the most understudied areas in ethical consumption is the 'attitude-behavior gap', which covers the psychological purchasing behavior of customers (Servera-Francés & Piqueras-Tomás, 2019). This shows that intention often does not materialize into personal behavior decisions (Janssen & Vanhamme, 2015).

4.3. Levels of fit

The locus and form of customer/company interaction lays the foundations for much scholarly research surrounding the topic of CSR. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) focus their study on the importance of fit between a consumer's own character and the company's CSR initiatives; when individuals identify highly with a company or perceive similarity, their loyalty is increased, they are more likely to try new products from the brand and promote it themselves. Leonidou et al. (2013), and Plewa et al. (2015), found based on similar survey methods that profits could be maximized when companies engaged in this relationship as perceived familiarity with a company's CV programme positively impacted CSR image and firm image.

Lynch and Chernatony (2004) suggest that those brands based on the emotional values that CSR creates are perceived as more durable and less likely to suffer from competitive erosion. Consequently, CSR as an emotional aspect of brand image and loyalty becomes an important source of sustainable competitive advantages and there is a significant difference in brand perception when companies don't engage in CSR (Jin et al., 2017). Thus not only is it vital for existing customers, but drawing in new ones as well, especially in an increasingly competitive market, where customers are presented with more choice and differentiation is increasingly difficult (Janssen et al., 2014).

The study by Joo et al. (2019), which was based on a several step method that included a literature review, in-depth interviews and a survey, showed that CSR authenticity and high fit with existing strategy could predict positive attitudes and value creation. Similarly Wójcik's (2014) study found that the effect of the type of CSR action (related vs. non-related to the core business) was found to be statistically significant. Respondents supported the former to a higher degree, with negative reactions in the latter scenario. Interestingly, non-related CSR programs did not increase either consumer brand valuation or buying intention. This was consistent with findings from Yang and Hsu (2017) and Gauthier and Pachernal (2015), and suggests that using CSR as a prop brings negative financial consequences by eroding trust.

4.4. Socially responsible consumers

Through the process of purchase making, customer decisions are not only influenced by the tangible (price, quality etc.) attributes of a product, but also the intangibles (brand associations, image, corporate reputation). However, it cannot be assumed that all consumers will react the same or have identical cares and concerns. At a practical level, it follows that CSR activities will only bring financial gain if there is a demand. Initiatives are therefore implemented by companies in order for the returned "anticipated support" (Vitell, 2015, p. 767), but they will have the most direct impact on socially responsible consumers, who recognize the relative importance of supporting these initiatives. Those who are more concerned with external image are thought to show more propensity to supporting CSR initiatives because of its social desirability (Bradu et al., 2014), which may conversely be an issue in self-reporting surveys.

There may be issues with this model as it assumes that consumers are rational thinkers. On the other hand, impulse purchases could tell a very different story (Schaefer & Crane, 2005). Additionally, consumers tend to exhibit "bounded responsibility," meaning they only associate with certain social issues (Janssen & Vanhamme, 2015, p. 782). For example, a preference to protect the environment or stop human rights abuses. Building on this research, Min et al. (2012) found based on data gathered from 350 respondents in Malaysia that consumers are increasingly environmentally minded, especially with the protection of natural resources and more limited consumption. According to their studies, consumers are increasingly concerned that products are made with a low environmental footprint and contribution to pollution reduction.

Mohr et al. (2001) cemented this conclusion in their survey, where the majority of the 44 participants who partook in in-depth interviews said they would prioritize buying from more ethical brands. However, the study was limited as equal weighting was given to both price and CSR attributes. On the other hand, Wei et al. (2018) found evidence from their online survey to support that consumers are willing to pay price premiums for responsible products e.g. Fairtrade (FT). This was supported by Bondy and Talwar (2011) with a similar method but sample size ten times larger, who showed that active consumers of FT goods remained loyal even with varying prices. Further, Ramasamy et al. (2010) found strong links between religion and CSR support as a result of altruistic and egotistical factors. Bucic et al. (2012) found using two samples from contrasting developed and developing countries, that purchase intentions reflecting personal concerns often prioritized ethical thoughts when it came down to decision-making, with price and brand name weighing heavily on the decision.

These sensitivities may be useful predictors of buying behaviors (Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2010) if consumers can be accurately analyzed. Results from Maignan and Ferrell (2004) suggest these different connections are intrinsically bound in social context. However, Dapi and Agabu Phiri (2015) aimed to determine consumer attitudes towards specific CSR programs in their study which surveyed South African telecoms consumers, and overwhelmingly found that consumers expected companies to be socially responsible. Min et al. (2012), similarly established that consumers had become expectant of this variable.

Responsible consumption lies in the domain of both companies and individuals. Whilst companies can conform to ethical norms and environmental protection legislation they must also make consumers aware through social responsibility campaigns (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014). These questions of how to communicate sustainability information to the public to promote more responsible consumption still exist even a decade after the *Oslo Declaration on Sustainable Consumption* (O'Rourke & Ringer, 2016). These have the knock-on effect of increasing loyalty to the company in question and recommending further ethical behavior but may carry the risk of introducing skepticism.

4.5. Consumers are informed and educated

Current literature still cites lack of credible information on environmental and social performance of products, consumer ignorance about product ethicality (Pomering & Dolcinar, 2009) and negative perceptions on the performance of 'greener' products (Papista & Krystallis, 2013) as barriers in responsible purchasing. According to in-depth coding of Amazon reviews, Ford and Stohl (2019) found the preferences for products are 1) price, 2) quality, 3) brand, 4) trend. All other aspects of a product also need to fit these requirements before a purchase will be made. They further inferred that tangible features such as price became more important over time, especially as the product moved into a mainstream market, diluting the CSR message of the brand as it was spread less by the consumer.

Wójcik (2014) concluded from an experimental study of 421 students that whilst price and quality are still seen as important factors within the purchase decision, consumers are willing to pay, and believe premiums are justified for socially responsible products. However, they need to be presented with the information clearly and obviously through marketing activities as they will not spend time seeking it out themselves. Pomering and Dolnicar (2009) found consumer awareness of the social issues that banks were engaging with to be low, and therefore ineffective at impacting attitudes. Initiatives are therefore effective at creating positive perceptions in theory, but do not fulfil their potential in the marketplace. Therefore, it is important for marketers to inform their consumers and encourage mass ethical behavior, for example specific labelling on products and packaging about manufacturing and ingredients, certifications that they have acquired, or education so that initiatives may be contextualized (Bradu et al., 2014; De Magistris et al., 2015).

Managers might also tactically target environmentally or ethically informed consumers to improve their chances of an increase in sales. Following this thought, Jones (2017) suggests the implementation of a more clear CSR rating scale which improves the accuracy of current measuring systems. Alternatively, De Magistris et al. (2015) found in their experiment of consumers buying canned tuna fish, that although the willingness to pay for CSR labels is higher than willingness to pay for product without, information provided on the particulars of CSR certification did not change consumers' willingness to pay. Thus, they suggest that the presence of initiative is enough, without further specification. The authors' results are a start to

tackling the problem of being socially responsible as a business, given the larger scale of the former study, Jones (2017) results may be more relevant to practitioners in the future.

Whilst Rodrigues and Borges (2015) found from their questionnaires that the knowledge of CSR actions was highly influential in decision-making, there seems to be scope in the existing research as to how aware consumers are to CSR initiatives at the point of consumption (Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009) as most research is done theoretically or in hindsight.

4.6. Consumer behavior in relation to trust, value and loyalty

Studies relating to consumer behavior and trust, value and loyalty have found mixed results. In their survey of 303 consumers, Kang and Hustvedt (2014) found that a business' transparency and honesty led to trust, having a greater impact than charitable endeavors in an effort to be socially responsible. The results of this study are therefore positive in reassuring businesses that having difficult conversations about negative conditions may actually be to their reputational and financial benefit. In addition, reports generally agree with the consensus that consumers will ultimately remove their support from businesses that behave in a continually irresponsible manner e.g. Nike and Ikea. In order to decrease uncertainty, reputation is the most important way to compete but it is also vital to do so in ways that appear genuine (Deng, 2012).

Öberseder et al. (2011) stated that consumers have the most positive perceptions towards firms where CSR activities and strategic aims seem to integrate. Singh et al. (2012), corroborated this with their study that showed using structural equations modelling the positive relationship between perceived ethicality, trust and affect. Further, Joo et al. (2019, p. 236) found that "CSR authenticity could be measured along a 7-dimensional scale (community link, reliability, commitment, congruence, benevolence, transparency, broad impact) to predict consumer attitudes". Conversely, CSR strategies that are seen to be tactical will have the opposite effect (Leonidou et al., 2013). Within the literature, these stances are called intrinsic (companies doing CSR as their duty) and extrinsic (firms doing CSR to achieve their objectives or enhance their profit-making strategy) (Ford & Stohl, 2019).

Multiple researchers have shown a link between CSR and positive consumer loyalty with quantitative studies - this is of relevance for marketers because it could improve sales levels and profits. From the findings, Dapi and Agabu Phiri (2015) therefore suggest that corporations take a proactive rather than reactive approach to social and environmental issues. Maignan and Ferrell (2001, p. 13) similarly established a positive relationship between the two, showing "active support for companies committed to cause-related marketing, environmentally friendly practices, or ethics". Psychological theories attempt to explain this phenomena, finding that social context, for approval and status is of the utmost importance. Öberseder et al. (2014), stated that greater understanding about how value can be created by CSR is needed, as the firm's long term survival will depend on it.

4.7. Cause-related marketing

One element of CSR found to have a significant impact on consumers is cause-related marketing. This is a method of marketing which is equally beneficial to the organization as well as a non-profit (Vanhamme et al., 2012) creating a collaboration in order to increase the former's sales and help the latter's cause. According to Gautier and Pachernal (2015) benefits of these programs include reputation, improved revenue and attraction of new customers. However, they urge that there needs to be a high level of fit for these schemes to be successful and not viewed cynically by consumers – which can lead to a negative attitude.

Cause-related marketing encourages customer action as it adds value to the purchase that they are making in terms of solving the problem. Several studies support this hypothesis that when consumers believe that their purchase decision may make a difference, they are more likely to buy responsibly (e.g. Vanhamme et al., 2012). On the other hand, Kim et al. (2019) found in their scenario-based experiment that where companies had already established strong CSR reputations, CRM had no additional influence on purchase intention. Pertiwi and Balquiah (2016) showed from the results of 367 respondents that they often had mixed perceptions of CRM, viewing it as both benevolent and strategic, which had potentially negative impacts for trust and loyalty. However, for controversial companies with negative reputations, CRM initiatives were shown to have the potential to reinvigorate brand image.

Collins et al. (2007) suggest that customer values should be widely taken into account in the drawing of strategic plans, meaning that they would have the ability to hugely influence the sustainability of a company.

4.8. Approaches for understanding the Attitude-Behavior gap

Despite the increase in attention around CSR, actual buying behavior remains low, creating a puzzling paradox for researchers. This is termed the *Attitude Behavior Gap* (ABG). Papers covering the ABG originate from a wide and multi-displicinary perspective, particularly from psychological backgrounds.

Several research papers sought to explore this phenomena, over a range of country contexts. They cited several of the antecedents as causes for the reaction, including the perception that socially responsible consumption (SRC) is costly (d'Astous & Legendre, 2009), the complexity of traceability labels/lack of information (Bradu et al., 2014) and the lack of social norms surrounding SRC (Fukukawa & Ennew, 2010). These social dilemmas show the interplay between interests at various levels, as purchasing CSR products benefits the wider societal good, yet at an individual level may come at a cost financially, or in terms of quality and choice. Findings from Öberseder et al. (2011) recognize that evaluation for CSR initiatives involves an assemblage of factors, where consumers hierarchically consider core, central (price) and outside factors. Their results paradoxically show that despite high price, 'competitive altruism' leads to the counterintuitive discovery that customers may actually be more likely to buy CSR products when they have a higher cost. Furthermore, altruistic behavior will likely match the extent to which said behavior improves a person's quality or status.

From the selected papers, it can be states the previous research prioritizes a cognitive decision-making process, whereby consumers are thought to understand their needs and apply deliberate choices to evaluate their options. This has traditionally left habitual and affective thought patterns under-researched and may be problematic within the research as in reality these processes are interconnected, with consumers engaging in a multiplicity of processes to make each decision (Janssen & Vanhamme, 2015). Additionally, consumers are often unable to predict their own behavior, thus asking respondents to verbalize their reactions may result in misleading evidence. The authors advance examination of the enigma in their theoretical paper, extending Ajzen's (1991) *Theory of Planned Behavior* to uncover a clearer image for the complexity of decision-making concerning the support of CSR initiatives, by acknowledging skepticism and cynicism as well as personal concern.

Adopting a psychological approach, Janssen and Vanhamme (2015) found that people's intrinsic assumptions of the world are fundamental to controlling their behavior. Consumers generally assume the world to be 'benevolent', additionally believing that they are in control of their own fate. Any threat to this belief system, such as feeling associated with, or blamed for the issues CSR programs tackle (e.g. sweatshop labour or climate change) will therefore have repulsive effects on their attraction and buying behaviors towards a product. Denial may, therefore, do much to explain the ABG as an avoidance strategy. Marketers would therefore be well advised to increase consumer distance to issues and target those who score lower on the assumptive world scale.

4.9. Social context of CSR

Social context is important to forefront when assessing the bias that development may bring to consumer purchase patterns. Attitudes towards adopting ethical behavior are often very socially informed, both by friends and society. Johnstone and Tan (2015) found that where responsible behaviors are not a common practice, there will be no impact on individual consumer behaviors. These two studies therefore come in support of the Value Belief Norm Theory, which states CSR behaviors are shaped by social norms. Bucic et al. (2012) therefore advise that future practice segments customers, treating them as submarkets in order to best target them. This allows for an appreciation of their awareness of ethical issues, need for education and willingness to engage.

Looking at the geographical location of the studies, most research had been carried out in North America (n = 14), which continues to dominate the literature on CSR (Wójcik, 2014), followed by the UK (n = 7), China (n = 6) and Australia (n = 5). Theorists are increasingly recognising that it is necessary to evaluate the social context within which CSR occurs (Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013) as cultural and demographic differences are thought to play a large role in the perception of CSR. Perry et al. (2015) findings in Sri Lanka demonstrated that manufacturers in the apparel industry view CSR reputation as intrinsic to commercial competitiveness in reaction to commercial buying practices, supported by Arli and Tjiptono (2014) who

found support in reaction for legal and philanthropic initiatives in Indonesia. However, such demand is rarely reported elsewhere (Johnstone & Tan, 2015).

In the Chinese context, Deng (2012) found that consumers were likely to boycott bad business but not necessarily reward good. This response was similarly reflected by the suspicion of CSR reported in Australia (Pomering & Dolcinar, 2009) and the UK (Dunn & Harness, 2018) as consumers often viewed CSR communication as marketing rhetoric, greenwashing or PR. Findings by Kolk et al. (2015), showed that the western CSR construct was generalizable to China. Despite these similarities Bondy and Talwar (2011) found significant intercountry differences between the US, Canada and the UK in their study, as did Puncheva-Michelotti et al. (2010) in their study of Russia and Bulgaria, thus suggesting further intercountry studies.

On the other hand, Yeo et al. (2018) further found that the demographic profile of the consumer was unlinked to trends of buying behavior in reaction to CSR. This was in part supported by Leonidou et al. (2013) who agreed based on a qualitative study of 387 consumers that age and education was not influential, however gender and urbanity did have moderating effects. Yet, these two studies do acknowledge their findings contradict the majority of the literature. It may therefore be most apt to suggest that individuals are ruled by factors which are both intrinsic (characteristics) and extrinsic (socially informed).

4.10. Social media

According to Morsing and Schultz (2006, p. 323), "the promotion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives traditionally tended to occur through one-way communication - in which consumers [were] recipients of information and are not directly listened to". However, the increasing use of social media has given consumers more power to voice their opinions, allowing further expression of whether corporate activities are mutually beneficial. Prooijen and Bartels (2019) highlight the importance of transparency and dialogue in relation to CSR for its associations with stronger attributions of morality, sociability, and competence traits to brands and consumers' willingness to endorse it online.

In their survey of 722 participants, Chu and Chen (2019), empirically tested relationships between CSR related activities in social media and their response to brands. Their results suggest that identification and brand attitude was dramatically improved by eWOM, which may give important strategic direction to marketers in the future. Similarly, Dunn and Harness (2018) situate online social networking as an important contributor to CSR attributions, especially in terms of shaping scepticism. Thorough and consistent use of social media to communicate CSR seems to alert consumers to genuine initiatives, since the respondents believed false claims would not be published, at risk of invalid claims becoming public and causing negative publicity.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Whilst CSR and its related definitions are still hard to place, it can broadly be defined as prioritizing altruism over profit motives whilst acknowledging responsibilities that

a business has to all shareholders involved. Increasingly, it seems to be favored by businesses because of the relationship between implementation and positive consumer attitudes. Additionally, its relative importance cannot be understated for the implications for humanity at large.

However, Morsing and Schultz (2006, p. 336) termed CSR a "moving target" as the contexts within which businesses operate get increasingly complicated and consumers are better informed - meaning an up to date analysis is of critical importance. This article has therefore provided a systematic literature review of the scholarly articles pertaining to the research questions, selected through a demanding process. The literature was dissected into themes as defined by the papers, this broadened the scope of the experimentation, and provided the most relevant information.

In terms of summarizing the main findings of these papers regarding the relationship of CSR and consumer behavior, there appears to be widespread support for the idea that the two are theoretically interlinked (Crespo & Inacio, 2019; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Servera-Francés & Piqueras-Tomás, 2019; Wei et al., 2018; Yeo et al., 2018). Many studies are aligned in stating that consumers will provide support for brands who engage in CSR initiatives when they are adequately informed (Bradu et al., 2014; De Magistris et al., 2015; Pomering & Dolcinar, 2009). Additionally the uptake of CSR initiatives will improve feelings of well-being derived from doing good (Curras-Perez et al., 2009) and create value, trust and loyalty for a brand (Castaldo et al., 2009; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Pertiwi & Balquiah, 2016; Singh et al., 2012; Vitell, 2015; Wójcik, 2014), in turn leading to repeat purchase behaviors.

The relationship between intended and actual behavior is less clear, however. In a report by Mintel (2011), despite 30% to 70% of consumers saying they want to buy greener, healthier, more socially responsible products, only 1-5% actually did. This gap is crucial for further study to create knowledge for marketers to shape behaviors more positively and negate the effects of irresponsible consumerism. Uninformed consumers with low levels of information on a company's responsible behavior will likely not seek it out themselves, continuing instead with their normal consumption patterns (Wójcik, 2014; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009). Further, it is widely believed that the effect of 'negativity bias' is stronger (Mohr et al., 2001). This is due to the fact that respondents may assume that no CSR information means lack of responsibility problems (i.e. positive CSR), or they simply do not think of it. Stronger sensitivity to negative CSR information may mean that avoiding questionable corporate behavior may be a more effective cause-related marketing strategy than engaging in CSR initiatives.

For most researchers (e.g. Auger et al., 2003), it has been found that consumer sensitivity to low/non-existent levels of CSR are higher than the alternative. Additionally, consumer behavior in reaction is thought to be stronger, e.g. boycotts that aim to undermine company performance. For example, the 2019 boycott of Amazon Prime Day, in protest of the treatment of workers in their warehouses and tax evasion policies. However, as stated by Klein and Dawar (2004) and Ettenson et al. (2006), the effect of boycotts on sales or financial performance are overestimated.

CSR has consistently grown in interest due to contextual reasons, Lockett et al. (2006, p. 133) describe it as a "continuing state of emergence" with new frameworks
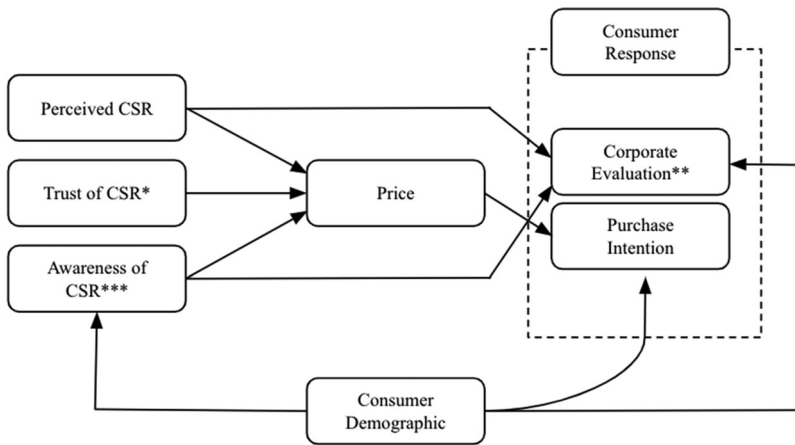
*Levels of fit; ** Value/Loyalty; *** Social Media*

Figure 2. The resultant framework.
* Levels of fit; ** Value/Loyalty; *** Social Media. Source: author illustrations.

and methods constantly being proposed. Based on the results of our research, the following framework (Figure 2) is proposed which figuratively explains the factors which affect consumer responses to CSR initiatives.

Increasingly, consumers know more about the background of the products that they are purchasing (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001), although it is uncertain that this will lead to concrete purchases, with price remaining the core factor in decision-making. Jones (2017) does suggest that consumers will pay when they are adequately informed, yet education is still limited, and often variant by consumer demographic. Nevertheless, increased use of social media is progressing this learning. Trust of CSR is also a preliminary factor, and shown to be affected by the varying levels of fit with both company and customer values. Both awareness and perception of CSR will feed into a consumer's corporate evaluation, which forms their overall judgement of a business and informs levels of value and loyalty. However, research is still limited in providing evaluation at different points of the consumer purchase cycle and a solid evaluation of the Attitude Behavior Gap. These need to be addressed in future research to advance our understanding and allow corporate utilization for competitive advantage.

Overall, it is clear from the evidence above that companies need to understand their consumers in order to strategically implement CSR and use it to create economic advantage. The body of literature suggests that it is still relatively unknown what consumers want in terms of CSR and what programs would be most successful at influencing them as well as largely being ignorant of the social context, which is essential to the problem (Johnson, 1987) and acknowledging complex shopping processes which are very different to outside the laboratory setting.

It is unlikely that the uptake of CSR will be welcomed in firms if there is no business benefit, it often requires additional investment and will therefore not be accepted if the cost-benefit is negative. Min et al. (2012), Perry et al. (2015), Leonidou et al.

(2013) confirm that CSR actions improve the competitive advantage. Many studies therefore try to link the economic performance with CSR initiatives, but they are mainly inconclusive. Maignan and Swaen (2000) refer this to difficulties in establishing the nature of connection e.g. does CSR lead to better performance or does better performance allow more scope for investment into CSR. Smith and Langford (2009) state that societal expectations increasingly assume sustainable corporate performance to be necessary. This may be due in part to historical factors, e.g. corporate scandals, which have undermined confidence in the way businesses have acted in the past (OECD , 2004).

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