Article

The Importance of Sustainable Practices in Value Creation and Consumers’ Commitment with Companies’ Commercial Format

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Abstract: Sustainable economic models are essential for any economic sector of the country. Companies must manage their relationships with the agents involved in their economic activity through a strategy based on dialogue and the constant pursuit of a balance among economic, social and environmental interests. In this regard, there has been an increase in customers’ interest in products or businesses that display a comparatively higher commitment with workers, the environment, or society as a whole. This study aims at gaining further insight into the relationship between the committed customer and the company by analyzing the influence of corporate social responsibility on key variables such as customer perceived value or customer commitment as regards its engagement dimension (customer motivations). In order to reach this goal, we perform a review of the literature, followed by a structural equation model that incorporates said variables. This model is tested on a sample of 707 customers of supermarkets and hypermarkets. The results confirm that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) directly affects commitment and that customer perceived value influences both variables (CSR and commitment). In addition, the study confirms the indirect effect of perceived value on customers’ commitment with the commercial format, which is mediated by CSR.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); sustainability; retailers; perceived value; PLS

1. Introduction

Recently, companies have been changing their interaction patterns with the environment and with each of their stakeholders in order to try to combine the goals shared by all the interest groups. In the current economic system, organizations do not act in isolation; they interact with their environment and take this interaction into account in their strategy design. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is found in the dialogue between the company and its stakeholders and is conceived as a competence that enables the balancing of economic, social and environmental interests. In this regard, it is essential to delve into the impact of CSR actions developed by companies on their customers’ purchase behavior. The modern customer shows an increasing interest in companies’ social actions. In fact, 74% of consumers are receptive to messages about companies’ social behavior and 59% of them would be willing to change their purchase behavior based on social values [1]. Corporate Social Responsibility has been studied mainly from the perspective of satisfying the interests of stakeholders, among which the customer stands out. However, there are very few works that study the relationship between sustainability (CSR actions) and the customers’ motivations. This paper aims to solve this gap.
Therefore, the importance of this research lies in demonstrating that sustainable actions lead to changes in customer behavior. These behaviors, although not purely transactional, are very important for companies because they increase both the customers’ commitment and their loyalty, which, in turn, results in greater benefits in the long term. This relationship will be confirmed with the results of this paper.

Therefore, this study aims at identifying the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the relationship between customers’ perceived value and their commitment—regarding its engagement dimension—with the retail store. The review of the literature identifies CSR as a variable that is capable of generating competitive differentiation for businesses while minimizing the negative effects of business activity on society [2,3]. The goal of this study is to delve further into this line of research by analyzing CSR’s direct effects on perceived value and commitment and CSR’s indirect effects on commitment through perceived value. The study draws on the analyzed theory to define an empirical structural equations model that links customers’ perception of companies’ generated value through its CSR policies and those customers’ commitment with the company. To do so, the article has the following structure: theoretical framework, empirical analysis, results, and conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility

People are becoming increasingly conscious of business activity’s effect on society at environmental, social, or ethical levels. In this regard, companies are searching new management methods that are respectful with society. Corporate Social Responsibility is an ideal option to unite the interests of the different social agents involved.

Despite the recent steep increase in social interest on CSR, research on the topic started in the 1950s. One of the pioneering studies is Bowen’s, which defined CSR as companies’ duty to align their decisions and business policies with society’s values and objectives [4]. In this first stage, CSR was considered a business duty. Specifically, Carroll defines such duty based on the following aspects: (1) economic obligations, which consist in being economically and productively viable (any company’s basic goal) given that lack of viability will prevent the activity from happening and hence responsible actions; (2) ethical and legal obligations, that is, complying with current legislation as well as with the company’s code of ethics and conduct; (3) and philanthropic obligations in order to give back to society [5]. In the 1990s, this conception of CSR as a duty gave way to a CSR model understood as duty toward all the company’s stakeholders [6]. This approach implies an extension of CSR obligations toward all the agents that are affected by the business activity either directly or indirectly [7,8]. CSR is conceived as a strategy of permanent dialogue with the agents with whom the company interacts. Companies must seek a structured form of dialogue with those agents who have (direct or indirect) interests in the company in order to identify that set of interests and their subjective perception of the company [9].

Under this approach, CSR evolves toward the company’s voluntary motivation to apply it beyond the fulfilment of a duty [10]. CSR must obey to the company’s positive commitment with the improvement of society beyond its obligation. In this line and from the relationship marketing approach, CSR has been identified with three main dimensions, based on the theoretical model of the “triple bottom line” formulated by Elkington (2004) [11]: economic, environmental, and social sustainability, being the retail companies the ones that initially implemented this business. Although there is some previous work on sustainability from the point of view of the producer and of the supply chain (Hammer and Pivo, 2017 [12]; Bernal-Conesa et al. (2017) [13]; or those including the CSR actions related to philanthropy (Arco-Castro et al., 2020 [14]; Guerrero-Villegas et al. (2018) [15]), the protection of the environment, defending consumers, respect for workers’ rights and helping the community [15]; Herrera et al., 2016 [16]; López-Pérez et al., 2018) [17], the sustainability model implemented by retailers has not yet been researched in depth.
Thus, the company would systematically encourage responsible activities through a positive attitude toward societal improvement and not merely through a reactive or restorative stance [18,19]. The effectiveness of this voluntary commitment requires its integration into the company’s strategy, thus allowing the company to generate value for the consumer [20,21]. A successful sustainability strategy must be designed to fit the context of each individual business and the culture of the country [22].

Following these contributions to the field of CSR, our study focuses on the analysis of said variable from an approach based on stakeholder relationships’ management. CSR is understood as the process of a company’s strategic and proactive management targeting the integration of its stakeholders’ concerns, which translates into higher added value. Specifically, following recent research, we selected four main stakeholders: customers, shareholders, employees, and society [3,23–25].

The literature coincides in pointing out the needs and expectations of customers as key elements of business management. From a CSR perspective, companies must seek the maximum integration between customers’ social expectations and the companies’ values and actions [26]. The goal is to put social and commercial requirements at the same level.

The brand must become an extension of the customer’s social personality. The importance of customers can be seen in research by Freeman, who states that “consumers are considered the stakeholder that is most affected by the achievement of the goals of an organisation” [27] (p. 46). Morrison and Bridwell emphasize the importance of the customer by pointing out that customers’ social responsibility is the true corporate social responsibility [28]. More recently, Servera-Francés and Piqueras-Tomás have confirmed that CSR policies influence customer satisfaction [25].

Regarding employee management, a CSR perspective stresses that an adequate management of human resources is linked to employees’ alignment with the organization’s values, including its mission and vision, as well as the maximization of their commitment with the company’s goal achievement. Both objectives depend on the company’s focus on respecting human rights and fully respecting legal and contractual commitments and regulations, quality of work life, health, hygiene and safety; on continuous training and on fostering employees' creativity, diversity management, etc. [29].

In sum, responsible companies are aware of the value of the people who comprise them, so they establish programs and policies to protect them and help them develop professionally and personally. These measures lead to higher employee participation and performance and an important source of competitive differentiation through creativity and knowledge, among others.

Furthermore, responsible companies must guarantee the implementation of corporate social responsibility criteria throughout the supply chain, maintaining the same open and transparent dialogue. Retailers must guarantee that all the members of the value-creation chain assume the values implicit in CSR [30]. One of the most common actions to disseminate those values is based on issuing suppliers a code of conduct, particularly as regards the compliance with human and work rights. Compliance with these social values must be considered essential criteria for supplier assessment and selection. The criteria include human rights preservation, employee accountability, the fostering of health and safety, or respect and protection of the environment.

Lastly, all definitions converge in pointing out that the main goal of CSR is reducing the negative effects of business activity on society as a whole, which leads to specific actions such as better quality of life of the community, a positive social effect on the community, respect for local customs, values and traditions, a constant and transparent information flow toward society, distribution of an equitable amount of the produced wealth, development of programs and local training centers to improve citizens’ skills, respect of the environment, etc. [3].

2.2. Perceived Value

One of the key topics of marketing research over the last years has been perceived value. An increasing number of companies use perceived value as a differentiating and necessary element to
achieve competitive advantages [31]. Thus, this element motivates different stakeholders to support an organization, which holds a privileged place in their minds.

Traditionally, the literature has offered two approaches to the concept of value: the first one considers value from a quality or usefulness perspective, as a unidirectional cognitive perception; the second one understands value as a bidirectional concept, using the term “trade-off” as an equivalent to compensation or balance aiming at maintaining benefits and sacrifices; this is the most accepted definition [32]. Zeithaml’s definition conceives perceived value as customers’ assessment of the usefulness of a product, based on what they give and what they receive in exchange [33] (p. 14). This definition includes the concept of trade-off between the perceived benefits and sacrifices made by the customer [34]. Therefore, an evaluative judgement prevails in this notion of value, which underlines a subjectivist orientation. Furthermore, value is not inherent to services, “but it is experienced by the customers” [35] (p. 7): in this context, value is perceived by the individual and this perception is materialized in “judgements or assessments of what a customer perceives he or she has received from a seller in a specific purchase or use situation” [36] (p. 103). Therefore, the customer perceives the value generated by the company [37,38]. Additionally, various studies consider that perceived value can influence customers’ attitudes [39], behavioral intentions [40,41], satisfaction level [34,42,43], and loyalty to the retailer [34,44].

This new approach focused on the customer includes CSR as a value-generating element for the customer [2,20,21,25,45]. Specifically, CSR policies are related to perceived value through a double dimension [25]. On the one hand, they enable an increase of positive outcomes of the exchange because they satisfy social, ethical, or environmental needs of the customer. On the other hand, these actions help reduce negative aspects—that is, there is an increasing number of customers who punish companies whose practices are irresponsible. Furthermore, the continuous and transparent dialogue between the interested parties allows the company to have first-hand information on the needs of the interest groups to provide a differentiated offer that may fully meet their needs [46].

This relationship allows us to define the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis H1 (H1).** Perceived value has a positive impact on CSR actions.

### 2.3. Customer Engagement with the Brand

Over the last few years, we have been witness to the birth of a new consumer with an increasing power, a consumer that decides what, how, when, and where he or she wants to buy and the type of service he or she wants to receive. It is a consumer that abandons and changes a brand when he or she loses trust in it, who wants to speak, converse, ask, and answer, voice his or her own opinions and compare them. When these customers lose trust, they stop listening and speaking [47]. They are not mere spectators, but consumers eager to participate actively in the purchase experience and value co-creation process [37]. In this new context, the customer engagement concept emerges as a new way to interact with the brand [48]. It can be defined as a display of customer behavior that goes beyond transactions and that is the result of motivational factors [49].

Through these types of behavior, the consumer can influence the company [48,50]. Therefore, it is a psychological process that reinforces the customer’s commitment with the company and increases of his or her loyalty to the brands [51]. Thus, the higher the engagement level of the customer with the brand, the stronger the relationship between both actors will be [47]. Companies must take advantage of this relationship in order to identify the resources that customers can offer and include them to achieve common goals that would allow for new value creation opportunities [50]. Executives are highly interested in the potential of customers’ engagement to increase perceived customer value [49]. From the perspective of CSR and the stakeholder approach, engagement becomes paramount for companies to improve their understanding of customers’ motivation to commit with a specific brand or company [50].
These statements allow us to posit the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis H2 (H2).** An increase of the value perceived by customers implies an increase of their engagement with the brand.

**Hypothesis H3 (H3).** CSR actions have a positive impact on engagement.

Figure 1 illustrates the previous relationships. In addition, we propose to use socio-demographic information (gender, age) as control variables.

![Theoretical model diagram](image)

**Figure 1.** Theoretical model.

3. Materials and Methods: Research Methodology

3.1. Sample and Data Gathering

The validation of the hypotheses established in the theoretical framework is based on field work using a structured questionnaire. The survey was distributed to a sample of customers of retailers—with supermarket or hypermarket commercial format—of food, toiletries, and household products in the region of Valencia (Spain). First, a stratified random sampling was applied, followed by a random system based on the telephone numbers for each location. Respondents were randomly selected and interviewed at the store exit about their perceptions and relationship with the store. For this research, we consider a sample of 10 chain stores (Mercadona, Consum, Mas y Mas, Vidal Tiendas, Supermercados El Corte Inglés, Carrefour, Alcampo, Hipercor, Lidl, and Aldi).

Before the data collection took place, the questionnaire was revised by academic experts and professionals of the sector. Furthermore, a pre-test was carried out comprising 30 consumers via computer-assisted telephone interviews.

Field work was carried out between the months of October and December 2018. The final sample comprises 707 consumers, mainly women (52.1%) with at least secondary education (63.5%) and aged 35 to 54 (51.6%). These data are consistent with the profile of the population under study: members of households who typically shop for food, toiletries, and household products.
3.2. Measurement Scales

The scales included in the questionnaire to measure the different variables of the model were adapted from the literature. In order to measure the perceived-value constructs, Sweeney and Soutar’s proposals [52] were used, including two items to measure the quality dimension (functional value), four items for the emotional value dimension and two items for the dimensions of social value and economic value. Regarding the measurement of the multidimensional structure of CSR, and following Maignan, Ferrell, and Ferrell [53], and Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque [9], four items measure the perception of CSR actions linked to the customers, four items measure the dimension of CSR actions involving stakeholders, three items measure the dimension of CSR concerning employees, and four items measure the perception of CSR relative to social and environmental actions.

The engagement scale, comprised of four items, was adapted from Cambra-Fierro et al. [48]. Table 1 presents the wording of the final items, showing the multidimensional nature of the CSR and perceived value constructs together with the dimensions of commitment or engagement with the store, measured using a 10-point scale. The final items are shown in Table 1 (see Appendix A, Table A1).

Finally, we included two control variables: gender and age of the consumers. These variables are expected not to have potential direct effects on the endogenous latent variables included in the model.

4. Results

The validation of the hypotheses was performed through an estimation of a structural equations model using partial least squares (SEM-PLS), and the software SmartPLS V.3.2.8 [54]. The adaptation of the estimation using this algorithm is based on the lack of normal distribution of the data analyzed and on the goal of this research, which focuses on analyzing the influence of the value perceived by the consumer (second-order reflective construct) mediated by his or her perception of CSR actions (second-order reflective construct) on his or her engagement with the store (first order construct). Drawing on Henseler et al.’s [55] recommendations, a bootstrapping consisting of 5000 subsamples with identical size (n = 707) was performed in order to determine the significance of the estimation, generating the standard errors and statistical t-values. Firstly, scale dimensionality and validity were verified by second-order measurement model estimation (see Section 4.1). After studying the reliability of the measurement scales, we proceeded to estimate the structural equation model in order to verify the hypotheses (see Section 4.2).

4.1. Measurement Model Estimation

The estimation of the second-order measurement model was assessed using the commonly recommended procedures [56,57]. First, the reliability of the measurement scales was analyzed. As shown in Table 1, the composite reliability values (CR), Cronbach Alpha (α) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), widely exceeded the minimum recommended thresholds of 0.7, 0.7, and 0.5, respectively [58]; therefore, the measurement scales are reliable. We must point out that one item was eliminated from the scale of economic value due to its low loading.

In the next step, convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement scales are assessed by analyzing the loadings and crossed loadings of the items to their latent factors. Table 1 show estimated loadings, exceeding 0.6, next to their associated t-value, which were significant at 99%. Additionally, first-order latent constructs loaded significantly to a higher order factor (see Table 1). Therefore, the scales have convergent validity [59].
Table 1. Second-order measurement model (dimensionality, reliability, and validity).

| Item                                                                 | Loading (λ) | t-Value |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------|
| **Quality-functional value (1st order). \( \alpha = 0.817; \text{CR} = 0.908; \text{AVE} = 0.833 \)** |             |         |
| Q1 The products of this retail store are good quality.               | 0.857 **    | 31.95   |
| Q2 In functional terms, this product has a good performance.         | 0.837 **    | 46.26   |
| **Emotional value (1st order). \( \alpha = 0.879; \text{CR} = 0.917; \text{AVE} = 0.734 \)** |             |         |
| Emo1 I enjoy shopping at this store.                                 | 0.837 **    | 46.26   |
| Emo2 I want to have the products sold by this store.                 | 0.872 **    | 61.71   |
| Emo3 Shopping in this store makes me feel good.                      | 0.902 **    | 94.67   |
| Emo4 People I interact with like this store.                         | 0.814 **    | 36.23   |
| **Social value (1st order). \( \alpha = 0.946; \text{CR} = 0.974; \text{AVE} = 0.949 \)** |             |         |
| Soc1 Shopping in this store influences other people’s image of me.   | 0.970 **    | 168.58  |
| Soc2 By shopping at this store, I make a good impression on other people. | 0.978 **    | 331.60  |
| **Economic value (1st order)**                                       |             |         |
| Eco1 The products at this store are cheap.                           | 1           | –       |
| **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) customers (1st order). \( \alpha = 0.767; \text{CR} = 0.835; \text{AVE} = 0.567 \)** |             |         |
| CSR_Cl1 He or she behaves honestly with his or her customers.        | 0.649 **    | 6.07    |
| CSR_Cl2 His or her employees offer customers complete information about the products/services of the company. | 0.669 **    | 6.53    |
| CSR_Cl3 He or she uses customer satisfaction as an indicator to improve the marketing of the service. | 0.866 **    | 20.90   |
| CSR_Cl4 He or she makes an effort to get to know customers and their needs. | 0.877 **    | 26.97   |
| **CSR Shareholders (1st order). \( \alpha = 0.772; \text{CR} = 0.864; \text{AVE} = 0.680 \)** |             |         |
| CSR_GI1 He or she is constantly trying to maximize profits.           | 0.869 **    | 36.43   |
| CSR_GI2 He or she has a strict control over costs.                    | 0.747 **    | 17.33   |
| CSR_GI3 Tries to ensure his/her survival and success in the long term. | 0.852 **    | 36.05   |
| **CSR Employees (1st order). \( \alpha = 0.887; \text{FC} = 0.912; \text{AVE} = 0.777 \)** |             |         |
| CSR_E1 He or she treats employees fairly (without discrimination or abuse). | 0.785 **    | 3.115   |
| CSR_E2 He or she offers training and promotion opportunities to his or her employees. | 0.884 **    | 3.976   |
| CSR_E3 He or she offers a nice work environment (flexible working hours, work life balance among others). | 0.966 **    | 3.703   |
| **CSR Society and environment (1st order). \( \alpha = 0.896; \text{CR} = 0.922; \text{AVE} = 0.748 \)** |             |         |
| CSR_S1 He or she helps to solve social problems.                      | 0.908 **    | 6.89    |
| CSR_S2 He or she allocates part of the budget to donations and social work in favor of social collectives in need. | 0.863 **    | 5.72    |
| CSR_S3 He or she collaborates in cultural and social events (music, sports, theatre among others). | 0.937 **    | 7.06    |
| CSR_S4 He or she tries to protect the environment.                    | 0.738 **    | 5.27    |
Table 1. Cont.

| Item | Loading (λ) | t-Value |
|------|-------------|---------|
| **Engagement (1st order).** α = 0.896; CR = 0.922; AVE = 0.748 | | |
| Engag1 | I like sharing my customer experience at this store with other customers. | 0.803 ** | 43.74 |
| Engag 2 | I like interacting with this store. | 0.877 ** | 76.50 |
| Engag 3 | I would collaborate with this store by making suggestions or suggesting ideas that would improve their services. | 0.855 ** | 68.44 |
| Engag 4 | I like helping other customers to solve their doubts regarding the products of this store. | 0.826 ** | 49.13 |

**Perceived value (2nd order).** CR = 0.789; AVE = 0.587

| Quality | 0.601 ** | 15.25 |
| Emotional value | 0.852 ** | 55.41 |
| Social value | 0.654 ** | 18.26 |
| Economic value | 0.667 ** | 19.26 |

**CSR (2nd order).** CR = 0.807; AVE = 0.512

| Customers | 0.791 ** | 14.14 |
| Shareholders | 0.742 ** | 17.18 |
| Employees | 0.618 ** | 7.63 |
| Society and the environment | 0.702 ** | 10.58 |

α: Cronbach's Alpha; CR: Complex Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; **: t-values significant at 99%.

Discriminant validity was also analyzed using correlations among latent factors. Given that the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) was considerably higher than the correlation among latent constructs, criterium to establish discriminant validity of the measurement scales was met (see Table 2) [60]. Further analysis of the results confirms the discriminant validity given that none of the ratios of the correlations heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) exceeded the threshold of 0.9 [61].

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

| Constructs | Mean | SD  | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. |
|------------|------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1. Perceived value | 6.28 | 1.34 | 0.698 1 |    |    |    |    |
| 2. CSR | 6.51 | 1.23 | 0.238 ** | 0.716 |    |    |    |
| 3. Engagement | 4.20 | 2.20 | 0.561 ** | 0.202 * | 0.841 |    |    |
| 4. Gender | — | — | 0.055 | 0.011 | 0.090 | 1.00 |    |
| 5. Age | 53.68 | 14.13 | 0.086 | 0.008 | 0.064 | 0.058 | 1.00 |

SD: Standard Deviation; 1: the elements of the diagonal (italic) show the square root of AVE; **: correlations significant at 99%; *: at 95%.

In line with previous researches (e.g., [9,13,15,25,26]), we can conclude that CSR actions are well represented by the dimensions that link to the customers, shareholders, employees, society, and the environment. Similarly, perceived value also reflects perceptions of social value, economic value, and quality that have been proposed by Sweeney and Soutar [52].
4.2. Estimation of the Structural Model

The validation of the posited hypotheses was tested based on the estimation of the structural parameters using a bootstrapping of 5000 interactions of the previously indicated resampling. Thus, we can employ the statistical t-values and the trust intervals generated to assess the significance of the causal relationships. Table 3 gathers the estimated effects, both direct and indirect ones, among the constructs of the theoretical model.

| Table 3. Causal relationships. |
|-------------------------------|
|                                |
| **Standard Coefficient (t-Stat)** | **Hypothesis** |
| Direct effects                 |                |
| Perceived value → CSR          | 0.238 ** (6.89) | H1 accepted |
| Perceived value → engagement   | 0.540 ** (18.68) | H2 accepted |
| CSR → engagement               | 0.073 * (2.13)  | H3 accepted |
| Control variables              |                |
| Gender → engagement            | 0.059 (1.61)    |                |
| Age → engagement               | 0.013 (0.42)    |                |
| Indirect individual effects on final constructs |
| Perceived value → CSR → engagement | 0.061 ** (3.00) |

*: significant at 95%; **: significant at 99%.

Perceived value has a significant positive influence on the perceptions of CSR actions carried out by the store (β = 0.238**), thus confirming hypothesis H1. This result supports the arguments developed in previous studies on retailing [25,26]. Specifically, we can highlight the importance of the perception of the value that the customer receives on the CSR actions supported by commercial formats. Furthermore, CSR also presents a significant and positive effect on engagement (β = 0.073**). This estimation means that hypothesis H2 is accepted. This result allows to continue the research line proposed by López-Pérez et al. [17], who argue that the positive perception of CSR actions could have a great impact on the long-term relationships with customers. On the other hand, perceived value shows a significant positive and direct effect (0.073**) and indirect effect (0.061**) on engagement, verifying hypothesis H3. In line with previous researches, this estimation indicates that perceived value acts as an antecedent in the chain CSR and the engagement [17,48]. The explained variance of the latent factor “engagement” reaches R² = 0.324**.

Finally, as regards the predictive ability of the model, the results of the Stone-Geisser model yield positive values of Q² for all the endogenous variables. Furthermore, the model’s global adjustment is adequate (SRMR = 0.059) because it shows values considerably below the maximum threshold of 0.08 [62].

5. Conclusions

This study responds to the need to delve deeper into the role of corporate social responsibility as an essential variable in modern business management. Our study has shown this importance in CSR’s ability to influence the consumer through his or her motivational commitment and value perception. The literature review has allowed us to contextualize these variables and their interrelations, thus identifying the importance of corporate sustainability in consumers’ purchase behavior. In this regard, we have analyzed corporate social responsibility from the point of view of the stakeholders as a variable of sustainable management. On the other hand, the study considered commitment in its engagement dimension as a psychological process resulting from motivational factors that leads to higher customer loyalty toward the brand. Finally, we have studied value perceived by the customer as a key variable in the process of brand selection by the customer. This process has allowed us to check whether customers that perceive a higher value in a brand show a higher commitment with
this brand and with the CSR policies applied by the retail store. To do so, we have performed an empirical study using a structured questionnaire involving 707 customers of retailers (supermarkets and hypermarkets). The results confirm that a higher perceived value leads to a higher customer commitment with the brand (both directly and indirectly through CSR). Furthermore, higher perceived value implies a higher importance of CSR policies implemented, and CSR policies allow companies to increase customers’ commitment with the brand. This result shows that consumer-oriented CSR activities can improve consumer engagement. Which is more relevant in the current crisis situation derived from the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and society. This crisis has weakened the trust and commitment of consumers with the organization. Therefore, it is a particularly important time for companies to strengthen their CSR policies and actions. The results of these actions will increase the perception of value of the consumer and this will be rewarded by a satisfied and loyal consumer that will translate into an increase in the profitability of the company in the long term. This is very important for business practice because it shows that investing in CSR has a positive influence on customer motivations, making them feel more committed to it.

The results lead to a series of management suggestions. First, the implementation of efficient CSR policies has become a demand not only from society but also from customers. Customers consider that a good management of CSR through policies that care for their customers, their needs and concerns, that improve employees’ working conditions, that generate benefits not only for shareholders but also for society, and that respect the environment fosters customers’ commitment and implication with the brand. Therefore, companies should invest in the development of efficient CSR in order to exert a positive influence on the brand selection process of the customer, that is, to be accepted by customers and among their preferred brands. Thus, our study has shown that customers that value the quality of the products sold at the store and the shopping experience or those who show a concern for their social image value companies’ CSR actions to a greater extent.

Finally, our study has some limitations, such as the local dimension of the analyzed sample or the focus on a single sector. Further, the retailers analyzed were present mainly in the local study area. Most of them are present at a national level but there are some whose national coverage is very limited. Another difficulty was the survey process, which was done with a personal interview at the door of commercial establishments. Which took more time. Our future research will attempt to replicate the study in other geographical areas and sectors. Future research should also consider the testing of the multidimensionality of the CSR construct, thus making it possible to establish new direct relations between this construct and the rest of the variables. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to study the relationship with other marketing variables such as co-creation of value or brand equity.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Questionnaire/Scales used to evaluate the different variables.

| Scale Used to Evaluate CSR Variable                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The company has established procedures to respond to all consumer complaints                         |
| The company behaves honestly with customers                                                         |
| The company has employees that offer comprehensive information to consumers about their products or services |
Table A1. Cont.

| The company uses consumer satisfaction as an indicator to improve the service |
| The company is constantly striving to know and meet the consumers’ needs |
| The company seeks to maximize their profits |
| The company maintains tight control over expenses |
| The company tries to ensure their survival and success in the long term |
| The company pays fair wages to their employees |
| The company offers job security for its employees |
| The company treats employees fairly (without discrimination or abuse) |
| The company offers training and development opportunities to employees |
| The company offers a friendly working environment |
| The company helps to solve social problems |
| The company invests part of its budget on social grants |
| The company is actively involved in social and cultural events (music, sports, theater, etc.) |
| The company seeks to protect the environment |
| The company always complies with the rules and regulations defined by law |
| The company complies with the contractual obligations undertaken with employees, suppliers, consumers, etc. |
| The company is committed to ethical principles |
| **Perceived Value Scale** |
| The products of this shop have a good quality |
| This item would, in functional terms, perform well |
| I enjoy shopping at this store |
| I want to have the products of this shop |
| Buy this store makes me feel good |
| This shop would like people to whom I usually relate |
| Buy in this store influence the image that others have of me |
| Buy in this store would create a favorable perception of me among other people |
| The products of this shop have a good quality-price relationship |
| The products in this shop are cheap |
| **Commitment/engagement scale** |
| Overall I am committed to this store |
| I will strive to help the store |
| A new store would strive more to achieve my goals and be more beneficial for me |
| My relationship with the store is something I try to keep indefinitely |
| I am patient with the company when it make a mistake |
| I work hard to keep my relationship with the company |

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