

## ECONOMICS

## Sociology

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## ALTRUISM OR STRATEGY? A STUDY OF ATTRIBUTIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY IN BUSINESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CONSUMER DECISION MAKING PROCESS

**ABSTRACT.** The principal aim of this paper is to propose a model of consumer decision making based on responsibility criteria, just as to analyze the role of consumers' attributions of business responsibility as determinants of that process. A self-reported study was conducted from a total sample of 454 Spanish consumers. Structural equations modeling with PLS was used to test the sequence between information search, information evaluation and purchase behavior based on responsibility criteria, just as the effect of value, stakeholder, strategic and egoistic-driven motivations attributed to corporate responsibility. Results support a model of responsible consumer decision making and show a different pattern of effects of social and strategic attributions on consumer behavior.

**Keywords:** Public marketing, corporate social responsibility, responsible consumption, consumer decision making process, social orientation, profit orientation, Spain

## Introduction

Over past decades, responsibility has gained increasing importance within both public and private organizations, it being the subject of much investigation and debate among both researchers and practitioners (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2006). Particularly, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been defined as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (European Commission, 2001, p. 6).

According to this new paradigm of economic functioning, enterprises are more and more convinced that improvement of social settings through their own activity has a great potential to contribute to the objectives pursued. In this sense, all kind of organizations around the world are nowadays concerned for maintaining their reputation and making it clear their

involvement with social demands and changes, in order to send a signal to the various stakeholders with whom they interact. From this viewpoint, widely accepted among academics and experts, it is assumed that consumers' demands and expectations have to be satisfied beyond the specific need which originated the relationship with the organization. In words of Baker (2006, pp. 197-198), "*distinction between success and failure in competitive markets may be reduced to two basic issues, first, an understanding of marketing needs, and, second, the ability to deliver added value*".

In consequence, business managers are now aware that issues such as collaboration with social causes, guarantee of fair relationships with stakeholders, fair trade, environmental awareness, work insertion of marginal collectives, and health and safety at work are, among others, new expectations to be fulfilled by enterprises in the satisfaction of consumer expectations (e.g., Vázquez *et al.*, 2011, 2012). Hence, responsible initiatives to influence consumers and differentiate product offerings have become quite common in current marketplaces (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006).

In line with this premise, many authors have investigated the implications of responsibility for marketing in organizations, concluding that contribution to social and environmental causes may induce consumer goodwill towards the company (e.g., Brown and Dacin, 1997; Jones, 1997; Handelman and Arnold, 1999; Lorge, 1999; Maignan, 2001), and thus remarking the importance of considering the way that corporate decisions are perceived by the public (Roberts, 1993, 1995, 1996; Mohr *et al.*, 2001; Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006; Ellen *et al.*, 2006; Webb *et al.*, 2008; Vlachos *et al.*, 2009). However, previous research have founded important mismatches between the pre-purchase and purchase behaviors of consumers when taking into consideration CSR criteria, in the sense that they seem to be less likely to buy ethical products than their stated intentions in marketplace polls (e.g., Auger *et al.*, 2008; Ehrich and Irving, 2005; Luchs *et al.*, 2010; Gupta and Sen, 2013).

To aid in the understanding of this misfit, this paper analyze the influence of perceived responsibility over the different stages of the consumer decision making process. Particularly, the goal of this paper is twofold. First, it is intended to analyze the sequential link between search for information, evaluation of information and purchase behavior according to responsibility criteria. Second, it is sought to study the determining role of the motives attributed to business responsibility over these stages of the consumer decision making process. In doing that, a self-reported study was conducted with a sample of 454 Spanish consumers. Structural equations modeling with partial least squares (PLS) was used to test the hypothesis proposed in the model.

According to that, the paper is organized as follows. First section reviews previous literature on business responsibility and consumer behavior, paying special attention to the consumer decision making process and the influence of the motives attributed by consumers to CSR initiatives. In line with this review, we set the hypothesis of the research model. Next, sections 2 and 3 describe the methodology employed in the study and its main findings. Finally, section 4 is devoted to discuss the results obtained and summarize the conclusions of the research.

## **1. Literature review on business responsibility and consumer behavior**

Discussion of CSR implications for consumer behavior has been a common topic in recent marketing literature. In general, major evidences reveal that socially responsible initiatives may induce consumer goodwill towards the organization, whereas irresponsible companies would be punished (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Jones, 1997; Handelman and Arnold, 1999; Lorge, 1999; Maignan, 2001). In this line, numerous studies demonstrate the link between CSR and positive responses by consumers, including identity attractiveness towards

the company (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Marín and, Ruíz 2007; Marín *et al.*, 2009; Lii and Lee, 2012), corporate attitudes (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006; Singh *et al.*, 2008), loyalty and commitment (Lacey and Kennett-Hensel, 2010; Matute-Vallejo *et al.*, 2011) positive evaluation of products (Creyer and Ross, 1997; Folkes and Karnins, 1999), reactions to price (Creyer and Ross, 1997), and purchase intentions (Murray and Vogel, 1997; Maignan, 2001; Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006).

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

In the convergence of both lines of research, some authors argue the existence of important mismatches between consumer's purchase intentions and behaviors with regards to CSR criteria (Auger *et al.*, 2008; Ehrich and Irving, 2005; Luchs *et al.*, 2010; Gupta and Sen, 2013). Previous works devoted to explain this substantial intention-behavior gap in ethical consumption consider different factors, including the under-requesting of ethical attribute information by consumers (Ehrich and Irving, 2005) the marketing methods employed to elicit consumer's purchase intentions (Auger *et al.*, 2008), the type of product attributed that assume relevance at the point of purchase (Luchs *et al.*, 2010), or the distinct temporal frames guiding poll responses and actual purchase decisions (Gupta and Sen, 2013).

As alternative explanation, we suggest that the level of involvement of customers in the different stages of the consumer decision-making process can help to gain understanding in the logic sequence between pre-purchase and purchase behaviors in consideration to CSR criteria. Particularly, we assume that consumers' involvement in search for information of firms' responsible initiatives and positive evaluation of that information may have a positive influence on actual purchase behaviors. Complementary, according to requests of further investigation on moderator or mediating factors in the relationships between perceptions of CSR and consumer goodwill towards organizations (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Schuler and Cording, 2006; Castaldo *et al.*, 2009), our model considers the influence of attributions of firm's motives to perform in a responsible way as important determining factors of consumer behavior. While most previous studies have focused on the effects of attributions on specific facets of consumer behavior (Ellen *et al.*, 2006; Vlachos *et al.*, 2009), little is known on their influence over the different stages of the consumer decision-making process.

### ***1.1. The consumer decision making process***

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

A simplified version of the model is shown in *Figure 1*. According to the model, consumers typically go through seven major stages when making decisions: need recognition, search for information, pre-purchase evaluation, purchase, consumption, post-consumption

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evaluation, and divestment. The model also shows how different internal and external forces interact to affect how consumers think, evaluate, and act.

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

According to the authors, search may be internal (i.e., retrieving knowledge from memory according to previous experiences) or external (i.e., collecting information from peers, family and the marketplace). At the same time, search may be passive or active. Sometimes, consumers search passively by simply becoming more receptive to information around them, whereas at other times, they may engage in active search behavior, by researching consumer publications and on the Internet, paying attention to ads, visiting shopping malls, etc.

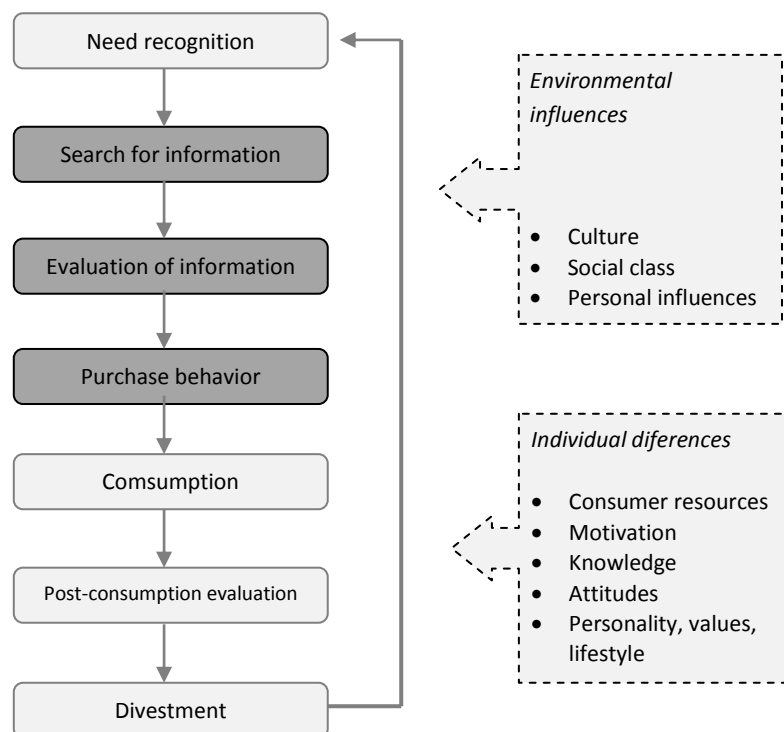


Figure 1. The consumer decision making process

Source: Adapted from Blackwell *et al.* (2006)

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

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

Similar sequences of stages within the consumer decision making process have been suggested by other authors to explain the influence of business responsibility on consumer behavior (e.g., Öberseder *et al.*, 2011). For instance, Valor (2010) considers four stages to

explain responsible buying decisions, namely antecedents of responsible purchase, information acquisition, evaluation of alternatives, and purchase behavior.

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

In view of previous models of the consumer decision making process and their adaptation to responsible consumption, this paper seeks to prove empirically a sequence of search for information, evaluation of information and purchase behavior according to responsibility criteria, as it is posed in the following hypotheses (*Figure 1*):

Hypothesis 1: Evaluation of information on business responsibility will have a positive direct effect on purchase behavior.

Hypothesis 2: Search for information on business responsibility will have a positive direct effect on evaluation of information, and a positive indirect effect on purchase behavior by total mediation of evaluation of information.

### ***1.2. Attributions of business responsibility motives***

Some previous works state that people may care less about what firms are doing that about why they are doing it (Gilbert and Marlone, 1995). For instance, firms have been found to engage in socially responsible behaviors not only to fulfill external obligations such as regulatory compliance and stakeholders demands, but also due to self-interest considerations such as increased competitiveness and improved stock market performance (Drumwright, 1994; Waddock and Smith, 2000; Klein and Dawar, 2004). In fact, many companies advertise their ethical practices to distinguish their products and achieve competitive advantage (Castaldo *et al.*, 2009), and by this mean, the availability of information on corporate responsible practices is considered a key determinant of consumers' assessments, decisions and purchase behaviors (Valor, 2010).

Such a kind of evidences makes it unlikely that consumers blindly accept CSR initiatives as sincere actions and thus reward the firm. Rather, citizens may perform responsible consumer behaviors as a mean to express personal values and beliefs or to punish irresponsible firms and brands (Valor, 2010). Likewise, research suggests that consumers are skeptical of firms' self-interested reasons for engaging in CSR (Webb and Mohr, 1998; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Porter and Kramer, 2004; Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006) and will punish firms that are perceived as insincere in their social involvement (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Creyer and Ross, 1997; Barone *et al.*, 2000; Ellen *et al.*, 2000; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006). From this view, many authors suggest that the specific attributions that underlie perceived motivations are likely to influence the evaluation of the firm (Boush *et al.*, 1994; Campbell and Kirmani, 2000; Ellen *et al.*, 2000; Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006), thus altering the relationship between CSR practices and consumer responses (Godfrey, 2005; Barone *et al.*, 2007; Valor, 2010).

Within this line of research, different models about motivators to engage in responsible practices have been proposed. In simple terms, Becker-Olsen *et al.* (2006) characterized firms' drivers as profit-motivated or socially-motivated, and found that promotion of high-fit, socially-motivated initiatives improves consumers' goodwill towards companies, while promotion of low-fit, profit-motivated initiatives has the opposite effect.

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

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

According to these previous results, our research model considers the influence of CSR attributions over the three stages of the consumer decision making process analyzed. Particularly, it is assumed that consumers will tend to support socially-oriented motivations (i.e., values-driven and stakeholder driven) and punish profit-oriented motivations (i.e., strategic-driven and egoistic-driven), as stated in the following hypotheses (*Figure 2*):

Hypothesis 3: Attributions of value-driven and stakeholder-driven motives to responsible firms will have a positive direct effect on search for information, evaluation of information and purchase behaviour.

Hypothesis 4: Attributions of strategic-driven and egoistic-driven motives to responsible firms will have a negative direct effect on search for information, evaluation of information and purchase behaviour.

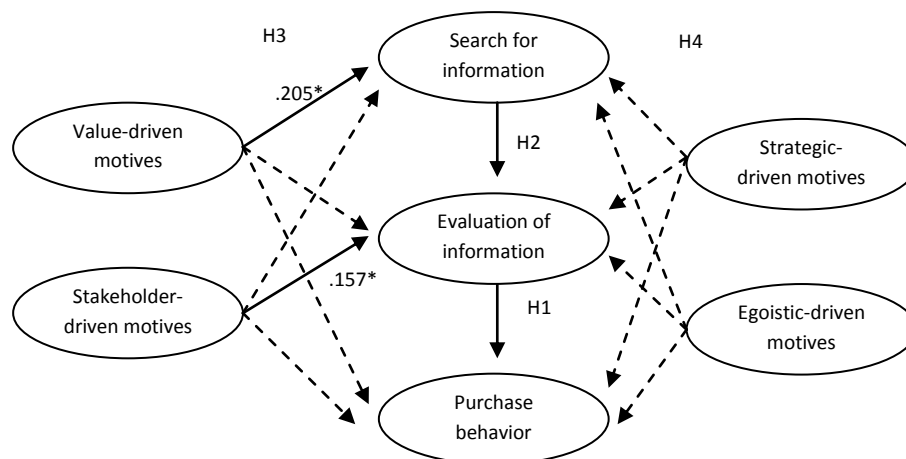


Figure 2. Model of hypotheses

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Sample

Self-reported data was collected from a total sample of 454 citizens from the Spanish region of León, ensuring a size for a representative 95% (being  $e = \pm 5\%$ ;  $p = q = 0.50$ ).

Respondents were randomly selected from general population according to real distributions by sex and age. Based on these criteria, the total sample comprised 243 females (53.5%) and 211 males (46.5%), aged 18 to 75 years old ( $M = 43.22$ ). By age group, 34.1% were aged 18 to 35 years old, 29.3% were 36 to 50, and 36.6% were 51 to 75 years old. Among the total, 39% of respondents had coursed university studies, 23.6% had attended a vocational school, 17.6 had finished secondary studies, 17.6% had received elementary education, and 2.2% were uneducated.

## 2.2. Measures

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

First, participants were presented a list of 13 items defining three stages of the consumer decision making process. Particularly, five items were used to ask participant about their search behavior of information concerning responsibility in business (e.g., “I pay attention to advertising messages on responsible brands”). Four sentences were devoted to measure the relative weight given by consumers to responsibility criteria when evaluating the information recovered and making purchase decisions (e.g., “I think that socially responsible products are of better quality”). Finally, four items assessed participants purchase behavior in consideration of such responsibility criteria (e.g., “I am willing to pay a higher price for a product from a socially responsible firm”). Participants reported their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Next, a scale of 15 items was used to ask consumers about possible firms’ motivations to act in a socially responsible way, in reference to the four categories established by Ellen *et al.* (2006) and validated by Vlachos *et al.* (2009): value-driven (e.g., “to give back something to the society”), stakeholder-driven (e.g., “to respond consumers’ expectations”), strategic-driven (e.g., “to improve their reputation”), and egoistic-driven (e.g., ‘to take advantage of the cause’). Again, respondents reported their degree of accordance with each sentence on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

## 2.3. Data analysis

The data collected was analyzed through SPSS 17.0 for descriptive purposes. Then, the partial least squared (PLS) technique was used to test the proposed model. The PLS method consists of a statistical modeling-based technique through structural equations that allow for the simultaneous estimation of a group of equations, by measuring the concepts (measurement model or outer model) and the relationships between them (structural model or inner model), and has the capacity to address concepts not directly observable. Unlike covariance-based methods, PLS aims to maximize the variance explained by indicators and latent variables. A series of iterative factorial analyses is performed through the ordinal least squares (OLS) estimation technique, combining linear and multiple regression for path analyses.

Based on this procedure, the estimation of the model is carried out in two stages. For reflective measures of constructs, the first stage involves the evaluation of the strength of the measurement model, by looking at individual item reliability, internal consistency and construct validity. Once the measurement model’s reliability and validity has been verified, the second stage focuses on the estimation of fit parameters for the structural model, thus indicating the fulfillment of hypotheses through standardized path coefficients and the  $R^2$  index. Likewise, the global fit of the model in terms of predictive relevance is estimated

through a *jackknife* procedure based on the Stone-Geiser test (Geiser, 1974; Stone, 1974). In these terms, the  $Q^2$  statistic represents a measure of how well observed values are reconstructed by the model and its parameter estimates.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Correlation and descriptive analysis

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients among the study variables. In general terms, the three facets of consumer behavior analyzed were strongly and positively correlated among them, thus showing congruence between the various purchase habits of respondents according to responsibility criteria. In this sense, mean scores in the consumer decision-making scales were moderated, with values around 3 in the five-point scale.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations (SD) and correlations among variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean (SD)
<b>Search for information</b>	--							3.24 (0.81)
<b>Evaluation of information</b>	.57**	--						3.03 (0.93)
<b>Purchase behavior</b>	.66**	.77**	--					2.96 (0.95)
<b>Value-driven motives</b>	.23**	.24**	.25**	--				3.25 (0.76)
<b>Stakeholder-driven motives</b>	.15**	.22**	.23**	.47**	--			3.42 (0.70)
<b>Strategic-driven motives</b>	.07	-.10*	-.07	.21**	.26**	--		3.84 (0.59)
<b>Egoistic-driven motives</b>	.04	-.15**	-.13**	.09	.14**	.60**	--	3.85 (0.66)

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .005$ .

Similarly, the four measures of motives attributed by consumers to business responsibility were positively correlated, while mean scores were similar for all scales (between 3 and 4 on the five-point response scale), thus pointing to the coexistence of different components in the participants' conceptualization of firm's motives to perform in a responsible way. However, mean values were slightly higher for egoistic-driven ( $M = 3.85$ ) and strategic-driven motives (3.84), thus showing the predominance of a vision of business responsibility as profit motivated.

Further, both value-driven and stakeholder-driven motives were significantly and positively correlated to the three stages of the consumer decision making process analyzed. Opposite, strategic-driven and egoistic-driven motives were only negatively correlated to information evaluation and purchase behavior, while no relation was found with the search behavior scale. In short, this pattern of results backs up the idea that consumer goodwill toward firms' responsibility depends on the specific motives attributed to that performance.

#### 3.2. Evaluation of the measurement model

As previously mentioned, the first stage of PLS modeling involves assurance that the measures used reflect the underlying theoretical constructs, by looking at items' reliability and scales' internal consistency and construct validity.

As displayed in Table 2, all item loadings were above the minimum level 0.5 for acceptability (Chin, 1998a, 1998b; Barclay *et al.*, 1995). The significance of loadings was further verified through a bootstrap procedure with 200 sub-samples, for obtaining significant



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t-statistic values at a 0.95 level (based on  $t_{(199)}$ , two-tailed test). Likewise, communalities were well above the minimum 0.25 (Bollen, 1989), the latent constructs explaining between 25.1% and 73.4% of variance in their respective observed indicators.

Regarding the internal consistency of scales, the examination of Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and the composite reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) reveals in general terms values exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1987; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994; Barclay *et al.*, 1995; Hair *et al.*, 1998), which proves that the occurrence of random error in measures was minimized.

Convergent validity was tested by the index Average Variance Extracted (AVE). In all cases, values were above the minimum benchmark of 0.5 (Fornell and Lacker, 1981), meaning that 50% or more variance of the indicators was accounted for. Next, we checked the correlation matrix of latent variables, with the squares roots of AVE values as diagonal elements, and no problem was detected, thus suggesting adequate discriminant validity.

Table 2. Indicators for measurement model evaluation

Item/Scale	Loadings	Communalities	$\alpha$	$\rho_c$	AVE
<i>Search for information</i>			.818	.872	.578
SI1	.779***	.687			
SI2	.840***	.706			
SI3	.651***	.424			
SI4	.770***	.593			
SI5	.748***	.559			
<i>Evaluation of information</i>			.848	.898	.687
EI 1	.818***	.669			
EI 2	.857***	.734			
EI 3	.830***	.689			
EI 4	.810***	.656			
<i>Purchase behavior</i>			.816	.879	.646
PB 1	.763***	.582			
PB 2	.749***	.561			
PB 3	.853***	.728			
PB 4	.844***	.712			
<i>Value-driven motives</i>			.601	.790	.558
VAL 1	.684***	.468			
VAL 2	.764***	.584			
VAL 3	.789***	.622			
<i>Stakeholder-driven motives</i>			.798	.853	.543
STA 1	.809***	.654			
STA 2	.683***	.466			
STA 3	.544**	.296			
STA 4	.834***	.696			
STA 5	.774***	.599			
<i>Strategic-driven motives</i>			.638	.768	.463
STR 1	.730**	.533			
STR 2	.591*	.251			
STR 3	.591**	.349			
STR 4	.854***	.729			
<i>Egoistic-driven motives</i>			.714	.838	.634
EGO 1	.857***	.734			
EGO 2	.767***	.588			
EGO 3	.761***	.579			

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .005$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (based on  $t_{(199)}$ , two-tailed test).

### 3.3. Evaluation of the measurement model

Once analyzed the reliability and validity of the measures, PLS technique was used to test the hypothesized relationships between exogenous and endogenous latent constructs. Statistical significance of path coefficients was tested by performing a standard bootstrapping with 200 subsamples, to obtain the *t*-statistic values associated to these predictive links (Chin, 1998b). *Table 3* shows the direct and indirect effects obtained by this procedure. Likewise, main results are summarized in *Figure 2*.

In line with Hypothesis 1, it was confirmed a direct effect of evaluation of information on purchase behavior, with a path coefficient of .747.

Also Hypothesis 2 was supported, since there was a positive direct effect of search for information on evaluation of information (path coefficient of .557), just as an indirect effect on purchase behavior by total mediation of this variable (path coefficient of .416).

Hypothesis 3 stating a positive effect of value-driven and stakeholder-driven motives on the consumer decision process was only partially supported. By one hand, findings showed a statistically significant positive effect of value-driven attributions on information search behavior (path coefficient of .205), whereas its effect on evaluation of information and purchase behavior was only marginal by mediation of search for information.

Similarly, stakeholder-driven motives predicted evaluation of information in a direct way (path coefficient of .157), while its effect on purchase behavior was indirect by total mediation of the previous stage in the consumer decision making process. However, there wasn't any significant effect of stakeholder-driven attributions on information search behavior.

Table 3. Direct and total effects

DV	IV	Direct effect	Total effect	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
Purchase behavior				.614	.359
	Evaluation of information	.747***	--		
	Search for information	--	.416***		
	Values-driven	.052	.173 <sup>†</sup>		
	Stakeholder-driven	.050	.199*		
	Strategic-driven	-.003	-.106		
	Egoistic-driven	-.031	-.110		
Evaluation of information				.416	.286
	Search for information	.557***	--		
	Values-driven	.047	.162 <sup>†</sup>		
	Stakeholder-driven	.157*	.200*		
	Strategic-driven	-.127	-.137		
	Egoistic-driven	-.006	-.105		
Search for information				.062	.034
	Values-driven	.205*	--		
	Stakeholder-driven	.076	--		
	Strategic-driven	-.018	--		
	Egoistic-driven	.019	--		

Note. <sup>†</sup> *p* < .10; \* *p* < .05; \*\* *p* < .005; \*\*\* *p* < .001 (based on *t*<sub>(199)</sub>, two-tailed test).

Hypothesis 4 concerning a negative effect of strategic-driven and egoistic-driven attributions on the consumer decision process was rejected, since the negative path coefficients associated to both constructs in the prediction of search for information, evaluation of information and purchase behavior based on responsibility criteria didn't reach statistical significance.

In the context of these results,  $R^2$  indexes for two of the three dependent variables of the model were above the minimum threshold of .10 (Falk and Miller, 1992), the overall model explaining 41.6% of variance in evaluation of information and 61.4% in purchase behavior. For these variables, the  $Q^2$  values associated with the Stone-Geisser criterion (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974) were consistently higher than zero, indicating that the prerequisites of predictive relevance for the model are fulfilled (Chin, 1998a). However, the overall model only allowed explanation of a reduced 6.2% of variance of search for information.

## Conclusions

The implications of sustainability and responsibility for consumer behavior and marketing have represented a quite common topic in recent literature. In general, main conclusions in this sense remark that, while it is true that socially responsible initiatives may induce some consumer goodwill towards the organization, the effects of CSR on consumer behavior are more complex than expected.

In order to throw some light on the subject, the objective of this paper has been twofold. First, it was intended to propose a sequential model of the consumer responsible decision making process in terms of search for information, evaluation of information and purchase behavior. Second, it was sought to analyze the motives attributed by consumers to business responsibility and their effect on these three stages of consumer decision making process.

According to our first purpose, the study presented here supports the existence of a positive relationship between search and evaluation of information on business responsibility and subsequent purchase behavior. From this view, it can be concluded that availability of positive references on firms' responsible practices have a positive impact on consumers' assessments of products and brands, what derives in specific buying decisions and behaviors.

Around that consumer decision making process, the findings previously described also proves the usefulness of previous models defending the dimensionality of consumers' CSR attributions (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006; Ellen *et al.*, 2006; Vlachos *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, the study supports the coexistence of different firms' motives to behave in a socially responsible way as perceived by consumers, according to social and profit-based considerations.

Related to that, findings suggest that the effect of consumer attributions on the consumer decision sequence depends largely on the specific content of the motives attributed and the specific stage of the process. By one hand socially-oriented attributions seem to have a positive impact on consumer behavior. Particularly, value-driven motives lead consumers to search for additional information on business responsibility, while stakeholder-driven attributions are more efficient to foster positive assessments of the information available. However, the impact of both positive attributions on final consumer behavior is only indirect. This results point to a certain misfit between the pre-purchase and purchase stages of the decision process, in the sense that, while perceived responsibility may induce consumer goodwill towards the company, ethical and social concerns seem to be relatively unnoticed by consumers when actually buying products and services (Castaldo and Perrini, 2004; Singh *et al.*, 2008).

Complementary, negative attributions of firm's responsible initiatives, both strategic-driven and egoistic driven, were not found to cause any significant influence on the consumer decision making process. In interpreting this finding, it can be said that consumers may tend to perform responsible consumer behaviors as a mean to express personal values, rather than to punish irresponsible firms (Valor, 2010). In other words, consumers are sensible to positive interpretations of CSR to guide their purchase decisions, while skeptical views don't lead them to look for additional information or consider it in their actual buying behaviors.

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