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PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON CONSUMER LOYALTY: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL IDEOLOGY

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Received 15 December 2019; accepted 25 May 2020; published 30 September 2020

Abstract. This study explored how different types of perceived corporate social responsibility serve to affect customer loyalty, and how consumer ethical ideologies affect perceived corporate social responsibility. The empirical research analysis reveals that respondents are more often characterised by an ethical ideology of idealism, and that they are most aware of any corporate social responsibility (CSR) that is consumer-orientated. In addition, it has been found that the perceived CSR, which focuses on the public, has a significantly lower impact, while the impact of the perceived employee-orientated CSR is statistically significant only in respect to repeat purchases.

Keywords: CSR; ethical ideologies; consumer loyalty

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Beniulytė, D., Šeinauskienė, B., Rūtelionė, A. 2020. Perceived influence of corporate social responsibility on consumer loyalty: the role of ethical ideology. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*, 8(1), 291-300. [http://doi.org/10.9770/jesi.2020.8.1\(20\)](http://doi.org/10.9770/jesi.2020.8.1(20))

JEL Classifications: M31, M14

1. Introduction

Research shows that consumers are characterised by different ethical ideologies that influence their decision-making. The corresponding values between consumer and company have been widely discussed in academic literature, and ambiguous results show that the relevancy of such values leads to a more desirable consumer attitude and behaviour. In theory, the argumentation of the effect of value-matching in terms of desirable consumer behaviour could be extrapolated to the level of compatibility between consumer and corporate values. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the effect of matching consumer and corporate values in terms of consumer loyalty has not been extensively investigated by the ethical ideologies of the consumer (representing certain ethically-based values) and those values of the company that are disclosed, including the company's activities through corporate social responsibility. The identified knowledge gap raises the need for further research.

Morality and ethics have a long history of discourse in a variety of contexts, including philosophy, religion and, more recently, business (Kolodinsky, Madden, Zisk and Henkel, 2010). Researchers (Ellen, Webb and Mohr,

2006; Valentine & Bateman, 2011; Leonidou, Leonidou and Kvasova, 2013); Palihawadana, Oghazi and Liu, 2016; Arli & Leo, 2017) are increasingly focusing on the analysis of indirect connotations of perceived CSR and consumer loyalty, but the factors that are associated with consumer characteristics are rarely taken into account. In scientific marketing literature, the ethical ideologies of consumers are mainly analysed by taking into account the theoretical basis offered by Forsyth (1980), in which consumer behaviour is analysed from the point of view of idealism (in other words it is in keeping with moral values while making ethical decisions) and relativism (when moral actions are taken with a dependence upon the nature of the situation and the people involved). Valentine & Bateman (2011) analysed the influence of idealism, relativism, and consumer-perceived moral intensity on consumer decisions in relation to ethical issues and ethical-based intentions within a social context. Arli and Pekerti (2016) explored how the ethical ideologies of idealism and relativism, religion and belonging to a certain generation of consumers serves to determine decisions that are driven by the consumer ethic. Later, Arli and Leo (2017) conducted a study which evaluated the ethical decision-making phenomenon of individuals that can be characterised by the aforementioned ethical ideologies as affected by the factors of guilt and self-control. Palihawadana, Oghazi and Liu (2016) explored how CSR as perceived by consumers affects the evaluation of goods that are offered by companies in developing Vietnam, with the ethical ideology (idealism and egoism) of consumers being included in the study.

The results that were obtained by the aforementioned authors have revealed a strong positive relation between idealism and consumer concerns about the unethical nature of marketing activities. From this it was possible to identify a direct negative relation between corporate unethical marketing activities and consumer confidence in a company. Research shows that the loss of consumer confidence has a direct impact on their behavioural changes in terms of repeated purchases, consumer recommendations, and loyalty. In addition, Leonidou, Leonidou and Kvasova (2013), when basing this on the results of the study, also identified the relation between idealism and egoism, and concluded that individuals with a high level of idealism also change the attitude of those who lean towards egoism.

It is noted that the relation between consumer moral ideologies and company values which is indirectly affected through the activities of companies, such as CSR, and its impact on consumer loyalty have been investigated only indirectly and in a highly fragmented fashion. It has been noticed that the ethical attitudes of consumer idealism and egoism have an impact not only on the perceived CSR, but that they also are reflected in consumer behaviour when making decisions in terms of quality (specifically the quality and ethical value ratio), determining the level of trust in the company and behaviour towards it when that company applies unethical marketing solutions. The present study addresses this research gap by exploring how different types of perceived corporate social responsibility serve to affect customer loyalty and how consumer ethical ideologies serves to affect perceived CSR.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1 The relationship between the ethical ideologies of consumers and perceived CSR

The authors of this study take the view that, when making consumer-related decisions and choosing companies to whom they will express their loyalty, consumers base their decisions on the company's perceived corporate social responsibility, with such a choice being influenced by the ethical ideologies of idealism and egoism that are specific to the consumer. Many authors agree that the ethical ideologies of consumers (idealism and egoism) are an important factor which serves to influence the perception by consumers of CSR and their decision-making (Al-Khatib, Stanton & Rawwas, 2005; Ellen, Mohr, and Webb, 2006; Leonidou, Leonidou and Kvasova, 2013). It has been observed that the ideologies of idealism and egoism have been considered in scientific sources as being highly fragmented. The choice of the aforementioned ideologies is also based on research that has been carried out by Palihawadana, Oghazi and Liu (2016), which analysed the relation between the ethical ideologies of

idealism and egoism on the one hand and CSR on the other, and managed to identify their different levels of impact on the consumer perception of CSR. Therefore it is important to evaluate the impact of ethical ideologies by incorporating the ethical ideologies of idealism and egoism into the conceptual model of research.

Research shows that individuals who can be characterised by the ideology of idealism find it important to discover solutions that will have positive effects and can benefit all parties. Consumers who confess this ideology follow moral rules when making decisions and seek to solve ethical issues that are likely to lead to a positive attitude towards CSR due to matching moral values. The positive influence of idealism on consumer perception of CSR was empirically determined by Forsyth (1980), Kolodinsky, Madden, Zisk and Henkel (2010), Leonidou, Leonidou and Kvasova (2013) and Palihawadana, Oghazi and Liu (2016). The authors noted that the positive relationships were determined by the ethical ideology of idealism and the inherently common nature of CSR, as reflected in a respect for ethical and moral values. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H1: Idealism has a positive impact on CSR as perceived by consumers

2.2 The ethical ideology of egoism and CSR as perceived by consumers

Research shows that consumers who can be characterised by the ethical ideology of egoism tend to accept only those corporate socially responsible initiatives that, in essence, strictly meet their personal needs, do not contradict their interests, and deliver the most personal benefit. The results of empirical research by Palihawadana, Oghazi and Liu (2016) revealed that users who are prone to egoism support only those CSR activities in which they see direct personal gain. Russell and Russell (2010), however, have found that consumers who can be characterised by egoism are more focused on locally-developed CSR initiatives that directly affect their daily lives. Therefore we hypothesise that:

H2: Egoism has a negative impact on CSR as perceived by consumers

2.3 The impact of the perceived CSR on consumer loyalty

The analysis of research on the perceived impact of CSR in terms of consumer loyalty has revealed that even though the aforementioned relationship has widely been analysed, the research results are inconsistent and can be characterised as providing different results due to different perceptions of CSR and the conceptualisation of the consumer loyalty phenomena. In work in which the relationship was assessed between perceived CSR and consumer loyalty, the results have been identified which indicate that CSR has a positive impact on brand recognition, company reputation, loyalty, and confidence in the company. However, it is assumed that different forms of CSR have a positive impact on consumer loyalty and areas in which it is expressed - the attitude towards the company, the verbal recommendation, and the intention to purchase repeatedly. In aiming to identify which dimension of perceived CSR has the greatest level of impact in terms of consumer loyalty, the classification will be applied of consumer-perceived CSR that is being offered by Marquina & Vasquez (2013). This involves corporate social responsibility which is orientated towards the public, consumers, and employees.

Maignan & Ferrell (2001) found that consumers are attentive to the physical and tangible aspects of corporate social responsibility, which are usually associated with the levels of quality of products or services, innovation, and the compliance of standards. When taking this into account, a significant influence by perceived CSR through perceived quality was identified by Wan, Poon and Yu (2016). It was found that CSR indirectly influences the purchasing intentions of and recommendations by consumers. The influence of CSR through perceived quality of service upon consumer loyalty, however, was also evaluated by Mandhachitara and Poolthong (2011), whose research showed that there is a positive impact in terms of the perceived CSR in relation to consumer loyalty and repeat purchases. It has been noticed that research shows ambiguous results in terms of any positive relation between perceived quality and consumer loyalty. When taking into account the aforementioned relation, it is

assumed that perceived CSR which is orientated towards consumers should also be positively linked to consumer loyalty. Therefore we hypothesise that:

- H3: perceived consumer-orientated CSR has a positive impact on consumer loyalty;*
- H3a: perceived consumer-orientated CSR has a positive impact on consumer attitude;*
- H3b: perceived consumer-orientated CSR has a positive impact on verbal recommendations;*
- H3c: perceived consumer-orientated CSR has a positive impact on repeat purchases.*

2.4 The impact of perceived employee-orientated CSR on consumer loyalty

The impact of this construct in terms of consumer loyalty is based on the fact that, within the context of socially responsible initiatives, companies indirectly communicate their values which their own employees cherish and pass on to consumers. According to Pelozo & Shang (2011), the publicised CSR initiatives have the potential to establish a stronger relationship with a stakeholder, in this case this being the consumer, and thereby form a positive image for the company. For this reason, consumer engagement and decision-making based on ethical values have a positive impact upon their behaviour and expressed loyalty. Marquina & Vasquez (2013) discussed the impact that employee-orientated CSR has on consumer loyalty, basing their thoughts on research, revealing that while developing corporate social responsibility and company-employee relationship, that company also has a positive impact upon consumer behaviour at the same time. Therefore we hypothesise that:

- H4: perceived employee-orientated CSR has a positive impact on consumer loyalty;*
- H4a: perceived employee-orientated CSR has a positive impact on consumer attitude;*
- H4b: perceived employee -orientated CSR has a positive impact on verbal recommendations;*
- H4c: perceived employee -orientated CSR has a positive impact on repeat purchases.*

2.5. The impact of perceived society-orientated CSR on consumer loyalty

Research shows that society-orientated CSR and its forms such as support, investment in infrastructure, or support for social and cultural events, leads to the creation of positive associations towards the company and its product which serve to influence consumer loyalty. Henderson (2007) observes that the dissemination of information regarding socially-responsible activities which are carried out by companies has a significant level of impact on the positive attitude of consumers towards the company. Abdeen, Rajah and Gaur (2016) have also identified CSR initiatives as having a positive impact on consumer intentions to support a company, to promote purchasing behaviour, and to create a sense of trust and loyalty towards the company. Based on the aforementioned insights, it can be assumed that the more favourably consumers view different forms of a company's society-orientated social responsibility, the more loyal they are to that company. Therefore we hypothesise that:

- H5: perceived society-orientated CSR has a positive impact on consumer loyalty;*
- H5a: perceived society -orientated CSR has a positive impact on consumer loyalty;*
- H5b: perceived society -orientated CSR has a positive impact on verbal recommendations;*
- H5c: perceived society -orientated CSR has a positive impact on repeat purchases.*

All hypotheses that have been formed in this section, and which serve to outline the relation between consumer ethical ideologies, perceived CSR, and consumer loyalty, are visually depicted in a conceptual context, a model of ethical ideologies, and the impact that the perceived CSR has on consumer loyalty (Figure 1).

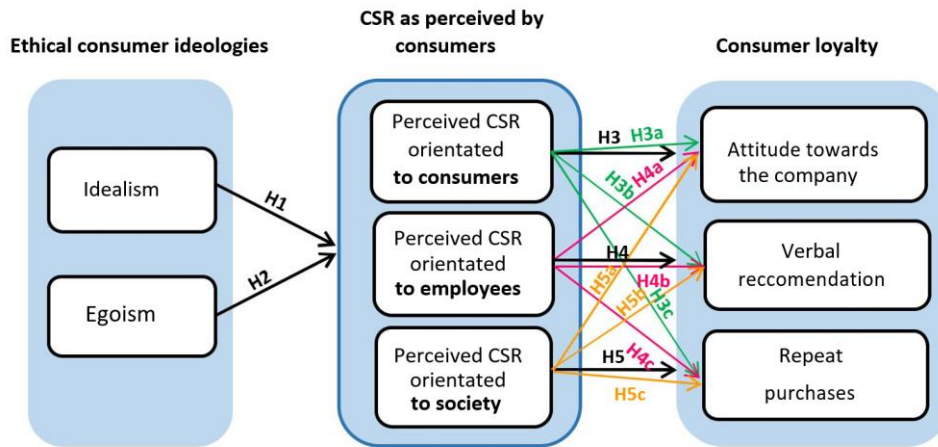


Fig 1. The conceptual model of the perceived CSR influence on consumer loyalty within the context of consumer ethical ideologies

3. Research methodology

In order to explore how different types of perceived corporate social responsibility affect customer loyalty and how consumer ethical ideology affects perceived CSR, we carried out a survey (between July 2019 and September 2019). The quantitative exploratory research design was adopted to test the conceptualized relations between ethical consumer ideologies, perceived CSR and consumer loyalty. Questionnaires were distributed to Lithuanian users of mobile communications, using a convenience sampling technique. The results were collected from Lithuanian users of mobile communications services. A total of 391 valid survey responses were utilised for the analysis. We addressed the non-response bias through the t-test. There was no significant difference in scores for early and late responses and no significant differences between respondents and non-respondents with regard to age or gender. We carried out two different tests in order to examine a common method bias. In order to be able to measure the constructs we used previously established and validated scales. The five-point Likert-type scales by Pérez & Bosque (2015) were used to capture the CSR orientation towards consumers, employees, and society. The five-point Likert-type scales by Leonidou, Leonidou and Kvasova (2013) were adopted to measure the ethical ideology of idealism and egoism. The five-point Likert-type scales by Moreira & Moutinho (2016) and Fatma, Khan and Rahman (2016) were adopted to measure the positive attitude towards the company. The five-point Likert-type scales by Pérez & Bosque (2015) and Fatma, Khan and Rahman (2016) were used to capture positive verbal recommendation and repeat-purchases.

4. Data analysis and results

The analysis of the results from the factor analysis showed that, in all cases, KMO values are prevalent that are higher than 0.4 and with Bartlett's sphericity criterion the figures are no higher than 0.01. As a result, it has been concluded that the analysis that has been carried out is effective and useful, and that the constructs of the research model that have been developed and the variables belonging to them are suitable for further analysis.

The descriptive analysis of variables in terms of consumer ethical ideologies that was carried out, plus the perceived CSR and consumer loyalty constructs, revealed that respondents to the survey can often be characterised by an ethical ideology of idealism and, when taking into account the average values for answers to the questions, it was found that respondents are most aware of CSR where it is consumer-orientated. The Kruskal-Wallis tests that have been carried out, based on grouping variables of gender, age, and mobile operator, revealed statistically significant differences between the construct variables that were included in the study. These are

likely to explain standard deviations in respondent responses. Whilst analysing the results of the tests that were carried out, it was established that women can be characterised by their possessing a more ethical ideology of idealism more often than do men. They also express a higher level of loyalty and a better understanding of socially responsible corporate initiatives.

A correlation analysis was carried out in order to identify the relationship between the ethical ideologies of consumers, their perceived CSR, and consumer loyalty. Summary results for multiple regression analysis which was used to measure the impact of various dimensions of consumer-perceived CSR on consumer loyalty and its forms, such as attitude towards the company, positive verbal recommendation, and repeat purchases, which were represented by all statistically significant correlations, are presented in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1. The results of testing the hypotheses

Independent variables	Dependent variables	Hypothesis	Has the hypothesis been confirmed?	R ²	Beta
Idealism	Perceived CSR	H1	Yes	0.140	0.272**
Egoism	Perceived CSR	H2	Yes	0.209	-0.106*
Perceived consumer-orientated CSR	Consumer loyalty	H3	Yes	0.546	0.867**
	Attitude	H3a	Yes	0.564	0.643**
	Verbal recommendation	H3b	Yes	0.692	0.563**
	Repeat purchases	H3c	Yes	0.377	0.352**
Perceived employee-orientated CSR	Consumer loyalty	H4	No	0.546	0.062
	Attitude	H4a	No	0.564	0.044
	Verbal recommendation	H4b	No	0.692	0.027
	Repeat purchases	H4c	Yes	0.377	0.098*
Perceived society-orientated CSR	Consumer loyalty	H5	Yes	0.546	0.157**
	Attitude	H5a	Yes	0.564	0.092**
	Verbal recommendation	H5b	Yes	0.692	0.141*
	Repeat purchases	H5c	Yes	0.377	0.200**

*N=391. Level of significance: **p < 0.001; *p < 0.05; with control variables being gender, age, and phone service provider.*

5. Conclusions and further research directions

Having analysed research results regarding the influence of the perceived social responsibility of Lithuanian telecommunications companies (mobile operators) in terms of the loyalty of consumers within the context of ethical ideologies, a model can be provided which is based upon empirical research. All hypotheses in the applied conceptual model have been confirmed and only three of them had a statistically insignificant factor (perceived employee-orientated CSR and its statistically insignificant impact on consumer loyalty, attitude, and verbal recommendation). At that time, the influence on employee-orientated CSR was determined only after repeat purchase. The results of research that was carried out by Jensen, Annan-Diab and Seppala (2018) in a very similar context - the telecommunications industry in Europe - did not reveal any clear impact of perceived employee-orientated CSR on repeat purchases. The research that was conducted by Pérez and Bosque (2015) also showed that the impact of employee-orientated CSR is not always identifiable and can be determined by other factors which may be influencing this link.

A summary of hypotheses is provided in Table 2 which shows that these hypotheses were formed within the conceptual model of the study and their established relationships in the empirical model. The table also shows that perceived society-orientated CSR can be characterised by a relatively weak relationship. According to Forehand & Grier (2003), the aforementioned weakness of the connection could be caused by the increasing scepticism of consumers regarding socially responsible initiatives. In addition, it has been noticed that consumers are not

informed about corporate socially responsible activities in society. Lauritsen & Perks (2015) propose an assumption that consumers do not actively seek information regarding CSR on their own, and instead tend to understand CSR through inclusive communication and interactivity. They also suggest that in order to generate benefits from CSR, it is first and foremost necessary to communicate it well to the target audience.

Table 2. A summary of the hypotheses and the relationships in the empirical model

Hypotheses		R ²	p
H1	Idealism has a positive impact on CSR as perceived by consumers	0.140	0.272**
H2	Egoism has a negative impact on CSR as perceived by consumers	0.209	-0.106*
H3	Perceived consumer-orientated CSR has a positive impact on consumer loyalty	0.546	0.867**
H3a	Perceived consumer-orientated CSR has a positive impact on attitude towards a company	0.564	0.643**
H3b	Perceived consumer-orientated CSR has a positive impact on verbal recommendation	0.692	0.563**
H3c	Perceived consumer-orientated CSR has a positive impact on repeat purchases	0.377	0.352**
H4	Perceived employee-orientated CSR has a positive impact on consumer loyalty	0.546	0.062
H4a	Perceived employee -orientated CSR has a positive impact on attitudes towards a company	0.564	0.044
H4b	Perceived employee -orientated CSR has a positive impact on verbal recommendation	0.692	0.027
H4c	Perceived employee -orientated CSR has a positive impact on repeat purchases	0.377	0.098*
H5	Perceived society-orientated CSR has a positive impact on consumer loyalty	0.546	0.157**
H5a	Perceived society -orientated CSR has a positive impact on attitudes towards a company	0.564	0.092**
H5b	Perceived society -orientated CSR has a positive impact on verbal recommendation	0.692	0.141*
H5c	Perceived society -orientated CSR has a positive impact on repeat purchases	0.377	0.200**

*N=391. Level of significance: **p < 0.001, *p < 0.05; control variables include gender, age, and phone service provider.*

Based on the recommendations proposed in the study that was carried out by Lii & Lee (2012), it is suggested that personalised CSR initiatives be carried out that reflect consumer values and lifestyle and thereby enhance the effectiveness of CSR. The author states that, by applying this method, CSR makes it possible to reach a larger part of the target audience and the possibilities in terms of being able achieve a well-defined group of users by exercising CSR initiatives are realistic, although it is necessary to deliberately implement corporate social responsibility.

The research has several limitations. Firstly, a cross-sectional research design, so it is difficult to claim cause-effect inferences. Also findings may not be generalizable to other populations (respondents – users of mobile communications services). The nonprobability sampling has been used as it was not be possible to acquire the sampling frame and ensure that all members of the population had a reasonable opportunity to be invited to participate in the study.

Further directions of research could be based on focusing upon specific consumer characteristics, especially where they are related to consumer values or character features, seeking new insights into the affected perceived

CSR. In this study, statistically significant differences in perceived CSR and consumer loyalty were also identified, basing them on the aspects of gender and age. According to Leonidou, Leonidou and Kvasova (2013), younger individuals can be characterised as having a lower level when it comes to promoting their ethical values, while older, educated individuals have a higher level of ethics and idealism. Therefore it would be useful to further analyse the perceived CSR in narrower age groups. The empirical study also identified corporate social responsibility as mostly being perceived by female employees, so it would make sense to pay more attention to the causes of this phenomenon and to analyse the factors that ultimately determine the CSR that is perceived by men. As another direction for continuance of this study, the application of this scientific model in other areas of corporate activity could also be possible, provided that those companies that are analysed meet the only criterion - that of engaging in social responsibility.

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