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## HOW CSR INFLUENCES CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: MECHANISMS AND MODERATING VARIABLES

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### Nashchekina O. M., Tymoshenkov I. V. How CSR Influences Consumer Behavior: Mechanisms and Moderating Variables

A positive relationship between CSR and financial performance represents a strong motivator for companies to engage in CSR. One potential source of improved financial performance is consumers' willingness to buy from the company and to prefer it to its competitors that are less advanced in the CSR sphere. Understanding consumer behavior is key to strategically implementing CSR and leveraging it to generate economic benefits and create competitive advantage. In this article, by synthesizing insights from the extensive literature on the impact of CSR on consumer behavior, we show that this impact is indirect and requires consideration of a large number of factors. We propose a multi-stage model that explains the mechanism underlying consumers' behavioral response to a company's CSR performance. The stages in the model include: 1) the actual performance of a company in the CSR sphere; 2) the communication of this performance to consumers; 3) the perception of the company's CSR performance by consumers, 4) the alignment of consumers' values with what the company does; 5) the formation of consumers' behavioral intention and 6) actual consumer behavior. Drawing on research findings reported in the literature, we examine each stage in depth and discuss related phenomena that may take place at these stages, such as consumer skepticism, the intention-behavior gap, and implicit and explicit attitudes. In addition, the relationship between CSR and consumer behavior is moderated by a wide spectrum of heterogeneous variables, such as consumer demographics, industry bias, company characteristics, socioeconomic context, brand trust, and others. We demonstrate that some of these variables, for example, brand trust, can also function as mediators, depending on the context and on whether their value changes as a result of CSR performance. We not only summarize the moderating variables identified in the literature but also associate them with different stages in our model. This provides deeper and more granular insight into the pathway between CSR and consumer behavior, allowing for more accurate prediction of the relationship between the two.

**Keywords:** corporate social responsibility (CSR), CSR performance, consumer behavior, purchase intentions, relationship between CSR and consumer behavior, moderating variables.

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### **Нащечкіна О. М., Тимошенко І. В. Як КСВ впливає на споживчу поведінку: механізм взаємодії та змінні-модератори**

Позитивний зв'язок між корпоративною соціальною відповідальністю (КСВ) і фінансовими показниками є важливим чинником, що спонукає компанії упроваджувати КСВ. Одним із потенційних джерел покращення фінансових результатів є готовність споживачів купувати продукцію компанії та віддавати їй перевагу перед конкурентами, які демонструють нижчий рівень КСВ. Розуміння поведінки споживачів має вирішальне значення для стратегічного впровадження КСВ і використання її для отримання економічних вигод і створення конкурентних переваг. У цій статті на основі узагальнення численних досліджень щодо впливу КСВ на поведінку споживачів ми показуємо, що цей вплив є опосередкованим і вимагає врахування значної кількості чинників. Ми пропонуємо багатоступеневу модель, яка пояснює механізм формування поведінкової реакції споживачів на КСВ компанії. Етапи моделі включають: 1) фактичну КСВ-діяльність компанії; 2) інформування споживачів про цю діяльність; 3) сприйняття споживачами КСВ-діяльності компанії; 4) відповідність цінностей споживачів КСВ-діяльності компанії; 5) формування поведінкових намірів споживачів; 6) фактичну споживчу поведінку. Спираючись на результати досліджень, представлені в літературі, ми детально розглядаємо кожен із цих етапів і обговорюємо пов'язані з ними явища, такі як скептицизм споживачів, розрив між намірами та діями, імпліцитні та експліцитні установки. На зв'язок між КСВ і поведінкою споживачів впливає також широкий спектр різномірних змінних-модераторів, таких як демографічні характеристики споживачів, особливості галузі, характеристики компанії, соціально-економічний контекст, довіра до бренду та інші. Показано, що деякі з цих змінних, наприклад довіра до бренду, за певних умов можуть виступати не лише як модератори, але й як медіатори, залежно від контексту та того, чи змінюється їхнє значення під впливом КСВ. Ми не лише узагальнюємо змінні-модератори, описані в літературі, але й пов'язуємо їх з окремими етапами нашої моделі. Це забезпечує глибше й більш деталізоване розуміння процесу, що поєднує КСВ зі споживчою поведінкою, і дозволяє точніше передбачити взаємозв'язок між ними.

**Ключові слова:** корпоративна соціальна відповідальність (КСВ), результати діяльності з КСВ, споживча поведінка, купівельні наміри, зв'язок між КСВ і споживчою поведінкою, змінні-модератори.

Рис.: 1. Табл.: 1. Бібл.: 40.

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has long since become a mainstream concept in business. However, the complexity, multidimensionality, and heterogeneity of this phenomenon pose certain problems for both defining it (CSR is an umbrella term) and unambiguously identifying its effect on business performance. Additionally, different approaches to CSR exist in terms of the philosophy or motivation underlying it, ranging from purely pragmatic to purely altruistic.

The instrumental approach to CSR [1], which justifies CSR as a means of creating wealth and strengthening competitive positions, calls for assessing the potential economic benefits a company can derive from its socially responsible behavior. A positive relationship between CSR and financial performance represents a very strong motivator for companies to engage in CSR. That is why it is important to understand whether such a link actually exists and how strong it is [2].

Financial results and competitive advantages can be improved through different mechanisms. For example, investors tend to favor companies with strong ESG scores, so financial performance may be enhanced due to a lower cost of capital and greater opportunities for growth. Socially responsible companies have better chances to attract talented, and therefore more productive, employees. Another potential source of improved financial performance, which is the focus of this study, is the benevolent attitude of consumers, translating into their willingness to buy from the company and to prefer it to its competitors that are less advanced in the CSR sphere. However, the question arises whether CSR indeed has a significant impact on consumer behavior and how exactly it influences this behavior. Understanding consumer behavior is key to strategically implementing CSR and leveraging it to create competitive advantage.

The empirical results reported in academic literature and statistical data from consumer surveys conducted by business consulting companies are contradictory. Although most researchers have found a positive relationship between CSR and consumer buying behavior [3–9], some studies reveal no significant impact of CSR on purchase decisions [10; 11]. Even in cases when a positive consumer response to CSR was reported, many consumers do not go beyond expressing purchase intentions, which may never be implemented because of the intention-behavior gap [12; 13]. Moreover, some studies point to a certain setback even at the level of consumer intentions over the past few years. According to the State of Grocery Retail 2025 Europe Report, “intention to buy environmentally friendly products is decreasing” [14]. Similarly, Statista data show that the number of people willing to pay more than a five percent price premium for sustainably manufactured goods declined significantly between 2020 and 2023 [15]. Thus, if products of a socially responsible company are more expensive, this may deter consumers from buying them.

Some researchers approach the relationship between CSR and consumer buying behavior from the opposite direction, examining whether the lack of CSR has a negative impact on consumers’ willingness to buy from a company [16; 17].

In addition, numerous studies reveal a myriad of factors that affect the relationship between CSR and consumer behavior, making it stronger or weaker. Such factors include, for example, consumer demographics [10, 13, 16, 18], company size [19; 20], industry bias [21; 22], and company location [23], among others.

The link between CSR and purchase behavior is not direct but rather involves a number of intermediate elements. Kraus et al. point out that research evalu-

ating the consumer purchase cycle at different stages remains limited [16]. A number of studies offer useful models showing the mechanisms of activation of consumer responses to CSR [16; 21; 24; 25]. However, those models tend to focus on the effect of only one or a few factors on consumer behavior, whereas a more comprehensive and integrative approach is needed.

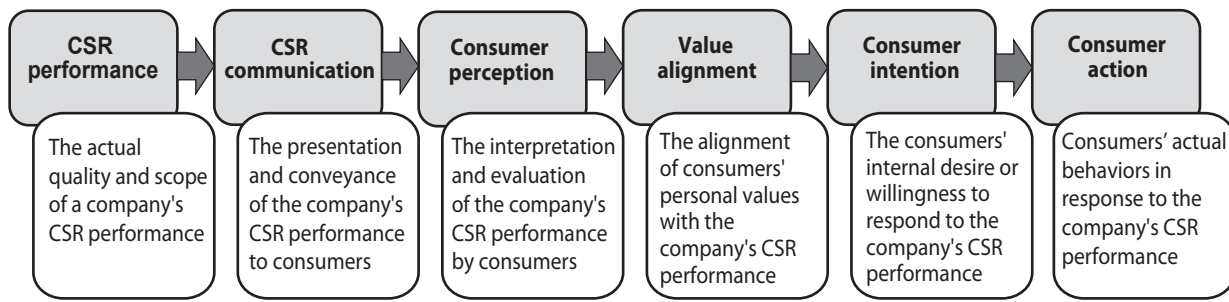
**The aims of this article** are to synthesize insights from different studies and develop a model that explains the mechanism linking a company’s CSR performance and consumer purchase behavior, to identify moderating variables affecting the CSR-consumer behavior relationship, and to relate them to specific elements within that mechanism. We argue that understanding how consumer response is generated, and what can potentially influence it, is more important than attempting to provide a definitive answer about whether CSR is positively related to consumers’ willingness to buy from a company, and how strong this relationship is.

Before we start, let us note that in reviewing the literature, we did not limit ourselves to studies that explicitly mention CSR. The evolution of CSR has brought about numerous related concepts, and for the purposes of our research, it did not make sense to draw a solid dividing line between CSR and ESG, CSR and sustainability, CSR and business ethics, and other similar concepts. It is the CSR spirit, rather than the letter (a particular term), that matters.

As mentioned above, the relationship between a company’s CSR performance and consumer purchase behavior is indirect and involves a number of elements or stages. This relationship is both mediated and moderated by various factors, each of which may influence the actual consumer response. Integrating the insights reported in the literature with our own ideas, we propose a model that outlines the mediating mechanism between a company’s actual CSR performance and consumer purchase behavior (*Fig. 1*). The mechanism includes several consecutive stages that lead to specific consumer responses to a company’s CSR performance. Below, we describe each of these stages in detail.

The first element in our model is the actual **CSR performance** of a company. CSR is an umbrella term implying a heterogeneity of interpretations and multiple dimensions. The understanding of what CSR encompasses is subject to change and institutionalization. It is shaped by international CSR standards, local legislation, societal norms and expectations within a given socio-economic environment. When deciding on the level of CSR engagement, companies take these factors into account.

When investigating the link between CSR and buying behavior, researchers may concentrate on spe-



**Fig. 1. Mechanism underlying the relationship between a company's CSR performance and consumer behavior**

cific dimensions, such as environmental responsibility, community involvement, philanthropy, employee well-being, fair employment in supply chains, cause-related marketing, and others. Some studies may focus on the manifestations of CSR related to product attributes, for instance, the production of sustainable products. Consequently, certain studies, addressing particular aspects of CSR, may examine their separate effects on consumer behavior. Other researchers may adopt a more holistic idea of CSR as part of a company's overall reputation.

The second element in the model is *CSR communication*. Information about CSR performance should be made available to consumers. It can, and should, be done through the company's owned media: CSR/sustainability/ESG reports or other forms of CSR disclosure, materials on the company's website (including blogs and case studies), press releases, news letters, official social media pages, and product labels.

Consumers may also learn about the company's CSR practices from external sources such as mass media, social media, CSR/ESG/sustainability ratings and rankings, and certifications issued by independent bodies. These external sources can reinforce a positive image that the company promotes through the owned media or they may undermine it. Surprisingly, in some cases, sustainability ratings based on professional evaluations may present a company in a more favorable light than the company presents itself [22]. Such discrepancies can result from ineffective CSR communications: from a lack of understanding of the target audiences or a failure to choose appropriate communication channels for different groups of stakeholders.

Most studies addressing CSR communications focus on those initiated by companies themselves. CSR disclosures are essential for building consumer awareness. Boccia and Sarnacchiaro [26] emphasize that although companies' CSR initiatives are important, they will have little impact on purchase behavior if consumers are unaware of them. Similarly, Spodarczyk shows that ineffective CSR communications result in a lack of

knowledge and awareness of CSR among consumers [11]. Several studies argue that companies should educate their consumers and raise consumer awareness of CSR-related issues [9; 27] to make CSR communications more meaningful for them.

Nugroho et al. suggest that organizations should prioritize effective communication of their performance to cultivate trust and enhance their reputation [9]. According to Pelozo et al., companies "that integrate sustainability into their culture and business practices are better able to integrate sustainability messaging into mainstream communications" [22]. Thus, when companies "walk their talk" they have a better chance of generating the desired consumer response.

In cases where CSR manifests through the sustainability of a company's products, a company should ensure that it provides clear and comprehensive information on product labels. Byrd and Su, who studied CSR-related consumer behavior in the apparel industry, have concluded that although consumers had a positive attitude towards sustainability in apparel and were willing to support sustainable brands, they lacked sufficient knowledge about the social and environmental practices of brands in the industry [5]. Additionally, consumers had limited understanding of sustainability labeling, which serves as a means of communicating CSR performance to consumers. The authors thus point out that brands should promote their sustainability practices not only through apparel labels but also via other communication channels.

Kankam-Kwarteng et al., in a study of the telecommunication industry, found that the relationship between CSR and consumer responses is moderated by marketing capabilities, including marketing communications, market sensing, and other related areas [7]. In our view, it is difficult to separate the effect of marketing capabilities per se on consumers' purchase intentions from their moderating effect on the relationship between CSR and consumer responses. That is, does a company attract customers due to its high-level marketing alone or because of its CSR per-

formance? However, even intuitively it seems logical that companies with strong marketing capabilities can effectively communicate both the advantages of their products and their CSR performance, targeting the right audiences through appropriate channels.

Shukla et al. point out that “effective communication of CSR practices is imperative for the firms... and reduces any misconception or ambiguity in the minds of customers related to their social involvement” [24]. This essentially leads us to the next element in the mechanism connecting CSR performance and consumer behavior, specifically *consumer perception*.

**B**ased on information communicated either through the company’s owned media or/and by third parties, consumers form certain perceptions about the company’s CSR performance. In consumer behavior, it is perception that matters, because consumers act based on what they think about a company, not on what the company actually is.

Du et al. describe CSR communication as a very delicate matter: “While stakeholders claim they want to know about the good deeds of the companies they interact with, they can easily become leery of extrinsic motives when companies promote their CSR efforts” [28]. Thus, when designing CSR communications discussed within the previous stage of this model, companies need to carefully consider how their messages may be interpreted by consumers.

Despite companies’ efforts to represent themselves in a favorable light, consumers may show doubt, if not outright distrust. A substantial body of research on CSR and consumer behavior explores the role of consumer skepticism [29]. Consumer skepticism is directly associated with the perception of CSR performance and has significant implications for consumer responses to CSR. If a company’s CSR disclosure, however comprehensive and well-crafted, is viewed as untrustworthy, it is unlikely to result in consumers’ willingness to purchase from the company.

Skarmeas and Leonidou, who studied cause-related marketing in retail, developed a model illustrating how consumers’ perceptions of a company’s underlying motives for engaging in CSR can lead to the buildup of consumer skepticism with negative implications for the company [30]. Specifically, the authors use the attribution model and consider four types of motives that consumers may attribute to a company’s actions in the CSR sphere: 1) egoistic, 2) strategic, 3) stakeholder-driven, and 4) moral values-driven. Surprisingly, the authors observed that stakeholder-driven motives do not lead to a positive consumer response. When a company is perceived as engaging in CSR merely because of stakeholder pressures and not out of genuine commitment, consumers may view

its actions as insincere. The authors show that egoistic and stakeholder-driven motives are positively associated with skepticism, while values-driven motives are negatively associated with it. Strategic motives neither reduce nor increase skepticism, which means that consumers exhibit tolerance of such motives. The authors conclude that skepticism decreases consumer-based retailer equity and adversely affects consumer resilience to negative information about the company and word-of-mouth, i.e. informal, interpersonal communications about the company.

Shukla et al., who chose as a starting point not the actual CSR performance but rather consumers’ perceptions of this performance, also demonstrated that consumers’ purchase decisions are influenced by the perceived motivations behind CSR [24]. The surveyed consumers positively reacted to strategic intent and moral motives, and did not consider legal compliance as genuine CSR. According to the same study, some consumers did not appreciate CSR at all, seeing it as a diversion of company resources.

Barkakati et al. reported certain skepticism among consumers of FMCG towards CSR, who attributed it to companies’ desire for public and media attention or to their compliance with the government regulations, rather than to true commitment [10].

**I**t should be mentioned that the differences in the results of studies on consumer perception of companies’ motives can be explained by the industry- and country-related factors as well as the type of CSR activities. Perceptions of whether companies are doing enough and doing it wholeheartedly can be moderated by social norms and expectations, which vary across societies, especially between developed and developing countries. For example, Priporas et al., who studied consumers’ perceptions of cause-related marketing (CRM) in Greece, revealed strong consumer skepticism toward CRM campaigns [23]. Often, it was rooted in distrust that a company would actually donate the promised percentage of its sales to the cause. The skepticism regarding CRM campaigns run by foreign companies, as compared to domestic ones, was even stronger. The authors attributed this to ethnocentrism and even an animosity toward foreign companies in the context of the economic crisis in the country. Their results also showed the influence of the political and legal environment on consumer skepticism toward CRM.

In the same vein, Nguyen et al., providing a comprehensive review of studies on consumer skepticism, indicate that skepticism can be country- and industry-specific, it may also manifest differently depending on the specific aspect of CSR, for example, skepticism toward CRM or green skepticism [31]. Pelosa et al. also point to the influence of industry or product

category on CSR perceptions [22]. In particular, the authors note that certain industries, such as the financial sector (after the crisis) or energy companies, may suffer from a negativity bias among stakeholders and be judged negatively despite their strong actual CSR performance. Other companies (e.g., IT-companies) may benefit from a positive halo associated with great promises of technological progress. Skepticism may also depend on demographics [32].

Understanding the reasons behind consumer skepticism is essential because behavioral responses of consumers to CSR strongly depend on the level of skepticism.

Kraus et al. indicate that both awareness and perception of CSR lead to “a consumer’s corporate evaluation, which forms their overall judgement of a business and informs levels of value and loyalty” [16]. These authors also consider consumer demographics as a variable affecting CSR awareness.

Consumers’ positive perception of a company’s performance can be moderated by variables such as corporate reputation [28; 31]. We would also add company reputation, brand attitude, brand trust, and brand loyalty to the list of moderating variables. A good corporate reputation, favorable brand attitude (high brand trust or brand loyalty) may lead consumers to focus more on positive CSR performances and downplay negative ones, or to grant the benefit of the doubt when unfavorable information comes from external sources. However, the same variables are often considered mediating variables [3; 4; 6; 33; 34], when explaining the link between CSR and consumer behavior. Indeed, if CSR performance leads to improvements in brand image and brand attitude, and enhances brand trust and loyalty, which in turn result in positive changes in buying behavior, then these variables act as mediators explaining the mechanism behind purchase intentions, which are stimulated by positive attitudes toward particular brands. Thus, these variables exhibit a dual nature – being both moderators and mediators.

Moderating variables can also be related to a company’s characteristics. Green and Peloza demonstrated that consumer trust and expectations regarding CSR engagement are affected by a company’s size [19]. Consumers tend to have both higher trust and lower expectations for CSR engagement in the case of small firms, compared to large ones. Consumers are even ready to accept socially irresponsible behavior from small firms, while being far less tolerant of such behavior exhibited by large ones.

Thus, industry bias, socio-economic context, the type of CSR initiatives, company size, company reputation, brand trust/attitude/loyalty, and consumer de-

mographics moderate the relationship between CSR and consumer purchase behavior and can be associated with the perception stage (or element) of our model. Understanding the perception stage in this mechanism can inform the choice of approaches to CSR communications. Companies should carefully choose how they communicate their CSR performance, ensuring that they convey the right signals about their motives and make their communications appear trustworthy in the eyes of consumers.

Even a positive perception of a company’s responsibility will not affect consumer behavior if consumers are indifferent to CSR- and sustainability-related issues. That is why it is important that consumers’ values are coherent with the principles of CSR and sustainability. Here we come to the next element of the model – *value alignment*. If the company’s behavior is consistent with consumers’ values, it may affect their buying intentions and ultimate purchase decisions. Han et al. proposed a mechanism of personal norm activation, which represents an interplay between problem awareness, appraisal of socially responsible behavior (attitude), the consumer’s feeling of responsibility for the consequences of their actions (ascribed responsibility) [21].

Spodarczyk draws attention to the fact that consumers want to see how they personally can benefit from the CSR actions of socially responsible companies. If there is no connection between CSR and “their needs, problems, and dreams”, they will not reward socially responsible companies by purchasing their products [11]. Wang indicates that alignment between consumers’ values and those of socially responsible companies leads to greater customer satisfaction, because it gives consumers the opportunity to satisfy their higher-level needs [4].

Lundblad and Davies show that sustainable fashion consumers, for example, may have different motivational patterns depending on the values that resonate with them [27]. They can be guided by altruistic (social justice), biospheric (environmental protection), or egoistic (a sense of accomplishment or feeling guilt-free) values.

Consumers may prioritize certain aspects of CSR over others. Boufounou et al. studied the effect of separate dimensions of ESG on consumer behavior in Greece and observed that governance indicators had no statistically significant impact on consumers’ choices, whereas social and environmental indicators had a moderate to high effect on their buying decisions [8]. The authors also showed that priorities differed between urban and suburban respondents: social indicators had a greater influence on urban residents, while environmental ones were emphasized more by the

suburban respondents. At the same time, women in the urban sample placed stronger emphasis on social indicators, which may be due to the fact that women experience more discrimination and injustice in their professional lives. The study also demonstrated that younger and more educated consumers scored higher on all indicators, which clearly shows the role of demographics in shaping consumer values.

The dependence of CSR awareness on gender and education was also noted by Panzone et al. [13]. Barkakati et al. found that respondents in the younger age group were more CSR-oriented than others, attributing it to their openness to new ideas and diverse information sources [10]. Similarly, Garai-Fodor and Popovics concluded that the CSR perception is related to age [18].

The authors of [35] also indicate that education affects CSR awareness, and that is why such awareness tends to be lower in developing countries “due to due to higher levels of illiteracy and lower exposure to global trends”. Their research showed that consumers in the developing country context placed less emphasis on environmental responsibility and more emphasis on CSR toward customers.

Han et al. studied how airline and restaurant customers evaluate the importance of environmentally friendly behavior and revealed a strong industry (or product type) bias [21]. According to their results, at a similar level of problem awareness, ascribed responsibility of airline customers is stronger than that of restaurant customers; the likelihood that environmental CSR will result in a positive attitude is higher for airline customers than for restaurant customers; and pro-environmental attitude more strongly activates the personal moral norm of airline customers than of restaurant customers.

Thus, different studies identified a number of moderating variables that can be related to this stage in our model and help explain the degree to which consumers’ personal values align with CSR. These variables include consumer demographics (age, gender, education, urban/rural location), socio-economic context, and industry bias.

**T**he next stage in our model is “consumer intention”. If a company’s behavior is aligned with consumer values, consumers may develop intentions to reward the company by buying its products. In this way, they will not only satisfy their needs related to the product characteristics and functionality, but also experience moral satisfaction, as mentioned above. Consumer satisfaction can be viewed as a mediating variable when we are talking about intentions, as consumers expect to derive satisfaction from buying products of socially responsible companies. Bou-

founou et al. found a positive correlation between all ESG indicators and consumer satisfaction [8]. In fact, they used consumer satisfaction as a proxy for positive behavioral responses to ESG, which was reflected in positive word-of-mouth and repurchase intention.

Intentions can include consumers’ readiness to pay more for the products of responsible companies and for sustainable products. Wang shows that if CSR is aligned with consumers’ values, they are willing to pay a price premium for products from socially responsible companies, as this brings them more satisfaction [4]. The readiness to pay a price premium can be moderated by company size and location. Rahman and Norman found that consumers demonstrate a more favorable attitude toward small local firms engaging in CSR activities and are willing to pay more for their products than for those of large, equally responsible firms [20].

**O**n the other hand, purchase intentions can be strongly moderated by price [16]. It is especially relevant when buying intentions are limited by low income. Saleem and Gopinath point out that in developing countries, consumers tend to prioritize low-priced products over buying from environmentally conscious companies [35]. Based on her pilot study results, Spodarczyk also shows that CSR is not a significant criterion in buying decisions. Consumers are more concerned with product price and quality, as well as their own budget constraints [11]. Similarly, the results reported in [10] demonstrate that consumers of FMCG in India do not regard CSR as an important criterion in purchase decisions as compared with product price and the convenience of buying. Even if consumers are socially conscious themselves, it does not necessarily make them socially responsible purchasers. According to the Statista data [15], the average percentage of consumers worldwide who were willing to pay a price premium up to five percent for sustainable products increased from 20 to 30% between 2020 and 2023, however the shares of those who were willing to pay a price premium from five to fifteen percent declined during the same period. The small shares of those who were willing to pay more than 15% remained the same. The implication for socially responsible companies is that they should avoid overpricing their products.

Schuitema and de Groot, based on the results of their experimental study on green consumerism, conclude that if there is a trade-off between egoistic motives (better need satisfaction, lower price, convenience) and higher moral standards, self-interest may prevail [36]. In the absence of such a trade-off, consumers may be more willing to demonstrate their support for responsible companies.

Marketing capabilities, as a moderating variable [7], can influence not only the effectiveness of CSR communication, as mentioned earlier, but also buying intentions and actual consumer behavior. Companies with stronger marketing capabilities are able to better understand their market and offer more attractive products at reasonable prices, reducing the chance of deterring consumers.

Consumers may not only reward companies, but also punish them for failing to meet expectations regarding CSR performance in areas such as environmental protection, respect for human rights and social justice, employment practices, supply chain sustainability, etc. Such deliberate buying or avoiding certain products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons is referred to as political consumerism.

Neilson showed that individuals who tend to punish negative corporate behaviors (boycotters) are different from those who prefer to reward positive behaviors (buycotters) [17]. Boycotters exhibit lower trust in institutions as compared to buycotters. Buycotters tend to be more altruistic and have more social connections. At the same time, both buycotters and boycotters demonstrate higher levels of association involvement than non-political consumers. Hence, individual social capital moderates the likelihood of choosing boycotting over boycotting in response to corporate ethical practices. There are also gender differences: women are more likely, according to the author [17], to engage in boycotting, however, no gender differences were observed in boycotting behavior. Thus, demographics, in particular gender, can be considered a moderating variable in the context of political consumerism.

In summary, at this stage, consumer buying intentions are moderated by a number of variables, such as consumer demographics, income (more generally, the income level within an economy), company size, company location, marketing capabilities, individual social capital, product price, and the convenience of buying. Although we did not discuss it earlier when describing the consumer intention stage, brand attitude and brand loyalty may also moderate consumers' willingness to buy.

The final element in the model is *actual consumer behavior*. Consumer intentions may remain intentions and never be implemented. One of the most common reasons for this is the intention – behavior gap. In the literature, similar phenomena are also termed as the attitude-behavior gap and the value-action gap.

According to the NilsenIQ survey [37], 77% of respondents reported being “likely to stop buying if brands found guilty of greenwashing” with 43% say-

ing they are very likely to do so. The question is how many of them will actually stop, especially if products of competing companies are more expensive, not readily available, and require extra effort to find them. According to Statista [38], more than 75% of consumers report including CSR-related issues, such as fair treatment of employees and low climate impact, in their purchase criteria. However, do they actually include them and how often?

De Sio et al. divide consumers into three clusters: coherent buyers (those who intend to buy green products and actually do), coherent non-buyers (those who neither intend nor buy), and non-buyers with favorable intentions (those who intend but do not buy) [39]. The latter cluster was 1,5 times larger than that of coherent buyers, showing that a large portion of intentions never translates into actual behavior.

Kraus et al. observe that consumers are often incapable of predicting their own behavior. As a result, when asked to verbalize their reactions, they may provide “misleading evidence” [16]. Based on an extensive literature review, the authors conclude that a solid evaluation of the attitude-behavior gap is needed because research in that area is still limited.

Janssen and Vanhamme contributed to the understanding of the so-called CSR–consumer paradox, which refers to the contradiction between the consumers' declared belief that buying socially responsible products is the right thing to do and the rather low sales of such products [40]. Using several psychology-related theoretical frameworks, the authors argue that a great deal of human behavior is triggered not by deliberate cognitive processing, but by elements that are “beyond the radar of conscious awareness”, i. e. the hidden part of the iceberg. These behaviors cannot be attributed to rational decision making, which is easier to affect through reason-based communications. The authors formulate a number of propositions regarding the factors influencing actual purchase behavior. Testing those propositions can help clarify under what circumstances consumers tend to overestimate the likelihood of their actual purchase behavior. They also suggest that communications and settings at the point of purchase may help bridge the gap between intentions and behavior.

Panzone et al., who studied sustainable consumer behavior when buying in a supermarket, point out the distinction between explicit and implicit attitudes. Explicit attitudes result from deliberate cognitive effort when people are directly asked about their values [13]. By contrast, implicit attitudes often manifest through automatic and habitual behaviors. At the same time, the authors conclude that the discrepancy between what people say and what they do is not necessarily due to a value-action gap. One possible reason is a

lack of understanding of what is sustainable and what is not. As a result, consumers may believe that they are behaving sustainably, in alignment with their values, when in fact they are not. This can be addressed by educating consumers about sustainability. Another reason may be the absence of relevant information at the point of decision making (e. g., in a store).

Carrington et al., who explored the intention – behavior gap, stress the role of marketing in bridging this gap by translating ethical intentions into action [12]. This can be achieved, in particular, through combining in-store and out-of-store visual media that remind consumers of their ethical purchase intentions, creating special physical settings at the point of purchase, providing in-store information, and so on. The unavailability of sustainable products or products from responsible companies at the point of purchase can also prevent intentions from being implemented.

Finally, the ability to pay a premium price strongly depends on the consumer’s financial capacity and, in particular, budget constraints at the moment of purchase.

Thus, tangible moderating variables at this stage include personal financial situation, product availability, and the convenience of purchase. Additionally, unconscious psychological factors and consumers’ tendency to overestimate their actual behavior should be taken into consideration.

In *Tbl. 1* we summarize the moderating variables that can affect the strength of the relationship between CSR and consumer behavior, showing their relevance to specific stages of the proposed model.

It can be seen that some moderating variables are related to several stages simultaneously. For example, consumer demographics can influence their perception of CSR performance, their values, and behavioral intention. Another example is the convenience of buying. When forming buying intentions, consumers may believe that it is relatively easy to purchase products from a socially responsible company. However, in reality, they might find it too difficult or inconvenient to actually acquire those products. Thus, the convenience of buying may affect both stages.

## CONCLUSIONS

Understanding consumer behavior in response to CSR performance is essential for developing effective and efficient CSR strategies that lead to economic benefits for socially responsible companies. In this article, by synthesizing insights from the extensive literature on the impact of CSR on consumer behavior, we show that this impact is indirect and requires consideration of a large number of factors. We propose a multi-stage model that explains the mechanism underlying consumers’ behavioral response to a company’s CSR performance. The stages in the model include: 1) the actual performance of a company in the CSR sphere; 2) the communication of this performance to consumers; 3) the perception of the company’s CSR performance by consumers; 4) the alignment of consumers’ values with what the company does; 5) the formation of consumers’ behavioral intention; and 6) actual consumer behavior.

In addition, the relationship between CSR and consumer behavior is moderated by a wide spectrum of heterogeneous variables, such as consumer de-

**Table 1**

**Moderating variables associated with specific stages in the model of the CSR-consumer behavior relationship**

Stage	Description	Moderating variables
CSR performance	What a company actually does in the CSR sphere	Legislation, international standards, societal expectations
CSR communication	How the company communicates its CSR performance	Marketing capabilities
Consumer perception	How consumers perceive the company’s CSR performance	Industry bias, socio-economic context, company size, type of CSR initiatives, company’s reputation, brand attitude, brand trust, consumer demographics
Value alignment	Whether what the company does is aligned with consumers’ personal values	Consumer demographics, socio-economic context, industry bias
Consumer intention	What consumers intend to do in response to the company’s CSR performance	Consumer demographics, consumer income, company size, company location, marketing capabilities, individual social capital, product price, convenience of buying, brand attitude, brand loyalty
Consumer action	What consumers actually undertake	Personal financial situation, product availability, convenience of buying

mographics, industry bias, company characteristics, socio-economic context, company reputation, brand trust, and others. We demonstrate that some of these variables, for example, brand trust, can also function as mediators, depending on the context and on whether their value changes as a result of CSR performance. We associate the moderating variables with different stages in our model, which provides deeper and more granular insight into the pathway between CSR and consumer behavior, allowing for more accurate prediction of the relationship between the two.

The model proposed in this article offers a comprehensive view of the complex, indirect relationship between CSR and consumer behavior by identifying intermediate stages. Each of these stages and the related phenomena occurring at them can be studied in greater depth in the future. Additionally, the list of moderating variables presented in this article is by no means exhaustive. It can be further expanded, and some variables can be broken down into more detailed sub-categories. Future studies may also focus on examining the effects of specific moderating variables or their combinations on the relationship between CSR and consumer behavior. ■

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