

Profiles of socially responsible consumers

Profils des consommateurs socialement responsables

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Abstract

This research aims to understand and highlight the distinctive characteristics of socially responsible consumers. Throughout this paper, we have outlined and examined the profile of this consumer by accessing it through various individual, cultural, and sociodemographic variables. The objective of this research is to establish a relationship between attitude and socially responsible purchasing behavior through intention and highlight determinants of this behavior, namely individual variables, variables related to the company, and sociodemographic variables. The results obtained from practical research conducted on this topic confirm this trend. Indeed, the socially responsible products sector (particularly organic and/or ecological products), despite its crisis, has experienced strong growth in terms of consumption, products launched in the market, revenue, and number of companies.

We have attempted to provide clear and direct clarifications to assist researchers and, of course, managers in focusing and orienting themselves more effectively.

Keywords: Socially responsible consumers; distinctive traits; individual variables; cultural variables; sociodemographic variables.

Résumé

Cette recherche vise à comprendre et mettre en évidence les caractéristiques distinctives des consommateurs socialement responsables. Tout au long de cet article, nous avons esquissé et examiné le profil de ce consommateur en y accédant à travers diverses variables individuelles, culturelles et sociodémographiques. L'objectif de cette recherche est d'établir une relation entre attitude et comportement d'achat socialement responsable à travers l'intention et de mettre en évidence les déterminants de ce comportement, à savoir les variables individuelles, les variables liées à l'entreprise et les variables sociodémographiques. Les résultats obtenus à partir des recherches pratiques menées sur ce sujet confirment cette tendance. En effet, le secteur des produits socialement responsables (notamment les produits biologiques et/ou écologiques), malgré sa crise, a connu une forte croissance en termes de consommation, de produits lancés sur le marché, de chiffre d'affaires et de nombre d'entreprises. Nous avons tenté d'apporter des précisions claires et directes pour aider les chercheurs et, bien entendu, les gestionnaires à se concentrer et à s'orienter plus efficacement.

Mots clés : consommateurs socialement responsables ; traits distinctifs ; variables individuelles ; variables culturelles ; variables sociodémographiques.

Introduction

Nowadays, the global economic situation is experiencing political and cultural conflicts that have become a common aberration, and as a result, the phenomenon of "responsibility" in consumer behavior regains its full meaning (Kang et al., 2023).

Thus, consumers are becoming more concerned with reducing their consumption volume and limiting unnecessary purchases (Lilleberg and Lehtimäki, 2023). This research is part of the socially responsible consumption framework, which is becoming one of the future challenges that attracts the interest of researchers and managers, aiming to cultivate consumers who engage in "responsible consumption" and, above all, "smart purchasing" (Le Gall, 2002; Rousseau, 2009; Rosa, 2023).

The results obtained from practical research conducted on this topic confirm this trend. Indeed, the socially responsible products sector (particularly organic and/or ecological products), despite its crisis, has experienced strong growth in terms of consumption, products launched in the market, revenue, and number of companies.

Several companies seize this opportunity to offer products, presented as socially responsible. These companies have made every effort to influence consumer purchasing behavior, as consumers are becoming increasingly sensitive to these products. Furthermore, every company strives to develop lasting and perpetual relationships with its consumers and build loyalty, which allows for increased profitability and subsequently, competitiveness (Babayev and Balajayeva, 2023; Masitenyane and Dhurup, 2023).

All these reflections will lead us to identify the following issue: How do perceptions of social responsibility influence the behavior of Tunisian consumers?

The objective of this research is to establish a relationship between attitude and socially responsible purchasing behavior through intention and highlight determinants of this behavior, namely individual variables, variables related to the company, and sociodemographic variables. This study presents a theoretical interest: It focuses on consumer purchasing behavior regarding socially responsible products. It relates intention and behavior, which addresses a relatively unexplored field of study, thus contributing to the existing body of research on the subject. Additionally, it offers operational significance. This work will assist passionate businesses in offering ethically compliant products by considering the link between intention and behavior, enabling them to act accordingly and influence behavior in a favorable direction. This article presents a literature review by analyzing the different research hypotheses.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Clarification of the concept of socially responsible consumption

The concept of socially responsible consumption was initially addressed by Webster in 1975, based on the theoretical foundations of Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968) regarding the social responsibility of individuals characterized by ethical and moral issues under the Social Responsibility Scale (SRS).

Furthermore, Webster (1975) defines the socially responsible consumer as "a person who takes into account the public consequences of their private consumption and tries to use their purchasing power to induce societal changes." This definition states that a consumer must consider the harmful impact of their consumption actions and use their purchasing power to influence society. However, Webster does not specify the desired impacts of these consumers (Lecompte and Florence, 2004).

Roberts (1995) emphasizes that the socially responsible consumer is someone who buys goods or services that they perceive as having a positive (or less negative) impact on the environment and uses their purchasing power to express social concerns. According to this approach, SRC can be considered as the opposite of the concept of corporate social responsibility (Arachchi and Samarasinghe, 2023; Zhang, 2023), meaning that the consumer avoids buying products from companies deemed irresponsible (Youn, 2022).

In fact, Lecompte and Prim-Allaz in 2009 reveal that "responsible buyers act beyond their own interests and take into account the impact of their consumption on the physical environment and/or different categories of people. This includes purchasing based on the level of corporate responsibility, as well as other engaged behaviors."

Toulouse (2009) highlights three categories of meanings of responsible consumption, namely:

- Responsible consumption as a liberating act is that of a consumer who controls and masters their own consumption, who sees themselves as autonomous. They use their own consumption to liberate themselves and have an ethical way of life. By using their personal ethics as a mode of identity production, they become subjects rather than objects.
- Responsible consumption as a political act: "consumption choices can be interpreted as a vote and would be related to the functioning of the city (rather than related to personal life, like the first group). The claim to belong to a group of consumers who advocate and influence society reinforces the political nature of responsible consumption."

- Responsible consumption as a moral act: "it essentially involves conforming to the alleged values conveyed by society (being supportive, being attentive to others, not causing harm) and to the messages associated with responsible consumption (the consumer can improve the daily lives of small producers in the South)."

1.2. The dimensions of socially responsible consumption

Several authors (D'Astous and Legendre, 2009; Ríos-Rodríguez et al., 2021) have focused on the dimensions of SRC to identify the measurement scale of this type of consumption and individuals' behavior towards it.

Indeed, Roberts (1995) highlights two dimensions, such as:

- *The environmental or ecological dimension:* it involves avoiding the acquisition of products that are disrespectful to the environment, for example, avoiding buying products with pesticides or insecticides that are no longer an ecological guarantee.
- *The societal dimension:* it involves avoiding the acquisition of products from companies deemed irresponsible, that is, companies that have a negative impact on human well-being.

Furthermore, Bonoli, (2023) and Chen et al. (2024) point out that SRC can be expressed through both avoidance behavior (refusing to buy environmentally hazardous products or products that are destructive to fauna and flora) and approach behavior (purchasing ethical products: biodegradable or recyclable).

Moreover, Toulouse (2009) generally identifies three categories of actions of responsible consumers based on three strategies with the market, namely:

- ❖ *The cohesion strategy:* this strategy allows for consumption while reducing its negative impacts on both the environment and society, for example, purchasing fair trade products, socially responsible investment and sustainable tourism.
- ❖ *The withdrawal strategy:* this strategy leads the responsible consumer to abolish a product or service that has a negative consequence (using communal laundries, cultivating one's own land).
- ❖ *The mobilization strategy:* this strategy states that the responsible consumer must conform to the entire consumerist system through external means such as claimed boycotts, petitions, and reclaiming advertising space.

Similarly, François-Lecompte and Valette-Florence (2006) emphasize that SRC can be summarized into five main facets, namely:

- The refusal to purchase from companies deemed irresponsible, whose behavior or practices are condemnable, such as environmental disregard, child exploitation, and worker layoffs. This factor refers to an individual boycott behavior.
- The intention to purchase shared products, which means a product where a portion of the price goes towards a social cause, such as supporting poor countries or humanitarian causes. This factor is also known as cause-related marketing. Shared products can be defined as "the result of the association between a company and an organization supporting a cause, products where a small portion of the profits is allocated to it, either directly or through the consumer who must return a coupon found on the product label" (Thiery, 1996). The most prominent example is the purchase of fair-trade products.
- The desire to help or support small businesses, specifically local traditional businesses, and avoid making purchases at large and powerful supermarkets.
- The preference for local products, meaning the geographical origin of the product, favoring locally manufactured products over foreign ones.
- Lastly, the final factor corresponds to reducing the volume of consumption. Socially responsible consumers avoid overconsumption and refrain from buying products that can be made at home.

Sfar (2006) cited in Bakini F et al. (2013a) states that responsible consumer behavior can take two fundamental forms, namely the act of purchasing and the gesture, based on the two factors of Roberts (1995), namely the social dimension and the environmental dimension. Indeed, Sfar (2006) has created a table summarizing responsible consumer behavior.

Tableau N°1: Classification of responsible behaviors

Type of behavior			
Dimensions	Social	Purchase	Gesture
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purchase of products with a social label. - Purchase of fair-trade products. - Purchase of shared products. - Purchase of local products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preference for ethical investments. - Support for humanitarian and charitable associations.
	Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purchase of recyclable and durable products. - Purchase of products with an eco-label. - Purchase of seasonal fruits and vegetables. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disposal of used batteries. - Reduction of personal energy consumption. - Sorting household waste. - Use of recyclable bags.

Source : Sfar (2006)

1.3. Antecedents of socially responsible consumption

In this regard, it is important to highlight the determinants of adopting socially responsible consumption:

1.3.1. SCR and individual variables

1.3.1.1. Individual commitment

Several researchers have focused on and tested the influence of SRC perceptions on consumer commitment (Vallejo et al., 2011; Arachchi and Samarasinghe, 2023; Toukabri, 2023). Therefore, we present the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Individual commitment has a positive influence on CSR.

1.3.1.2. Knowledge

The level of knowledge about SRC is a determining factor according to several researchers (Malcolm et al., 2023; Olanrewaju et al., 2023) who state that information is lacking. Some researchers believe that information on ethical consumption is insufficient, resulting in consumers not always behaving in a socially responsible manner (Légendre and D'Astous, 2009; Olson et al., 2016; Hiller and Goworek, 2023).

Kim and Kim (2023) as well as Chen et al. (2023) state that when information is lacking, it can harm CSR. Therefore, information represents a key factor in improving the awareness of this concept. Yue et al. (2020) emphasize that knowledge about the effects of consumer behavior is

essential for acting in a socially responsible or environmentally friendly manner and expressing environmental consciousness.

Shaw et al. (2005) identify that consumers need to be informed and aware of ethical and environmental issues. According to them, information contributes to strengthening and increasing the perceived ability to engage in responsible consumption and make socially responsible purchases. Uutisalo and Oksanen (2004) also argue that negative information has an effect on consumers' unfavorable attitudes.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Knowledge has a positive influence on CSR.

1.3.1.3. Perceived effectiveness of individual actions

In addition to the three fundamental justifications invoked by consumers and knowledge of SRC based on information, which is considered very important as identified above, the third explanatory variable or antecedent seems to be necessary for the adoption of SRC behavior. Indeed, Alsaad (2021) believes that individual ethical consumption behavior must make a real difference for the consumer to be convinced.

Meisel et al. (2023) argue that SRC is more plausible if consumers believe that individual efforts can make a difference. For example, consumers tend to boycott when they judge that their individual responsibilities will have a significant effect (Alyahya et al., 2023). In other words, consumers must believe in their perceived ability to make a difference in order to act in a socially responsible manner and become aware of ethical concerns (Sajjad et al., 2024).

This perspective refers to the concept of perceived consumer effectiveness, which has been defined by Kinnear et al. (1974) as the perception among consumers that their actions make a difference and can solve various ethical and environmental issues. According to De Pelsmacker et al. (2005), perceived effectiveness of individual actions is a key factor in practicing socially responsible consumption, and it is important to highlight two fundamental dimensions: resignation and personal efforts.

Individuals with high internal control are those who behave in a socially responsible manner by attributing their own actions paradoxically to others with high external control (Tucker et al., 1981).

Furthermore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived effectiveness has a positive influence on CSR.

1.3.2. CSR and cultural variables

1.3.2.1. Ethics

Chaddha and Agrawal (2023) emphasize that ethics can be defined as a set of moral principles and values. Similarly, Zghal and Ben Amara (2008) show that ethics can be translated as "moral systems relating to the intentions and rules of human action. It thus guides the conduct of individuals in society through certain fundamental values: loyalty, honesty, courage, diligence, justice, responsibility, and respect."

De Pelsmacker et al. (2005) defined ethical consumption as "the purchase of a product that promotes certain issues such as working conditions, human rights, animal welfare, and ecology".

Lecompte and Florence (2004) defined ethical consumption as consumption in accordance with the principles of a society and the implicit way of acting in what is recognized as good, based on the work of Smith in 1990. In the same logic, socially responsible consumption converges with ethical consumption by choosing products that have a positive impact on society.

Despite this similarity, the two concepts remain extremely nuanced because they do not refer to the same reality. For example, drinking alcohol and using condoms are acts with ethical implications that do not fall within the concept of SRC because they do not influence the well-being of society.

Furthermore, Crane (2001) highlights four levels of the ethical augmentation matrix, which are product, marketing, organization, and country of origin.

This approach means that ethics affects the consumer according to these four levels of augmentation. Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Ethics has a positive influence on CSR.

1.3.2.2. Religiosity

Religiosity "Religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols that facilitates proximity to the sacred or transcendent (God, a supreme power, reality, or ultimate truth), and understanding one's responsibility and relationship with others in community life..." (Koenig et al., 2000).

Religion significantly influences individuals' value system, habits, and attitudes. Similarly, it influences their lifestyle, which to some extent dictates consumption decisions and behaviors. Small (2023) argue that one function of religion is to provide meaning and purpose to what one

does. Although religion is considered a separate specialty in psychology, it remains largely untapped in marketing. The influence of religion on consumer behavior has been underexplored. The author focused specifically on the impact of religion on the role of husband and wife in consumption decisions, as well as the effect of religion on perceived risk when purchasing durable products (automobile and microwave oven). It should be noted that the religious orientation studied by Delener (1994), previously established by Allport and Ross (1967), can take three possible forms: intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and non-religious orientation.

More recently, Lindridge (2005) studied the influence of religion on culture and consumption by comparing Indians living in Great Britain with two other population groups: Asians and British. Note that religiosity was measured through two themes previously identified by Wilkes et al. (1986) as influencing consumer behavior; these are attendance at religious institutions and the importance of religion in daily life. Here, we note that most studies have examined religion from two distinct aspects: religious affiliation and intensity of religiosity.

Religiosity is defined as a religious disposition, whether or not associated with a particular religion; it is more a matter of sensitivity than faith. Lindridge's study (2005) revealed, among other things, that the divergence in religiosity between the two groups of Indians implies different societal and consumption behaviors, leading to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Religiosity has a positive influence on CSR.

1.3.3. The relationship between intention and responsible consumption behavior

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein, 1967) remains the reference in research on the attitude-intention link. This is also confirmed by the work of Ryan and Bonfield (1975). This theory consists of two phases: the first explains intention based on behavior, and the second equates intention with behavior, independently of the final link (Duong, 2023). In this sense, a series of studies have highlighted this relationship and substantiated it (Albrecht and Carpenter, 1976; Bentler and Speckart, 1979; Zuckerman and Reis, 1978; Taylor and Todd, 1995). All these studies have demonstrated that the consumer's attitude is not directly correlated with their behavior but rather with their intention, and have emphasized this link, assuming that intention is determined by a personal or attitudinal component and a social or normative component. This link has also been demonstrated in the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991; Ajzen and Madden, 1986) or in the theory of trying (Bagozzi, 1992). In the field of responsible consumption, the relationship between intention and socially responsible behavior remains underexplored. Thus, we postulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6: Intention has a positive influence on responsible consumption behavior.

1.3.4. Sociodemographic variables

The majority of previous studies that have been conducted and have focused on the sociodemographic characteristics of socially responsible consumers have mainly focused on individual variables.

Several previous studies have highlighted a positive relationship between gender and SRC behavior (Arnold et al., 2023; Malcolm et al., 2023).

Indeed, these authors have noticed that women are the most concerned about ethical, social, and environmental issues. Similarly, François-Lecompte and Valette-Florence (2006) state that gender plays a crucial role in better understanding socially responsible consumers.

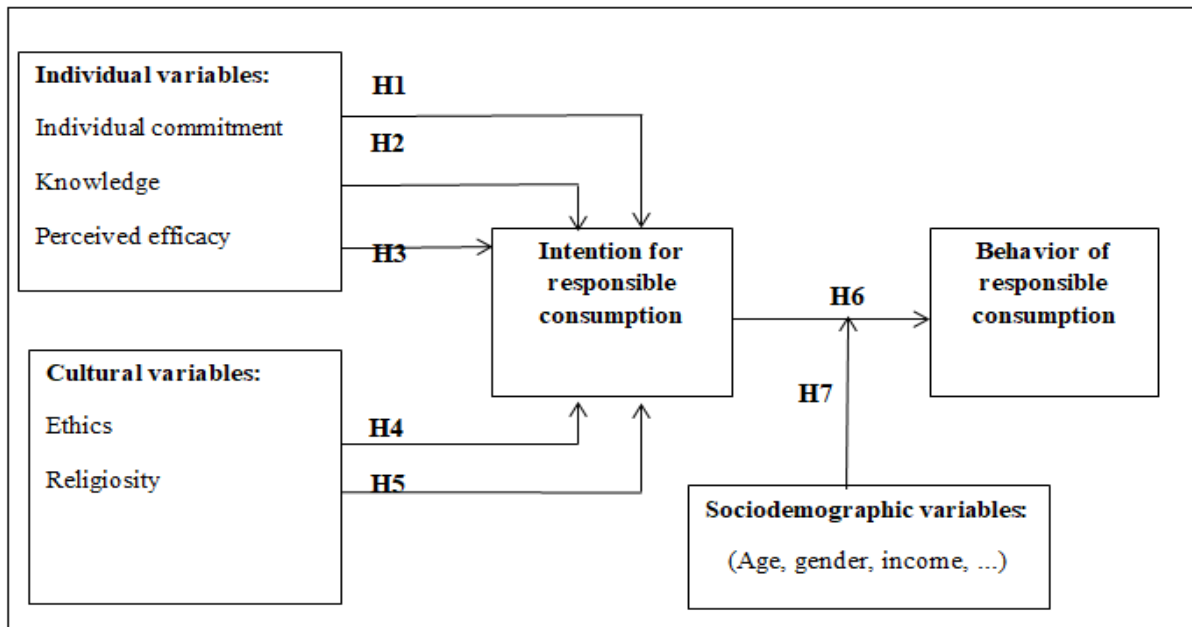
Previous research has shown a relationship between age and the adoption of socially responsible consumption (Vlastelica et al., 2023). Furthermore, Lecompte and Florence (2006) suggest that age plays a very important and determining role in CSR. In this sense, older individuals are more likely to consume in a socially responsible manner, particularly in terms of consumption volume, geographical origin of products, and support for small businesses, while younger individuals are more concerned with organizational behavior and product attributes, according to the measurement scale developed by Lecompte and Florence (2006).

The studies identified on the link between income and SRC indicate a positive impact of income level on SRC behavior (Webster, 1975), while they states the existence of a significant but negative relationship between income and SRC behavior. Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968) argue that there is a positive relationship between income and socially responsible consumption, meaning that higher income leads to a greater sense of social responsibility in individuals. Lecompte and Florence (2006) show that budget constraints are considered a barrier to responsible consumption.

Hypothesis 7: Sociodemographic variables have a positive influence on CSR.

Our research model is presented as follows:

Figure N°1: Research model of socially responsible consumption



Conclusion

Responsible consumption represents nowadays a response to irrational purchasing and one of the solutions to sustainable marketing problems. This study aims to provide solutions to improve consumption practices in general, and responsible consumption in particular.

Our literature review has allowed us to establish a model for evaluating socially responsible consumption, which makes it essential to validate our research model through an empirical study. In conclusion, our research has provided us with a variety of insights and has offered managers and researchers the opportunity to better understand this behavior. To ensure the survival and sustainability of an industrial company in the market, it is imperative to accelerate its digital transformation and cultivate the importance of responsible consumption among individuals. To succeed in this transformation, companies and individuals must understand its relevance within the industry 4.0.

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