

DEMOGRAPHICS-BASED DISSIMILARITIES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED CSR AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY: THE CASE OF PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS

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Abstract: The purpose of the current research is to investigate the demographics-based dissimilarities in the relationship between perceptual corporate social responsibility (CSR) and customer loyalty. The study is focused on the personal care products market, within the particular socio-cultural and economic framework of one of the largest countries of Central-Eastern Europe. In order to accomplish the research purpose, a total of 1462 urban Romanian users of personal care products were investigated by means of a paper-and-pencil questionnaire, which comprised a total of 34 items intended to reflect perceptual CSR (28 items) and customer loyalty (6 items). The results show that, in general, customer loyalty towards personal care brands/companies is positively and significantly influenced by how customers perceive their companies' social responsibility. However, certain perceptual CSR dimensions (such as those regarding the environment, public authorities, cultural sponsorship) have a significant effect on customer loyalty only among some demographics-based market segments. The implications of the current research are both theoretical and practical. From a theoretical perspective, the study brings new insights regarding the relationship between perceptual CSR and customer loyalty. From a practical standpoint, the results represent useful information for efficient market segmentation and dissemination of companies' CSR efforts.

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Keywords: perceptual CSR; customer loyalty; personal care products; demographics

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1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and customer loyalty represent important literature issues especially due to several advantages they can confer organizations in most industries. Thus, implementing appropriate CSR policies, as well as disseminating CSR efforts among various categories of publics have been proven to increase companies' attractiveness to potential employees, to enhance their employees' motivation and retention, to improve the satisfaction level of customers, or to generally enhance companies' relationships with their primary stakeholders (Kim & Park, 2011; Sen & Bhattacharya 2001; Peloza & Shang, 2011). Moreover, many relevant business benefits can be associated with customer loyalty, including business performance and long-term profitability (Reichheld, 2003; McMullan, 2005; Salegna & Goodwin, 2005).

Up to this day, several studies have focused on the topic of the relationship between consumer behavior and perceived CSR. However, researchers should further and deeper investigate how perceptions of CSR impact customer loyalty, as well as how this relationship varies across different demographic categories. Furthermore, the actual knowledge regarding the above-mentioned issues within the particular socio-cultural and economic context of Central-Eastern European countries is rather scarce.

The aim of the current research is to fill the above mentioned knowledge gap by investigating the demographics-based dissimilarities in the relationship between perceptual CSR and customer loyalty in a specific sectorial and geographical context. Thus, the paper is focused on the personal care products market, within the particular socio-cultural and economic framework of one of the largest countries of Central-Eastern Europe. In order to clearly delimit the sectorial focus of the study, the personal care products industry was defined as including all companies that make and commercialize products intended to satisfy consumers' needs of personal hygiene or beautification.

2. Literature review

Before approaching the issue of the relationship between perceived CSR and customer loyalty, the two concepts need to be briefly described, according to the most relevant conceptual frameworks developed in the literature.

Firstly, concerning the concept of CSR, it must be stated that a widely accepted definition does not exist yet in the literature (Dahlsrud, 2008). Nevertheless, the literature reveals at least three CSR systematization approaches: Carroll's approach, the UN's sustainable development approach and, respectively, the stakeholder-based approach. In Carroll's approach CSR is regarded as comprising "*the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time*" (Carroll, 1979, p.500). In the UN's sustainable development approach CSR is seen as a three-dimensional construct (social, economic, and ecological), representing the "*way through which a company achieves a balance of economic, environmental and social imperatives*", being "*a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders*" (UN, 2015). Finally, according to the stakeholder-based approach (Freeman et al, 2010) companies' social responsibilities

are clearly delimited considering the specific stakeholders they are focused on. Thus, companies have certain particular responsibilities towards each stakeholder category: shareholders, customers, employees, the environment, the society, etc. According to this approach the concept of perceptual CSR is very similar to that of corporate reputation, both of these constructs reflecting how a company's policies and actions with regard to economic, social, or environmental issues are perceived by its stakeholders (Radomir et al, 2014).

Secondly, in what concerns customer loyalty, the literature comprises several relatively similar approaches, the main differences among these regarding the exclusive nature of loyalty and, respectively, its behavioral or attitudinal character. Some popular definitions regard the concept as having an exclusive nature and behavioral character. Thus, the American Marketing Association (AMA) defines customer loyalty as *"the situation in which a consumer generally buys the same manufacturer-originated product or service repeatedly over time rather than buying from multiple suppliers within the category"* (AMA, 2015). Another AMA definition sees loyalty as *"the degree to which a consumer consistently purchases the same brand within a product class"* (AMA, 2015). David A. Aaker, one of the most relevant authors who have paid special attention to customer loyalty, also defines the concept from an exclusive and behavioral standpoint stating that it *"reflects how likely a customer will be to switch to another brand, especially when that brand makes a change in price, product features, its communication or distribution programs"* (Aaker, 1991, p.39). However, the most relevant and influential definition of customer loyalty comes from Jacoby & Chesnut (1978) who define it as *"the biased behavioral response expressed over time by some decision-making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of brands and is a function of psychological processes"* (Jacoby & Chesnut, 1978, p.80). In this approach, customer loyalty is seen as having a non-exclusive, and, respectively, a dual behavioral-attitudinal nature, the authors suggesting that observed behavior alone is not capable of fully explaining loyalty, repeat buying behavior being accompanied by psychological commitment.

After briefly describing the main concepts of the paper – CSR and customer loyalty – the issue of the relationship between the two concepts will be further on depicted, according to recent and relevant studies indexed in the most widespread and important literature databases: Web of Science and Scopus (Norris & Oppenheim, 2007).

In what concerns recent studies having focused on the relationship between perceived CSR and customer loyalty in the particular sector of personal care products, only two such papers could be identified in Web of Science and Scopus, both being geographically focused on South-East Asia (He & Lai, 2014; Suh & Yoo, 2014). These papers suggest a positive, significant, but indirect influence of certain dimensions of perceptual CSR on customer loyalty, mediated by variables such as brand image (He & Lai, 2014), or brand authenticity (Suh & Yoo, 2014). However, both studies have a limited approach regarding the measurement of perceived CSR and do not consider demographic-based dissimilarities in the investigated relationship.

Taking into consideration other industries related to the personal care products sector, and analyzing the contents of the same literature databases, three recent relevant studies can be outlined as focusing on the subject. Thus, a survey conducted by Singh et al (2012) among Spanish customers of several fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies suggests that there is a positive relationship

between perceived ethicality of a brand, on one hand, and brand trust and brand affect, while the latter ones are positively correlated with brand loyalty. Moreover, a survey conducted among Austrian customers of three different companies, including a FMCG one (Öberseder et al, 2014) reveals a positive influence of customers' perceptions of CSR on their purchase intention, both directly and indirectly, mediated by customer-company identification. Finally, a survey conducted among Slovenian customers of OTC medicine brands (Roblek & Bertonec, 2014) suggests that customers' perceptions of CSR have a positive influence on brand loyalty, both directly and indirectly, mediated by brand trust and customer satisfaction. However, even though some of the previously mentioned studies include an extended approach in what concerns the quantification of perceived CSR, none of them specifically address the demographic-based differences in the relationship between perceived CSR and customer loyalty.

3. Methodology

The purpose of the current research is to investigate the demographics-based dissimilarities in the relationship between perceptual corporate social responsibility (CSR) and customer loyalty. The study is focused on the personal care products market, within the particular socio-cultural and economic framework of one of the largest countries of Central-Eastern Europe. In the context of the current research, the personal care products industry was defined as including all companies that make and commercialize products intended to satisfy consumers' needs of personal hygiene or beautification.

In order to accomplish the research purpose, a total of 1462 urban Romanian users of personal care products were investigated between January-March 2015. The investigation was done by means of a paper-and-pencil self-administered questionnaire comprising an extensive set of items intended to measure CSR perceptions and customer loyalty.

A two-phase process was employed in order to establish the final item pool aimed at measuring perceived CSR and customer loyalty: in the first phase a preliminary item pool was created based on an extended literature review, while in the second phase the preliminary item pool was refined by removing ambiguous, redundant or customer imperceptible items, with the support of several marketing specialists (especially professors and Ph.D. students).

The final item pool included 34 items, 28 of these being targeted at evaluating customers' perceptions of CSR with regard to their current or most recent personal care products provider. The 28 items were based on previously developed and validated scales (Maignan, 2001; Öberseder et al, 2014; Pérez & Bosque, 2013; Salmones et al, 2005; Turker, 2009; Wagner et al, 2008), and regarded companies' responsibilities towards several important stakeholder categories: *shareholders* (2 items: maximizing profits and economic performance; long term economic success), *customers* (6 items: providing good quality products; pursuing customer satisfaction; providing honest and complete information; charging fair prices; providing safe products; managing customers' complaints), *employees* (6 items: fair remunerations; good working conditions; lack of discrimination; respecting employees; respecting employees' rights; offering professional development opportunities), *the environment* (4 items: minimizing specific negative effects; minimizing resource consumption; using

environmentally friendly materials; waste management and recycling), *community development* (7 items: positive contributions to local economic development, local quality of life, local employment, and other local companies' development; respecting local values/culture; social sponsorship; cultural sponsorship), and, respectively, *public authorities* (3 items: respecting legal norms; paying taxes; avoiding corruption).

The other 6 items included in the final item pool were targeted at assessing customer loyalty and were also based on previously developed and validated scales (Cronin et al, 2000; Martínez & Bosque, 2013; Rosenbaum, 2006; Sloot et al, 2005; Zeithaml et al, 1996). These latter items reflected respondents' intentions to remain customers of the current personal care products provider, to purchase more from the same company, to recommend it to friends and acquaintances, etc.

Procedurally, the subjects firstly had to name a specific company or brand from which they had recently acquired personal care products. Further on, they had to keep in mind that provider and to strictly refer to it when expressing their perceptions of CSR, rating the 28 dedicated items on a Likert scale ranging from 1="strongly disagree" to 7="strongly agree", with a middle neutral point. Finally, after assessing their provider's CSR, respondents were asked to refer to the items regarding their loyalty to that company, rating the 6 dedicated items on a similar Likert scale.

Non-probabilistic sampling procedures such as snowball sampling and quota sampling (by age and gender) were employed, a total of 1462 valid and completed questionnaires being collected. The demographic structure of the investigated sample can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample demographic composition

Gender		Age		Relative income	
Men	719	18-29 years	557	Lower	225
Women	743	30-44 years	518	Similar	879
Total	1462	45-56 years	387	Higher	358
		Total	1462	Total	1462
Education		Type of residence			
High-school or lower	739	Up to 50,000 inhabitants	501		
BA	443	50 - 200,000 inhabitants	462		
MA or higher	280	More than 200,000 inhabitants	499		
Total	1462	Total	1462		

4. Results

The actual analysis of the relationship between perceived CSR and customer loyalty was preceded by an exploratory factor analysis intended to reduce the large number of items to a lower number of reflective latent variables. The analysis resulted in a single latent variable for customer loyalty and six other latent variables corresponding to companies' social responsibilities towards shareholders (economic success), customers, employees, the environment, community development, and public authorities. However, even though theoretically both social and cultural sponsorship

were treated as companies' particular responsibilities towards community development, the factor analysis suggested that the two corresponding items should be separately included in two different latent variables (Table 2).

Table 2. Latent variables

Latent reflective variables*	No. of items	Variance explained
Economic success	2	6.42%
Customers	6	8.68%
Employees	6	14.33%
Environment	4	9.20%
Community development & social sponsorship	6	11.75%
Public authorities & cultural sponsorship	4	7.48%
Customer loyalty	6	12.23%

*Exploratory factor analysis; Varimax rotation; Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value (KMO=.934>.9); Bartlett's test of sphericity (Chi-square=33806.776; df=561; p<.001)

The relationship between perceptual CSR and customer loyalty was depicted using a multiple linear regression model (see Figure 1). Each perceptual CSR dimension was inserted in the model as a potential partial predictor of customer loyalty, all corresponding variables' values being computed as mean scores.

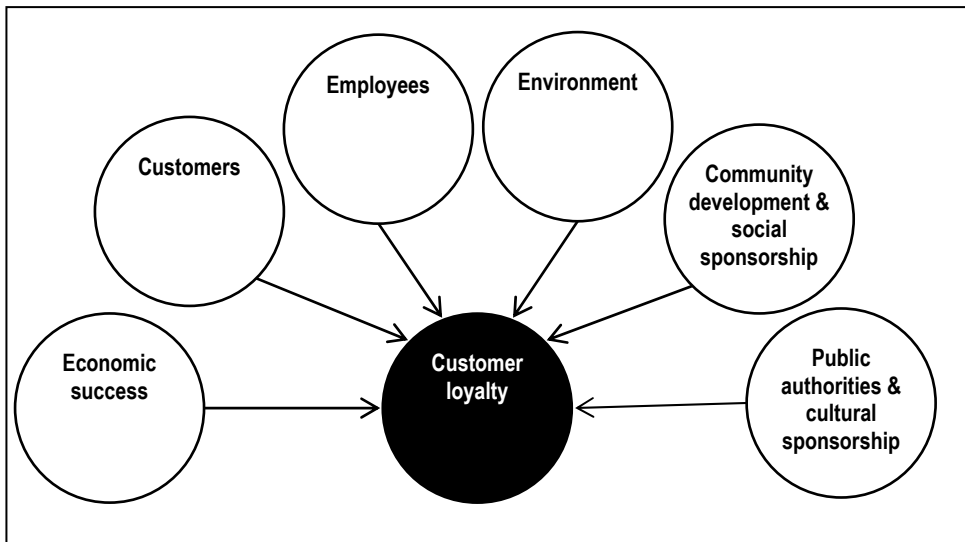


Figure 1. Proposed multiple linear regression model

The proposed model was comparatively tested within different demographics-based customer categories, considering gender, age, relative income, education, and, respectively, type of residence.

Table 3. Gender-based multiple linear regression standardized coefficients

	Men			Women		
	Beta	t	p	Beta	t	p
Economic success	-.031	-.89	.376	-.003	-.10	.919
Customers	.498	12.60	.000	.462	12.03	.000
Employees	.020	.49	.628	-.002	-.05	.960
The environment	.059	1.47	.142	.116	3.11	.002
Community dev. & social sponsorship	-.016	-.41	.683	-.018	-.47	.636
Public auth. & cultural sponsorship	.100	2.33	.020	.177	4.28	.000
	R ² =.325			R ² =.389		
	F(6,712)= 57.212			F(6,736)= 52.116		
	p<.001			p<.001		

As it can be seen in Table 3, the variance in customer loyalty accounted for by customers' perceptions of CSR is higher in the case of women (38.9%) as compared to the case of men (32.5%). These results suggest that the positive impact of perceived CSR, as a whole, on customer loyalty is higher in the case of female customers than in the case of male ones. Moreover, results indicate the fact that even though in both cases (males/females) the most influential CSR perception refers to how customers perceive companies' responsibility towards their customers (Beta=.498/.462), the perceived responsibility towards the environment has a positive and significant impact on loyalty only in the case of women (Beta=.116), while the influence of perceived responsibility towards public authorities and cultural sponsorship, even though significant in both cases, is higher in the case of female consumers (Beta=.177 versus Beta=.100).

Table 4. Age-based multiple linear regression standardized coefficients

	18-29 years			30-44 years			45-56 years		
	Beta	t	p	Beta	t	p	Beta	t	p
Economic success	-.055	-1.42	.154	.003	.07	.943	.011	.23	.815
Customers	.507	11.88	.000	.497	10.46	.000	.434	7.74	.000
Employees	.040	.89	.371	.001	.02	.985	-.043	-.77	.441
The environment	.119	2.76	.006	.063	1.41	.160	.075	1.29	.200
Community dev. & social sponsorship	-.036	-.80	.420	-.019	-.42	.673	.017	.30	.764
Public auth. & cultural sponsorship	.118	2.54	.011	.143	2.80	.005	.161	2.65	.008
	R ² =.385			R ² =.367			R ² =317		
	F(6,550)=57.287			F(6,511)=49.453			F(6,380)=29.391		
	p<.001			p<.001			p<.001		

Table 4 shows that the variance in customer loyalty accounted for by customers' perceptions of CSR is the highest in the case of the youngest consumers (38.5%) and lowest in the case of the oldest ones (31.7%). The results

suggest that the positive impact of perceived CSR, as a whole, on customer loyalty is higher in the case of younger consumers, and diminishes as age increases. Moreover, results indicate the fact that even though in all age categories the most influential CSR perception refers to how customers perceive companies' responsibility towards their customers (Beta=.507/.497/.434), the perceived responsibility towards the environment has a positive and significant impact on loyalty only in the case of the youngest (Beta=.119), while the influence of perceived responsibility towards public authorities and cultural sponsorship, even though significant in all cases, decreases as age rises (Beta=.118/.143/.161).

Table 5. Income-based multiple linear regression standardized coefficients

	Lower			Similar			Higher		
	Beta	t	p	Beta	t	p	Beta	t	p
Economic success	.105	1.71	.088	-.029	-.93	.352	-.074	-1.50	.134
Customers	.448	6.52	.000	.515	14.40	.000	.452	8.13	.000
Employees	.146	1.93	.055	-.008	-.24	.810	-.052	-.88	.380
The environment	-.012	-.16	.873	.097	2.78	.006	.105	1.93	.055
Community dev. & social sponsorship	-.056	-.79	.433	-.016	-.46	.649	.015	.26	.792
Public auth. & cultural sponsorship	.136	1.72	.088	.109	2.89	.004	.208	3.41	.001
	R ² =.402			R ² =.363			R ² =.348		
	F(6,218)=24.429			F(6,872)=82.741			F(6,351)=31.263		
	p<.001			p<.001			p<.001		

Results in Table 5 indicate that the variance in customer loyalty accounted for by customers' perceptions of CSR does not differ sharply among different income categories, despite an apparent diminishing as income gets higher (40.2%/ 36.3%/ 34.8%). Results show that in all income categories the most influential CSR dimension refers to companies' responsibility towards their customers (Beta=.448/.515/.452). However, the perceptual CSR aspects referring to the environment, public authorities and cultural sponsorship have a selective impact on customer loyalty. Thus, the perceived responsibility towards the environment has a positive and significant impact on loyalty only in the case of consumers with an average income (Beta=.097), while the influence of perceived responsibility towards public authorities and cultural sponsorship is only significant for consumers with average or higher incomes (Beta=.136/.109/.208).

Table 6. Education-based multiple linear regression standardized coefficients

	High-school			BA			MA, PhD		
	Beta	t	p	Beta	t	p	Beta	t	p
Economic success	-.017	-.50	.617	-.020	-.44	.659	-.022	-.39	.700
Customers	.505	13.38	.000	.464	8.97	.000	.473	7.39	.000
Employees	.017	.44	.658	.045	.90	.369	-.097	-1.40	.163
The environment	.077	2.00	.046	.060	1.23	.218	.177	2.72	.007

Community dev. & social sponsorship	-.041	-1.06	.290	.053	1.06	.288	-.060	-.93	.353
Public auth. & cultural sponsorship	.158	3.85	.000	.091	1.65	.100	.164	2.34	.020
	R ² =.376			R ² =.355			R ² =.339		
	F(6,732)=73.562			F(6,436)=40.029			F(6,273)=23.380		
	p<.001			p<.001			p<.001		

As it can be seen in Table 6, the variance in customer loyalty accounted for by customers' perceptions of CSR does not differ sharply among different education categories, even though there is an apparent decrease as education level gets higher (37.6%/35.5%/33.9%). Results indicate the fact that in all education categories the most influential CSR perception refers to how customers perceive companies' responsibility towards their customers (Beta=.505/.464/.473). However, the perceived responsibility towards the environment has a positive and significant impact only in the case of those highly educated (Beta=.177), while the influence of perceived responsibility towards public authorities and cultural sponsorship is only significant in the case of the less educated, and, respectively, the highly educated consumers.

Table 7. Residence-based multiple linear regression standardized coefficients

	Up to 50,000 inhabitants			50 - 200,000 inhabitants			More than 200,000 inhabitants		
	Beta	t	p	Beta	t	p	Beta	t	p
Economic success	-.021	-.54	.587	-.068	-1.59	.112	.015	.36	.721
Customers	.574	12.68	.000	.526	10.88	.000	.368	7.51	.000
Employees	.036	.76	.448	-.014	-.29	.771	.013	.25	.800
The environment	.050	1.08	.279	.066	1.36	.175	.123	2.61	.009
Community dev. & social sponsorship	-.007	-.15	.880	.028	.62	.538	-.057	-1.15	.251
Public auth. & cultural sponsorship	.096	1.93	.055	.146	2.91	.004	.173	3.23	.001
	R ² =.432			R ² =.373			R ² =.284		
	F(6,494)=62.746			F(6,455)=45.059			F(6,492)=32.479		
	p<.001			p<.001			p<.001		

Results in Table 7 show that the variance in customer loyalty accounted for by customers' perceptions of CSR decreases significantly as customers' cities of residence are larger (43.2%/37.3%/28.4%). Therefore, it can be stated that the positive impact of perceived CSR, as a whole, on customer loyalty is higher among consumers residing in smaller cities, and lower among those residing in larger ones. Moreover, results indicate the fact that the most influential CSR perception, in all residence categories, refers to companies' responsibility towards their customers (Beta=.574/.526/.368). However, the influence on customer loyalty is limited in the case of other CSR dimensions such as those referring to the environment, public authorities and cultural sponsorship. Consequently, the perceived responsibility towards the environment has a positive and significant impact on loyalty only among consumers residing in large cities (Beta=.119), while the influence of perceived responsibility towards public authorities and cultural sponsorship is not significant as a predictor of loyalty among consumers residing in smaller cities (Beta=.096/.146/.173).

Finally, all results suggest that, no matter what demographics-based category is taken into consideration, the loyalty towards personal care brands or companies is not significantly impacted by how customers perceive companies' responsibilities with regard to their economic success, employees, or community development and social sponsorship.

5. Conclusions, implications, limitations and future research opportunities

By investigating the demographics-based dissimilarities in the relationship between customers' perceptions of CSR and their loyalty towards personal care products brands/companies from one of the largest Central-Eastern European countries, the current paper manages to fill a relevant regional knowledge gap. Results indicate that, no matter what demographic category is taken into consideration, the loyalty towards personal care brands or companies is positively and significantly influenced by how customers perceive companies' responsibility towards their customers, this being the most influential CSR dimension. Moreover, in all demographic categories, customers' loyalty is not significantly influenced by how these perceive companies' responsibilities with regard to their economic success, employees, or community development and social sponsorship. However, perceived CSR in what concerns the environment or public authorities and cultural sponsorship has a significant effect on customer loyalty, this effect being different in various demographic categories.

Thus, the research suggests that the positive impact of perceived CSR, as a whole, on customer loyalty is higher in the case of women (as compared to men), in the case of younger consumers (diminishing as age increases), and among consumers residing in smaller cities (as compared to those residing in larger ones).

Moreover, the perceived responsibility towards the environment has a positive and significant impact only in some demographic categories: female consumers, younger consumers, consumers with an average income, highly educated consumers, or consumers residing in large cities.

Also, the positive influence of perceived responsibility towards public authorities and cultural sponsorship is significant only among consumers with average and high incomes, and not among those residing in smaller cities. Moreover, this positive influence is higher in the case of female consumers (as compared to men), and decreases sharply as age rises.

Practical implications of the findings can be emphasized, especially relevant in what concerns the appropriate focus and marketing communication of CSR. Thus, companies that have the same sectorial and geographical focus as the current research can improve the level of their customers' loyalty by selectively emphasizing their CSR efforts, focusing on their responsibility towards customers (concerned with customers' satisfaction and solving customers' complaints, providing high quality and safe products, providing honest and complete information about products, and charging fair and reasonable prices) in all demographics-based market segments. Moreover, CSR efforts related to public authorities, cultural sponsorship, or the environment should also be emphasized, with particular focus on those demographics-based market segments in which these have been proven influential with regard to customer loyalty.

Thus, according to the research results, companies should always and actively disseminate CSR actions/policies regarding their customers, among all market segments, and by all means available (CSR reports, CSR sections included in corporate websites, special advertising campaigns etc.). When addressing market segments which include mostly women, young consumers, people with an average income level, highly educated consumers and/or people residing in large cities, companies should also emphasize their CSR efforts concerning the environment (such as, for example, those regarding using environmentally friendly materials, reducing energy/resource consumption, recycling and others alike). On the other hand, if companies target market segments consisting mainly of consumers with a low income level and/or people residing in small cities, there is no need for underlining CSR efforts related to cultural sponsorship or public authorities (such as, for example, those regarding taxes or corruption in relation with public authorities).

The limitations of this research refer mainly to the fact that possible mediating factors of the relationship between customers' perceptions of CSR and customer loyalty were not taken into consideration. This limitation, however, represents an opportunity for an enhanced future research based on structural equation modeling. Thus, customer satisfaction, customer trust, or other variables with a potential mediating effect could be integrated into the relationship model, outlining possible indirect effects of perceptual CSR on customer loyalty.

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