

# The Impact of the Attitude towards CSR on the Intention of Buying Ecological Products

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**Abstract: Purpose:** This communication aims at explaining a relation of causality between the attitude towards the CSR and the intention of buying ecological products. An objective is to gain more insight on how consumer's think of the different forms of corporate social responsibility concept.

In addition, this paper provides an adjusted definition of the societal responsibility. Besides, we explained the concept of the consumer's attitude, while basing on several theories and especially the theory of planned behavior developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991.

**Methodology:** A survey conducted on 400 persons distributed over the different Lebanese regions and equally between males and females. We used the software «SmartPLS version 3» in order to apply the PLS-PM method «structural equation with slow variation».

**Findings:** The results show that the attitudes towards every level of CSR commitment affect significantly the intention of buying ecological products. The consumers were more affected by the companies fulfilling their environmental responsibility whereas they were negatively affected by the fulfillment of the economic responsibility.

**Research limitations:** The theory of planned behavior suggests that the intention is affected by 3 factors which are the attitudes, the subjective norms and the perceived control. This paper considers only the impact of the attitude on the intention of buying eco-product and ignores the other 2 factors. This issue constitutes a limitation in having a full explanation of the intention of buying eco-products regarding all the factors.

**Practical Implication:** This research presents a conceptually yet empirically supported framework to describe the attitude of consumers toward CSR and its impact on their purchase decisions. The study is particularly useful for companies aiming at using the CSR as a strategy to attract the consumers interested and concerned with social issues and causes.

**Originality:** This paper explained the concept of the consumer's attitude and its impact on the intention of social consumption, while basing on several theories and especially the theory of planned behavior developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991. This paper suggests a theoretical foundation on the use of the theory developed by Ajzen in order to explain the social consumption.

**Index Terms: Keywords:** CSR, Consumer, Attitudes, Intentions.

Revised Manuscript Received on December 22, 2018.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Explaining the consumer's behavior in all its angles is a very hard task to accomplish because of the plurality of factors that affect it and the several inherent components in the behavior. The theory of planned behavior developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991 uses the cognitive self-regulation to explain and predict the behavior. This theory helps to understand how to change consumer's behavior. Moreover, it helps to predict deliberate or planned behavior, since the consumer decides deliberately to buy ecological products on the base of his social commitment. The theory of planned behavior enabled us to clarify the commitment CSR as determinant of the consumer's attitude that in turn affects the intention of buying ecological products.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Consumer behavior is a complex and sophisticated process. It can be defined as the study of psychological, social and physical actions when an individual buys, uses and disposes of products, services, ideas and practices. Consumer behavior consists of consumer ideas, feelings, experiences and actions while considering environmental factors. It's still a dynamic process because of the continuous change of ideas (Peter, 2008).

To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to know what factors affect the consumer and how these factors affect his behaviors and his decisions. In the literature, these factors are grouped under 4 categories: cultural, social, personal and psychological factors (Philip Kotler, 2013). The purchase decision is the result of all these factors. Knowing these factors allows companies to develop strategies, convey messages to consumers and have efficient campaigns.

Understanding the consumer behavior does not end with an explanation of the above factors. It is necessary to exploit the concept of consumer attitudes and to link it with intention through a theoretical conceptualization. This paper uses the theory of planned behaviors in order to understand the consumer's behavior towards the ecological products.

According to this theory, the behaviors of individuals are driven by three considerations (Ajzen, 1991). **Behavioral attitudes:** Beliefs about the consequences of behavior and the evaluation of consequences lead to behavioral or non-behavioral attitudes. **Subjective norms:** Beliefs about the expectations and expectations of other specific social references with respect to behavior result in motivations to change or adapt the behavior in order to meet the



expectations of specific references. **Perceived control:** beliefs about obstacles and the elements that facilitate behavior, lead to an evaluation of the different obstacles. The combination of the three considerations leads to the formation of the behavioral intention that in turn leads to the action. As already mentioned, the subjective norms and the perceived controlled were ignored in this study; our aim was to find a relationship between the attitude toward the CSR and the intention to buy the eco-products independently of the other 2 factors.

#### A. The consumer's attitude:

Attitude is one of the essential factors that influence consumer's behavior. Generally, the way attitudes are constituted, is the result of previous experiences. People have got specific attitudes towards politic, fashion, religion and towards nearly all things; and so changing them is hard to achieve (Kotler, 2004).

The process of consumer's attitude begins before the act of buying, by identification of a need and the search for information. It's the phase where attitudes play an essential role in the choice of products or services. Attitudes are factors that allow predicting the behavior. In this way, attitude is the possession of a feeling of acceptance concerning a stimulus. Indeed, the stimuli are emotional feelings that people have on a phenomenon (Bahman Montazeri, 2013).

Fishben and Ajzen define attitude as « the predisposition already learned, so to answer constantly in a favorite way or not towards a situation or a given object » (Fishbein, 1975). This definition coincides with the one given by Bahman, and which considers that attitude is an emotional situation or a feeling towards an object. Attitudes lead individuals to behave in a consistent way towards similar objects.

According to Hawkins (Hawkins, 2001), attitude is « a lasting organization of motivational process over lasting and cognitive, while considering some aspects of our environment ». This definition means that the environmental stimuli, the presentation of products and the way to communicate them, develop the attitudes. Hawkins' definition is developed by Boone and Kurtz, who define attitude as « a lasting situation favorable or not favorable of evaluations, emotions or tendencies of actions towards an object. The lasting character of attitude is essential, because attitudes are applied, constantly or not, for specific times.

Attitudes are not directly observable, as being the results of psychological process and the deduction of what people say or do. Surveys conducted on the subject of attitudes and sent to people; release their states of mind (Asiegbu, 2012). By state of mind, we mean mental non observable attribute, but which can be identified through other external sources such as behavior.

Attitudes are shaped by our values and beliefs (Berkowitz, 2000). Values are shared beliefs or cultural standards about what is important or true. Values are transmitted to the individual through his immediate environment, such as family, religion, workplace, community and the other persons. Cultural values have an influence on the way the consumer sees and uses the product. They also have influence on the aims that the individual pursues. Given their importance, values are strongly used in advertising campaigns to affect the consumers (Asiegbu, 2012).

The belief is defined by Kotler (Kotler, 2004), as a

descriptive thought that « a person have towards something ». Marketing wise, this thing manifests a product or a service. Beliefs are based on personal experience, advertising and discussion with the others. Beliefs are important, because they provoke favorable or not favorable attitudes towards products that are what affects their decisions to purchase.

To conclude, attitude has three important characteristics: the subject of attitude, acquired ability and consistency. The subject of attitude consists of giving a position to the individual towards a product, a service, a price. The acquired ability towards a subject results from direct experience with a product or a service. Ability is a decisive factor of attitude towards an object. Concerning the consistency of attitudes, consumers' behavior must be substantial with attitudes. Yet, attitudes and behavior are not substantial, because of the fact of existing situations that have affected consumers during the behavior process (Asiegbu, 2012).

#### B. The Social consumption:

According to Webster, one of the first authors in this field, the socially responsible consumer is "a consumer who takes into accounts the public consequences of his private consumption and who tries to use his purchasing power to induce changes in society" (Webster, 1975).

The definition of Webster explains the same meaning as Robert stated in 1995, but it evokes it in a clearer and more precise way. Robert considers a socially responsible consumer when he "buys goods or services that he perceives to have a positive impact on his environment and uses his purchasing power to express his social concerns" (Roberts, 1995).

Important additions to this definition make it more general, socially responsible consumption will be "the purchase of products and services perceived as having a positive impact" or less bad "on the consumer's entourage" understood in a broad sense "and / or like using purchasing power to express social or environmental concerns " (François-Lecompte & Valette-Florence, 2004).

In this same perspective, Moher, Web and Harris defined in 2001 the socially responsible behavior of the consumer as being: "a consumer behavior that bases the acquisition, use and disposition of a product on a desire to minimize harmful and destructive effects and maximize long-term benefits for society" (Mohr, 2001).

In 2009, the previous definition is more developed to allow a broader definition of the concept. Socially responsible behavior is: "a behavior of a consumer who bases his decisions on desires to minimize or eliminate harmful effects and to maximize the beneficial impacts on society in one or more stages of the consumption process. This process includes information retrieval, acquisition, use, disposition and post-disposition" (Jung E. Ha-Brookshire, 2009).

Socially responsible consumption can still be defined by using a different conceptualization based on two opposing visions: utilitarian vision "personal interest" and "normative" ethical vision. In both cases, consumer behavior is motivated by personal interest and social interest. (Canel-Depitre, 2008)

In addition, some researchers have attempted to use Carroll's (1979) business model to define CSR on four levels:

economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. The economic responsibility of the consumer results in the purchase of goods and services satisfying the needs of the consumer at minimum costs. The legal responsibility of the consumer manifests itself when the consumer adheres to the legal framework to which it is presented and does not buy the products of the companies not in conformity with the law. As a result, the ethical responsibility of the consumer is when buying to consider the standards, values and standards of society and do what is fair, just and right. Finally, the philanthropic responsibility of the consumer is represented by his purchases and actions that help him become a good citizen (Canel-Depitre, 2008)

Socially responsible consumption also refers to the purchase of ecological, ethical, green products, etc. These terms refer to products, compared to products of the same type, as having lower environmental impacts. In fact, these products do not necessarily affect the environment in a way that is considered positive or negative (Khamsing, 2012)

### C. CSR Concept and definition:

Before developing our work, we will define corporate social responsibility through two levels. The first concerns the definition of the terms constituting this concept and the second concerns the definition of the concept.

Corporate Social Responsibility contains three terms, each with a definition in the literature. It is therefore necessary to state the definitions of these terms before defining the concept that joins them. The first term is "Responsibility", the term "responsibility" is derived from the Latin verb "respondere" which can be translated as "to act as guarantor" (CAPRON, 2007). It is currently defined as the "moral obligation or necessity, intellectual, to repair a fault, to fulfill a duty, a commitment" (Caroline, 2012). The term "Social" is known in English as "Corporate social responsibility - CSR" (CIDD, 2006). An essential element of this concept is the term "social" which can encompass two definitions: "Social": The responsibility of the company towards the human being in general and specifically the workers within the company. "Societal": The responsibility of the company towards the whole society which simultaneously encompasses the different economic, social and environmental aspects. It is better to talk about Corporate Societal Responsibility, which takes into account all the responsibilities of the company and not only the obligations towards its employees. The last term "corporate or enterprise" is defined as "the smallest combination of legal units that constitutes an organizational unit for the production of goods and services that enjoys a certain autonomy of decision-making, notably for the allocation of its current resources" (INSEE, 2015).

As for the concept, CSR is a very complex concept, given its different definitions and its explanations. That's what makes impossible to have mutual consent on its definition (Masaka, 2008). Its explanation varies through place and time (Mansour, 2010). The CSR may change from one company to another and from one person to another, because it is affected by cultural differences, the degree of economic development and the legal and political environment of the country where the company is located (Marquina, 2007).

Carroll, one of the founders of this concept, defines the CSR as « what the society expects from organizations in economic, legal, ethical and voluntary matters at a given time » (Carroll, 1979). In 2001, the European commission in its

green paper, defines the CSR as the voluntary integration by the companies, so that to improve society and make a cleaner environment through their commercial activities and their relations with their stakeholders (Commission européenne, 2001). This definition reveals the three-dimensional aspect of the CSR « social, environmental and economic ».

In 2006, the interdepartmental commission on sustainable development gives its own version and defines the CSR as « a process of improvement, in the frame of which, companies integrate voluntarily, systematically and coherently, considerations of social order, environmental and economic in their management in coordination with their stakeholders» (CIDD, 2006). Afterwards, the CSR is considered by the ICSD (Interdepartmental commission for sustainable development) as a long term improving process by the companies including responsible considerations in their management (CIDD, 2006).

As a vanguard organization in the field of the CSR, the European commission suggested in 2011 to redefine this concept where from the CSR will become: «the responsibility of companies towards the effects that it exert over the society». This definition supposes that the socially responsible companies respect the legislation in force and existing conventions between the different society players. According to this definition, the companies integrate social concerns, environmental, ethical, and human and consumers' rights in their daily activities and their basic strategies (COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE, 2011).

After these detailed explanations, we can propose our own version: « the CSR is the mandatory or voluntary answer of companies through their activities facing the pressures of all the stakeholders. This answer manifests itself on five levels: economic, legal, social, environmental and ethical ».

This definition means that *the economic responsibility* is *the obligation* for companies to maximize profits, therefore to increase the wealth of the owners. *The legal responsibility* is *the obligation* for companies to respect laws in all their operations and activities. *The social responsibility* is a *voluntary act* that consists for the companies to improve the quality of life of all society members including employees and their families, and to reduce harmful effects that these companies may exert on society through their activities. This responsibility includes the aspects of the companies' responsibility towards human being. *The environmental responsibility* lies on two levels: companies' responsibility towards the effects that they exert on environment; and their contribution to the challenges of sustainable development. *The environmental responsibility* can be either *compulsory* concerning prohibited or imposed practices by public authorities; or *voluntary* in case when practices prepared by the companies in the field of environmental responsibility, are not specified by legislation. *The ethical responsibility* is a *voluntary act* to obey to the moral rules according to appropriate behavior.

Finally, certain responsibilities considered as voluntary, may transform to compulsory, if companies find themselves in the obligation to fulfill them in order to keep their existences or their market shares facing pressures of stakeholders, more precisely coming from consumers.



#### D. Research Model:

The theory of planned behavior as already explained is a theory allowing the prediction of the behaviors of the human individual. Consumer behavior as one of the human behaviors can still be estimated in light of this theory. The theory suggests that the behavior of the human being, here of the consumer, is a complex phenomenon. According to this theory, the consumer's buying intention is affected by three factors: attitudes, subjective norms and perceived control. Attitudes in our model are represented by consumer attitudes towards different levels of CSR.

Applying the theory of planned behavioral suggests that attitudes toward socially responsible companies affect the consumer's intention to buy from their products that are considered ecological products. The impact of attitudes can be positive or negative with regard to ecological products. Many researchers have found that a large part of consumers prefer socially responsible products (Caroline, 2012). In committing in responsible activities, companies try to impress the consumers (Canel-Depitre, 2008). In this perspective, arises the following general hypothesis:

**H1:** The consumer's attitude towards the CSR commitment affects positively the intention of purchasing ecological products.

Positively means that an attitude towards the commitment provokes a positive intention to buy the product. The CSR commitment varies through the different sectors. For example, the industrial companies concentrate more in their social practices on environment, while other sectors are more interested in supporting social causes (Kavanagh, 2012). That's why; it seems more efficient to study the impact of every level of CSR on consumer's behavior. This approach is useful, because every level may affect the consumer's behavior in a different way. We keep in mind in our work, the five levels of CSR commitment as quoted in our definition of the CSR.

The first hypothesis is divided into five sub-hypothesis; each of them represents a level of the CSR commitment.

**H1-a:** The consumer's attitude towards the economic responsibility affects positively the intention of purchasing ecological products.

**H1-b:** The consumer's attitude towards the legal responsibility affects positively the intention of purchasing ecological products.

**H1-c:** The consumer's attitude towards the social responsibility affects positively the intention of purchasing ecological products.

**H1-d:** The consumer's attitude towards the ethical responsibility affects positively the intention of purchasing ecological products.

**H1-e:** The consumer's attitude towards the environmental responsibility affects positively the intention of purchasing ecological products.

### III. METHODOLOGY:

This document deals with causality relation between consumer's attitude towards every level of the CSR commitment and the intention of purchasing ecological products, where from we use the conclusive causal research. This is why we adopted a positivist research philosophy, with

a deduction approach. Our methodological choice was quantitative by using a survey as a strategy.

The survey was a questionnaire that is divided into two parts, the first part is constructed to measure the attitude of the consumers towards each level of corporate social responsibility "economic, legal, social, ethical and environmental" this why we have five sections, and the attitude toward each type of responsibility was measure by two items/questions. The second part was used to measure the intention to buy ecological products, 5 items were used in this regard.

The scale used is the Likert scale in which interviewees are invited to indicate their degrees of agreement or disagreement « 1: Totally Disagree until 5: Totally Agree ».

We made a test on the questionnaire « Pilot test », before sending it to the general sample of the study .The pretest is performed on 50 interviewees, so to make sure of the clearness of questions and statements. In addition, the pretest helped to verify the understanding of the questionnaire by the interviewees in its totality. Besides, we made the analysis of the internal coherence of the scale on the pretest's sample. For that purpose, we calculated the value of the indicator Chronbach Alpha = 0.785 > 0.65. This result allows the same conclusion: « There is a good coherence between the asked questions. So, we may admit the reliability of questionnaire in giving good results ».

The sample's size concerns 400 interviewees spread over Lebanese provinces proportionally to the number of inhabitants of these provinces. Likewise, it was equally distributed between the two genders, 50% of females and 50% of males. We attributed the collection work to a company specialized in this field in Lebanon. It's the most famous and the most widespread one in the country « Statistics Lebanon Ltd ».

As for data analysis, since we are dealing with qualitative questions and answers and because we're looking in this part for inferences, we used the software « SmartPLS Version 3 » in order to apply the PLS-PM method « structural equation with slow variation » (Ringle, 2015). In our choice of this software, we took into consideration the usability of its interface and the possibility of obtaining graphic representations of valued models.

This analysis requires two important steps. The first one is a verification of the analysis method, which allows choosing the appropriate type of analysis regarding the general characteristics of the sample. The second one consists in performing the analysis, so to identify the level of correlation between the model's variables to check the reliability and the validity of data. It also helps to find a complete model. As a test of our hypothesis, we use models of structural equations with slow variations. Finally, we validated the analysis made by Bootstrap. To proceed to this analysis, there are two methods: « LISREL and PLS-PM ». In order to verify which one is the appropriate method of analysis, we analyzed the normality of variables. Afterwards, we checked on unidimensional and reliability of blocs. The results showed the non-normality of variables along with the unidimensional and reliability of blocs, this why the PLS-Pm method was used.



IV. FINDINGS:

Our analysis begins by the determination of the correlation between the intention of buying ecological products and the different attitudes. The table below represents the correlations between various latent variables of the model:

Items	Intention of Buying Ecological Products
Attitude towards economic responsibility	0.526
Attitude towards legal responsibility	0.444
Attitude towards social responsibility	0.282
Attitude towards ethical responsibility	-0.484
Attitude towards environmental responsibility	0.442

We notice that most of latent variables are correlated between them in the threshold of 5%. «Most of presented results are above 0.3». We may say that correlation is significant between the intention of purchasing ecological products and the attitude of the consumer towards all levels of commitment, except in the case of social responsibility. Indeed, we notice that social responsibility is the variable which is the less correlated with the real intention of buying ecological products with  $r = 0.282$ .

Moreover, we observe a negative correlation between attitude towards economic responsibility and intention of purchasing ecological products. That’s what affects intention in a negative way. These results give more sense to the analysis made later by Bootstrap.

The modelling by structural equations allows us to set up causality equations that indicate causal relations between latent variables of the model. The results permit us to draw up structural equations of the initial model:

$$\text{Intention of purchasing eco product} = -0.373 \times \text{economic responsibility ecological products} + 0.244 \times \text{environmental responsibility} + 0.175 \times \text{legal responsibility} + 0.103 \times \text{social responsibility} + 0.238 \times \text{ethical responsibility}$$

These last are interpreted as coefficients of regression. The picture below indicates t values of Student and their increase in value, so to judge the significance of coefficients.

Items	Std. Dev.	T Statistics	P Values
Environmental responsibility→ intention of buying ecological products	0.061	3.987	0.000
Legal responsibility→ intention of buying ecological products	0.049	3.429	0.001
Social responsibility→ intention of buying ecological products	0.050	2.007	0.045
Economic responsibility→ intention of buying ecological products	0.190	2.000	0.046
Ethical responsibility→ intention of buying ecological products	0.038	6.507	0.000

As the previous table indicates, the significance of all

coefficients explaining the relation between various latent values is ensured. That’s what permits to hold back all latent variables.

The results show that the five levels affect the consumers’ attitudes. And in turn, the attitudes towards every commitment, affect the intention of purchasing ecological products in a significant way. In addition, we found that the attitude towards economic responsibility is the most significant but in a negative way. These results coincide with those presented in the table representative of correlations between the several latent variables of the model. Consequently, there is a negative correlation between the commitment in the economic level, and the intention of buying ecological products. Indeed, it’s possible that consumers have badly perceived the maximization of profits by companies.

Besides, variables that affect positively the intention are classified by their order of importance as: environmental responsibility comes at first, followed by ethical responsibility, then legal responsibility and finally social responsibility. Likewise, these results mesh with those presented in the table representative of correlations between the different variables of the model. Indeed, the highest correlation is between intention and environmental responsibility. The legal responsibility comes after with a small difference. Finally, we have the social responsibility which is less correlated with the intention.

V. CONCLUSION :

The previous analysis allows validating hypothesis linking up the Attitudes towards every commitment to the intention of purchasing ecological products.

Indeed, all levels of the CSR commitment affect the intention of buying ecological products. Concerning economic responsibility, it has got a significant impact on intention. But, this impact is negative as long as the CSR commitment is high. Thus, at the economic level, intention of buying ecological products decreases. In this respect, even though the companies try to make more benefits, they have to cover up those trials instead of presenting them at this level in order to avoid negative answers from the consumers.

The other commitment levels have a positive impact on the intention of buying ecological products. Companies must make efforts in this direction. That’s why, they’ve got to incorporate the different levels of the CSR commitment, to improve their reputation and affect positively the intention of purchasing ecological products. We should note that this impact varies from one commitment to another. Effectively, consumers are more affected by environmental responsibility, followed by ethical responsibility, legal responsibility and finally social responsibility. In this way, companies must put the environment at the top of their priorities in their commitment. Then, they have to work at ethical, legal and social level.



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