

# **The effectiveness of the Corporate Social Responsibility: Application on the role of perceived authenticity of biological products**

15<sup>th</sup> International Marketing Trends Conference 2016.

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## **The effectiveness of the Corporate Social Responsibility: Application on the role of perceived authenticity of biological products**

### **Abstract:**

This research attempts to identify the main factors of the effectiveness of corporate social responsibility based on perceived authenticity of biological products. A qualitative research was conducted because the lack of theoretical foundations in order to propose a conceptual model, that it was empirically tested by a quantitative survey. Using simple regression, the results validate the proposed model by showing the positive effect of perceived congruency on social responsibility image and purchase intention.

**Key words:** Biological products, Corporate Social Responsibility, Perceived authenticity, Image of socially responsible company, Purchase intention.

## **L'efficacité de la responsabilité sociale des entreprises: Application sur le rôle de l'authenticité perçue des produits biologiques**

### **Résumé :**

Cette recherche vise à identifier les principaux facteurs de l'efficacité de la responsabilité sociale des entreprises basées sur l'authenticité perçue des produits biologiques. Une recherche qualitative a été menée en raison de l'absence de fondements théoriques afin de proposer un modèle conceptuel, qu'il a été vérifié empiriquement par une enquête quantitative. En utilisant de la régression simple, les résultats valident le modèle proposé en montrant l'effet positif de la congruence perçue sur l'image de responsabilité sociale et l'intention d'achat.

**Mots clés:** produits biologiques, la responsabilité sociale, l'authenticité perçue, image de l'entreprise socialement responsable, l'intention d'achat.

## **Introduction:**

The notion of effectiveness has always posed problems for the marketing responsible. Today, the effectiveness of the social responsibility of the company has become a strategic issue for managers and an object of study for management and marketing research (Trinquecoste, 2008). It attracted the interest of companies, researchers and advertisers. Indeed, companies adopt more socially responsible behavior based on perceived authenticity of biological products (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). On the one hand, to meet demand responsible consumers seeking to adopt an ethical behavior regarding the concerns and impacts of their consumption on health and society (Dawkins, 2004) and on the other hand, to seek to embellish the perception of the company's image. According to Stobbelaar and al, (2006), the biological products are food substances produced without pesticides, artificial chemicals products and without genetic modification in their production. The biological products have unobservable characteristics by the consumer but they play an important role at the time of shopping. Thus, if the consumer decides to buy biological products this depends on several factors including the corporate social responsibility (CSR), health and environmental concerns and the authenticity and credibility perceived of the products.

From a theoretical point of view, several studies have shown that CSR improves the economic and financial performance of companies. Thus, some researchers have shown that CSR is a source of competitive advantage for companies (Hamzaoui and Zahaf, 2009). This belief is reinforced by recent work showing that CSR initiatives positively influence the attitudes and behavior of consumers, who have become now more sensitive to health and environmental concerns (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2007; Lacey and al, 2009).

In this work, the socially responsible increase in the commitments of companies lead us to look at the problem of measurement of the effect of CSR perceived on the consumers and justify our research proposal from the following problems: To what extent the CSR based on perceived authenticity of biological products is effective?

### **1. Corporate Social Responsibility :**

A voluntary approach of sustainable development involving stakeholders of the company can define CSR. The "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR) used by Howard Bowen was inspired by sustainable development. In fact this term is to manage the impact of business on society, including men and women make up this company as their environment. It is therefore an ideal tool to "the business contribution to sustainable development issues" (Molleda, 2010) including the economic goals, social and environmental. CSR is a voluntary approach, which means two things: the explicit will of the company to exceed the regulatory requirements. CSR includes actions that a company voluntarily performs in the environmental and social fields, as part of its trade relations with the stakeholders affected by its activities. It usually results in the drafting of a code of ethics and an action plan on environmental and social matters; but also, the company is free to set its own field of action, apart from new external constraints for example from the state (CSR does not incur legal liability). Also, CSR is characterized by a strong involvement of the company's stakeholders affected by its activities. Indeed, listening by the company in its environment determines its durability, its growth and legitimacy when it meets the expectations of society. This is called the perceived CSR, defined as "the set of activities and the company's obligations related to the perception of its obligations to the Company or its business stakeholders" (Liao and Ma, 2009). The literature on socially responsible consumption (N'Goala Cissé-Depardon, 2009; Dimitrova et Aron, 2014) as well as CSR perceived allowed us to highlight the key role played by consumers and to focus on their perceptions of the efforts made by companies to integrate social and environmental demands of context (Garriga and Mele, 2004).

Several studies of consumption were undertaken in North America and Europe in order to evaluate the consumer perceptions of biological food (Baker and Crosbie, 1993; Groff and al, 1993; Hutchins and Greenlagh, 1995; Thompson and Kidwell, 1998 O'Donovan and McCarthy, 2002; Wolf, 2002). Most of these studies allowed to conclude that consumers buy biological products because they consider that they are safer, healthier and more respectful of the environment than the conventional products.

Studies have indicated that health and hygiene of the products were the main attribute of quality which the consumers of biological products take into account. Concern for the environment was less important than the hygiene of the products and health concerns, which gives to understand that these consumers are likely to go private or personal benefits of the organic farming before its benefits for the company. Chen (2009) studied the attitude towards the biological products and examined the moderating role of the health lifestyle on the

relationship between the latent variables. Its results showed that health and environmental concerns are the main antecedents of attitude.

Tarkiainen and Sundqvist (2005) examined the subjective norms as a history of the attitude of Finns towards the biological products and showed that they indirectly influence the purchasing intention of the biological products through attitude. Tsakiridou and al. (2008) noted the effect of certain variables on attitudes, namely: the health and environmental concerns, the level of consciousness, the price, the availability, the quality and design of the biological products. They are added the contribution of the socio demographic variables in the explaining of the attitudes of consumer toward the biological products but in a limited way. Padel and Foster (2005) explored the gap between attitudes and the behavior of purchase of the biological products through a quantitative study. The results have revealed the correlation between the two constructs. Magistris and Gracia (2008) focused on the decision making process of biological products in the south Italy, they concluded that attitudes towards health and the environment are the main factors of the process of purchase decision. Several studies showed that a majority of consumers prefer the biological products and are interested in them (Wandel and Bugge, 1997; Brunso et al, 2002). The consumers have a positive image of the biological products because of their perceived value of health and the nutritional security (Beharrell and Macfie, 1991; Tregear et al 1994; Thompson and Kidwell, 1998; Gil and Sutherland, 2000). Moreover, Magnusson (2004) concluded that the beliefs related to the biological products are "more valuable" and "stronger".

**H1: The CSR has a positive impact on the environmental concern through biological products.**

**H2: The CSR has a positive impact on the health concern through biological products.**

## **2. The perceived authenticity of biological products:**

Authenticity is one of the fundamental concepts to explain consumer preferences in terms of food. When the consumer says "authentic product", he talks about real product (Camus, 2002; Grayson and Martinec, 2004), honest (Camus, 2002), Real (Bruner, 1994; Fine, 2003; Molleda, 2010), ethnic (Upton, 1996), credible (Bruner, 1994), sincere (Grayson and Martinec, 2004), ethical, natural and durable (Boyle, 2003, Liao and Ma, 2009). Some authors add product certification (Bruner, 1994). Since the symbols it represents, authenticity has become a selection criterion for which the consumer when purchasing decisions (Maille and Camus, 2006).

- **The perceived credibility towards biological products:**

De Jonge and al. (2007, p.730) define trust towards the food as "the extent to which consumers perceive that the food is generally safe and does not cause any harm to health or environment". Several factors can be at the origin of consumer confidence towards the modern food products, including the incorporation of ambiguous components in food products (Pichon, 2002). In their qualitative study, Yangui and El Aoud (2014) showed that the interviewees say they do not like the ingredients "doubtful" in the list of ingredients in these products. One of the interviewees explains why these ingredients do not inspire confidence to him. Thus, for him, the presence of these ingredients, of which in particular it quotes the additives dyes, is only one a reflection of the unauthenticity of the food, or of "something unnatural" as he says.

### **3. The consumer reactions:**

The CSR is a strategic management tool that allows an organization to create a competitive advantage of integrated marketing strategy. In the literature, there has been much discussion about how the CSR and in particular the authenticity of biological products can positively affect the social image of the company (Piric, 2008).

Organic products are essential to the survival of companies, for the maintenance of ethics image (and reputation) or to ensure their competitive advantage through CSR. The corporate communication, health and environmental concerns, authenticity perceived product (cause-related marketing) have the potential to make a significant contribution to the awareness and highlight a consistent and socially responsible image (Jahdi and Acikdilli, 2009).

It has been shown that the corporate credibility is a component of its image and reputation (Johnson and Wilson, 1993; Mason, 1993; Fombrun, 1996).

If the company is perceived as competent and trustworthy in its social commitment, it will be more credible from its socially responsible (Kim and al., 2011). This company should generate more perception of social responsibility in the public (Kim et al., 2007). In other words, credibility should increase the persuasive power of the undertaking (Newell and Goldsmith, 2001) and minimize the risk that consumers evaluate the company's image on the basis of arguments other than those issued by the company itself (Bigné-Alcaniz, 2010). Hence the following hypothesis:

**H3: The perceived credibility positively influences the image of socially responsible company's.**

Moreover, the perceived credibility of the company has a positive effect on purchase intentions (Winters, 1988; Lafferty and Goldsmith, 1999; Davis, 1994; Fombrun, 1996; Goldsmith et al. 2000). Davis and al (1995) showed that the overwhelming majority of consumers said their purchasing decisions products are more or less influenced in part by the perception of "good citizenship" of the company. Based on the model of the attitude towards the ad (Aad), several studies have found that the credibility of the company has a direct effect on consumer purchase intention (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2004). Kim and Chung (2011) examined the effect of consumer values (consciousness of health and the environment), previous experiments on purchase intention of the biological products and the moderating effect of behavioral control perceived on the relation between the attitude and purchasing intention. Their result shows that the conscience of the environment positively affects the attitude towards the biological products. The past experiences are also predictors of the purchasing intention; perceived behavioral control moderates the relation between the attitude and the intention to purchase. These findings reported improvement on the theory of the planned behavior. Then we issue the following hypothesis:

**H4: The perceived credibility of company positively influences the purchase intention.**

**4. An exploratory qualitative research:**

The choice of a qualitative methodology for this research is performed by the lack of theoretical foundations to meet the problem posed. Qualitative interviews were conducted with people likely to buy or consume a food product. These people are more involved in the subject of food consumption and can therefore be more "information rich" (Devers and Frankel, 2000). Data collection took place parallel to the interpretation of the data collected to monitor the achievement of semantic saturation. Furthermore, respecting the principle of diversity of qualitative sample (Giannelloni and Vernet, 2001), we made sure to diversify the sample selected by age, gender, socio-professional category. We conducted thematic content analysis. Thus, we conducted 15 interviews whose characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Characteristics of the qualitative sample**

Criteria		Number of interviewees
Gender	Men	8
	Women	7
Age	Less than 30	5
	30-45	7
	46 and more	3

### **Interview guides:**

We have grouped the questions into two main themes. The list of topics is as follows:

#### **Theme 1:** Corporate Social Responsibility and biological products.

- Definition of CSR (to clear a definition of CSR from a practical point of view and ask if possible examples).
- Is CSR occupies an important place in the current marketing strategies?
- The use of organic products in the context of CSR.

#### **Theme 2:** The effectiveness of Corporate Social Responsibility.

- Perceived credibility of the company.
- Concern the interests of the environment.
- Concern the interests of the health.
- Perceived authenticity of the biological products.

### **Discussion of results:**

As we have seen, we have preferred to start our discussion by defining and perception of the consumer on the place which the CSR from a practical point of view.

#### **Corporate Social Responsibility and biological products:**

This step allowed us to identify some examples of socially responsible companies and to better understand the place of the use of biological products in the context of CSR. In what follows, we will proceed with the analysis and discussion of the results.

*« CSR is related to the conduct of the company which is sensitive to the environment and society without forgetting to be profitable. Example: TOTAL» (Interviewee 3).*

*« Socially responsible companies must respect the environment and the health of consumers in food production and more specifically by offering biological products ».*



(Interviewee 7).

These results point in the same direction of the findings of several researchers such as Corsi and Novelli (2003); Govindasamy and Italia, (1999) "environmentally friendly in food production," as for non-food products (Vlosky et al., 1999; Laroche et al, 2001) and specifically for biological products (Krystallis and Chryssohoidis, 2005).

*The effectiveness of the Corporate Social Responsibility:*

Several factors may be responsible for the effectiveness of the social responsibility of the company through organic products. In this context, the interviewees say that they have confidence in the products of companies that are socially responsible. The authenticity perceived product is one of the fundamental concepts to explain consumer preferences in terms of organic products. When the consumer says "authenticity product", he speaks of true sincere and credible product.

*« CSR knows really the ingredients in it and it is natural and sustainable » (Interviewee 2).*

*« What is natural, is authentic the food is generally safe and does not cause any harm to health or the environment » (Interviewee 11).*

**P1: The CSR positively influences the authenticity perceived of products.**

**P2: The authenticity perceived of products positively influences the credibility perceived of companies.**

Health and environmental concerns are important motivations for the purchase and consumption of biological products. Consumers buy organic products because they inspire the trust and perceive as healthy products.

*« Health concerns of company's results in the production of biological products are healthier and more nutritious than conventional products » (Interviewee 5).*

*«Authentic and biological products are credible because they take into account the preservation of the environment » (Interviewee 14).*

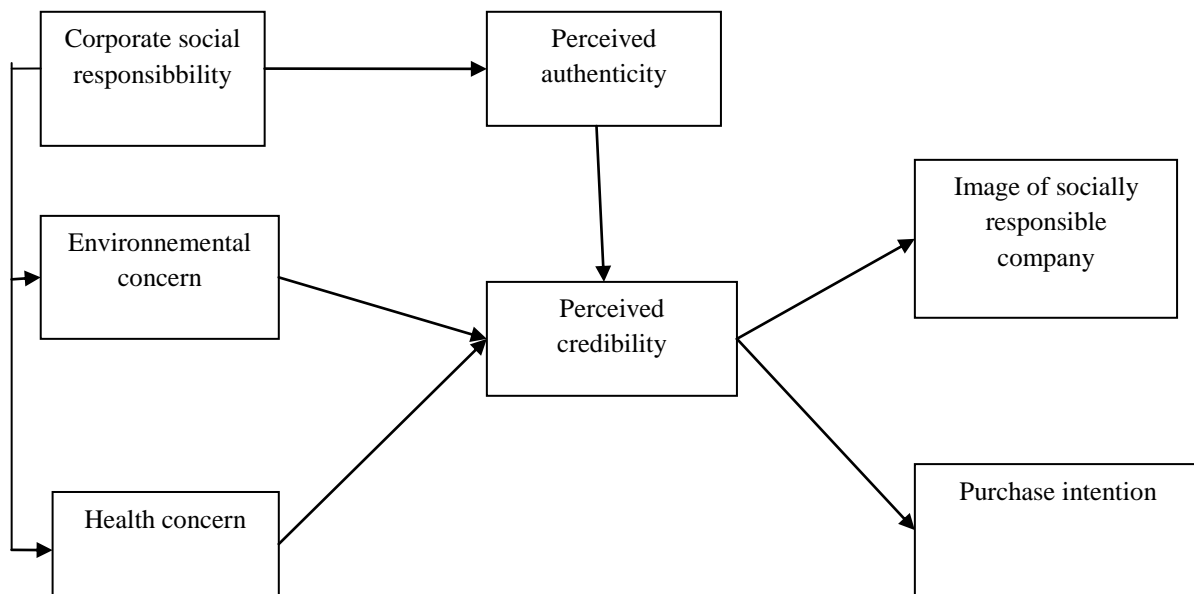
**P3: Heath concern positively influences the credibility perceived of companies.**

**P4: Environmental concern positively influences the credibility perceived of**

**companies.**

The different relationships that have been identified can be summarized in the following model (Figure 1) we will try to test.

**Fig. 1: Conceptual Model**



## **5. Method:**

### **Measures:**

All the measurement scales were adopted from the literature. They are of Likert type at 7 points active of at all of agreement to completely of agreement. To measure the CSR perceived, we use the work of Duygu (2009). The variable environmental concern developed by Shepherd, Douglas et Shanley (2000) was measured with a scale with 8 items. The variable health concern developed by Cheung (2005) was measured with a scale with 10 items.

Items for the perceived authenticity of products (10 items) were taken from Camus (2004). Perceived credibility was measured by scale using (8 items) and developed by Newell et Goldsmith (2001). The measuring scale of the image of socially responsible company

consists of 6 items measured by Menon and Kahn (2003), Dean (2002) and Lichtenstein and al. (2004). The scale is reliable and valid and whose Cronbach alpha is equal to 0,910. To measure purchase intention, we selected the scale of Ahmat and Nurita (2010). It is composed of 8 items to anticipate the future behavior of the respondent.

### **Sample and data collection:**

In order to better carry out this study, we conducted a survey of respondents who have previous experience of buying biological products. The sample was made up of 300 respondents who either were directly interviewed face to face. To ensure the good comprehension of the questions by the respondents, a pre-test was made near 30 customers (10% of the sample). The questionnaire was presented in French.

### **Analysis method:**

Exploratory factor analyses were used to assess the properties of the measurement model using SPSS 18.

In order to measure the construct reliability scales, Cronbach alpha scores were used to purify the measurements. This indicator confirms the internal coherence items for any scale. Also, using the Principal Component Analyses (PCA) allows the researcher to examine the properties of the seven measuring instruments, and to reduce the number of items.

## **6. Results:**

### **Respondent Demographic Characteristics:**

Approximately 39% of respondents were male (117), and 61% were female (183). The majority of respondents were of the age above 44 years old (51, 5%), 21, 5% were between 25–44 years old and 27% were under 25 years. The majority of respondents were executives (55, 5%), 38% were student and 6, 5% were employee.

### **Reliability tests:**

The dimensionality of the seven variables was examined using exploratory factor analysis via SPSS 18. Most reliability of scales were ranged from 0,751 to 0,975, which we can accept these values. All variables are unidimensional and explain more than 50% of variance extracted. In this analysis, items were removed whose communality were insufficient ( $<0.5$ ). The Cronbachs' alpha of each variable was greater than 0,7. All these measures are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: Structure and reliability of the scales of measurement**

Scales of measurements	Factorial structure	Explained variance	Reliability	KMO Test
Corporate social responsibility	Unidimensional	90,002	0,975	0,755
Purchase intent	Unidimensional	89,382	0,926	0,769
Health concerns	Unidimensional	74,521	0,751	0,765
Environmental concerns	Unidimensional	84,423	0,801	0,758
Perceived authenticity	Unidimensional	82,007	0,773	0,880
Image of socially responsible company	Unidimensional	78,159	0,831	0,753
Perceived credibility	Unidimensional	82,188	0,908	0,759

**Hypothesis testing:**

In order to test the hypotheses, we used simple regression. The fact that all the coefficients are statistically significant allows concluding that the hypotheses and propositions are validated. The results of verification of the links between the variables are presented as follows:

**Table 3: Results of verification of the hypothesis and propositions**

Hyp / Pro	Relation	Student's T	$\beta$	P	Results
H1	CSR $\longrightarrow$ environmental concerns	3, 196	0,211	0,000	Checked
H2	CSR $\longrightarrow$ health concern	2, 486	0,421	0,000	Checked
H3	Credibility $\longrightarrow$ image	4, 555	0,315	0,000	Checked
H4	Credibility $\longrightarrow$ purchase intention	2, 496	0,381	0,000	Checked
P1	CSR $\longrightarrow$ authenticity	3, 177	0,301	0,000	Checked
P2	Authenticity $\longrightarrow$ credibility	4, 006	0,281	0,000	Checked
P3	Health concern $\longrightarrow$ credibility	2, 498	0,419	0,000	Checked
P4	Environmental $\longrightarrow$ concern credibility	2, 158	0,281	0,000	Checked

**Discussion and Conclusion:**

The main objective of this research was to identify the key determinants of the effectiveness of corporate social responsibility based on perceived authenticity of biological products. A model was proposed, combining the results of a qualitative study and a review of the literature on this topic. In this model, our interest was focused on the perceived authenticity and credibility of food that appears as an indirect determinant on purchase intent and image of socially responsible company. From a theoretical point of view, our research consisted of testing in the same time the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility and biological products but also examines the determinants of the effectiveness of Corporate Social Responsibility. In fact, buying depends on the purchasing intention which is a predisposition to purchase. The purchasing intention depends then of the effectiveness of the Corporate Social Responsibility. In our case, Having as basis the theory of reasoned action, consumer buying intention is now influenced by perceived authenticity and credibility.

From a managerial point of view, this research provides to the managers relevant criteria which can use to choose the right social cause to support, depending on the degree of consumer perception of the credibility of the company.

Currently, we can say that the results from this research can be useful for consumers of organic products by plotting their way towards minimizing the feeling of anxiety and the need for reinsurance to their products. Thus, an enhancement of the authenticity of the offered products can help consumer to regain confidence and reduce the risk that it is associate to these products. This can be reassuring to some categories of foodstuffs.

This research certainly admits limitations. Indeed, theoretically, other concepts are relevant in explaining the process of CSR based on perceived authenticity of biological products, have not been taken into account. Furthermore, the interesting socio demographic variables such as educational level and gender can be integrated into the research model as moderating variables. This study was only the first attempt to understand how the need for reinsurance arises from a perceived inauthenticity of modern food products. Subsequent efforts can focus on the study of the influence of other variables on the appearance of this need, we can mention the traceability of products and the perceived attitude towards food processing. Finally, some variables may be subject to further investigation on this topic, such as family life cycle, the number of children in the family, risk aversion, etc...

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