



EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) AND THE EFFECT ON MOROCCAN CONSUMER PERCEPTION IN THE AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY: ANALYSIS OF PERCEIVED QUALITY, SATISFACTION, LOYALTY AND PURCHASE INTENTION

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Abstract: *This research consolidates the existing literature suggesting that a company's ethical behavior can have a positive effect on consumers' perception regarding the company (Kraus et al., 2022). This qualitative study, based on a comprehensive approach, conduct an initial exploratory investigation to identify the effect of the societal responsibility on the perception of Moroccan consumers regarding the agri-food products. The main aim is to generate insights that can serve as a foundation for developing theory-based hypotheses for subsequent quantitative research. The study, conducted via 35 semi-structured interviews, has revealed five key areas: (1) A hierarchy of consumers' expectations of the CSR pillars according to the PERVAL scale developed by Sweeney & Soutar (2001) (2) A significant enhancement of perceived quality linked to CSR actions, (3) an improvement in satisfaction (4) a complementary role in loyalty. (5) Finally, an influence of CSR on the purchase intention, subject to economic constraints. While CSR is positioned as a strategic key of success driver in the agri-food sector, its impact remains secondary according to the sample, highlighting a tension between ethical aspirations and budgetary constraints among Moroccan consumers. Through its methodology, this research contributes by using the PERVAL scale as an analytical lens for qualitative data in the context of agri-food CSR. It illustrates how CSR perceptions can be translated into perceived value, offering a foundation for future quantitative research on consumer perception.*

Key Words : *CSR, exploratory study, consumer perception, purchase intention, agri-food sector, Morocco.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Corporate Social Responsibility (henceforth referred to as CSR) has emerged as an exciting topic for researchers in various sectors. For a long time, companies favored an approach focused on commercial results, neglecting ecological and societal dimensions that nevertheless offer considerable potential (Phillips et al., 2019).

Businesses today operate within a complex, globalized network involving a multitude of stakeholders. Among them are consumers [...] encouraging businesses to adopt responsible practices (Shahzad et al., 2024). Consumers value companies that care about the environment (Kotler, 2011). This trend is part of a context in which debates on sustainability are encouraging economic players to review their strategies and integrate social and environmental considerations under pressure from stakeholders (J. Xie et al., 2024).

From a marketing perspective, CSR has become a major area of interest (Peloza & Shang, 2011). Allowing corporations to increase customer satisfaction, loyalty (Islam et al., 2021), and enhance the perception of quality (Latif et al., 2020) and purchase intention (S. Kim & Hwang, 2023). CSR, as defined by Carroll (1991), is based on companies' commitment to contribute to the well-being of the community.

Moreover, it strengthens their competitiveness (Salam & Jahed, 2023). Previous studies showed that consumer intentions are strongly influenced by companies' CSR initiatives. As an illustration, if a customer is sensitive to CSR dimensions. Then, it is conceivable that CSR will influence their intentions and preferences (Al-Haddad et al., 2022).

The subject is pertinent to the Moroccan agri-food sector as it helps companies to meet stakeholder expectations, particularly those of consumers. In this context, the reviewed literature verified the effect of CSR on consumer perception in the agri-food industry. By examining the brand-consumer relationship and CSR, responsible actions, such as sustainable farming, ethical supply chains, and resource conservation, impact consumer trust and purchase intention, and are fundamental to building strong relationships with stakeholders (Zaman et al., 2020). Other existing research suggested a positive cause-and-effect relationship between the company and its values, CSR actions, or its identity, and consumers' purchasing behavior and loyalty (Barlas et al., 2023). These interactions trigger emotional attachment, which affects performance indicators such as perceived quality and customer satisfaction (Lacap et al., 2021). These observations are in line with the conclusions of Salam et al. (2022), who recommend later that the CSR approach simultaneously strengthens customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Furthermore, studies have argued against generalizing the results of studies on CSR, stating that its effects vary from

one sector to another (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). This note challenges the researcher and justifies the interest in studying the impact of CSR in the Moroccan agri-food sector. The aim of this article is to deepen the understanding of CSR perception within PERVAL's model, and then analyze the following variables: perceived quality, satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intention. In light of the initial observations, it becomes relevant to answer the following questions:

To what extent does the perception of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) influence perceived quality, satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intention among Moroccan consumers in the agri-food industry?

How do Moroccan consumers perceive CSR in the agri-food industry?

To what extent does perceived CSR influence the Moroccan consumers' perception of the quality of agri-food products?

How does the perception of CSR contribute to the satisfaction of Moroccan consumers of an agri-food product?

Is customer loyalty influenced by these initiatives, and to what extent do CSR actions affect Moroccan consumers' intention to buy?

Finally, how do these variables interact with each other?

To answer this question, the paper is organized as follows: the literature review sets out the different concepts and the various research studies that have been carried out by authors on the subject, followed by a description of the methodological framework. The collected data are then analyzed thematically, and the results are discussed in light of the existing literature. Finally, the conclusion highlights the study's scientific contributions, methodological limitations, and practical implications.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions

(CSR) has been gradually refined, becoming a structured framework. Initially, Bowen (1953) defined it as « *the obligations of entrepreneurs to promote policies [...] desirable in the light of society's objectives and values* », emphasizing the alignment between business decisions and societal expectations. He considers it as actions that go beyond « *technical or economic interests* », while Johnson (1971) extends the conceptual framework by integrating the interests of stakeholders (employees, suppliers, consumers). Then, CSR was formalized by (Davis, 1973) and (Carroll, 1979) as an obligation « beyond legal requirements », structured into the following pillars: economic, legal and ethical. Jones (1980) focuses on « *voluntary obligations to the constituent groups of society* », while Drucker (1984) specifies that profitability remains a prerequisite, «

generating sufficient profits to cover future costs ». Carroll (1991) adjusts his model by integrating philanthropy, then Kotler and Lee (2005) link it to « *improving community well-being* ». Finally, Vaaland (2008) refers to CSR as « *managing stakeholder concerns to create corporate benefits* ».

2.2 CSR in the agri-food sector

In the agri-food sector, the intersection between CSR and sustainability issues is particularly relevant (Nazzaro et al., 2020). This relevance is explained by the sector’s nature, whose production processes depend directly on the exploitation of natural resources (Maloni & Brown, 2006); it follows that the company’s choices have a direct impact on the environment. It should be acknowledged that CSR in the agri-food industry is grounded in the Triple Bottom Line (Planet, People, Profit) conceptual framework, which integrates the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.(Elkington, 2004). According to Carroll’s approach, another perspective may be considered: this responsibility encompasses economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations (Carroll, 1979, 1991).

This approach emphasizes that CSR adapts to evolving stakeholder expectations, particularly those of consumers. Consumers, who have become more aware due to health crises and environmental imperatives, now demand traceability of practices and a transition to socially responsible models (Coppola et al., 2020).

In summary, CSR in the agri-food sector can be defined as a voluntary commitment that integrates environmental, social, and ethical concerns into interactions with stakeholders, going beyond legal requirements and taking into account the specific characteristics of the sector related to the use of natural resources, food safety, [...] consumer expectations.(Maloni & Brown, 2006).

The following discussion will explain the theories used to understand the relationship between perceived CSR and consumers’ evaluations of committed companies.

Consumer behavior theory (Kotler & Keller, 2016)

Consumer behavior theory analyzes how consumers choose goods and services to meet their needs, influenced by cultural factors (culture, social class), social factors (family, reference groups, status), personal factors (age, lifestyle, values), and psychological aspects such as motivation, perception, learning, and memory. In the agri-food industry, consumer behavior theory provides an understanding of the motivations behind consumers’ food choices regarding sustainability.(Prothero et al., 2011)

Commitment theory (Allen & Meyer, 1990)

According to this model, lasting loyalty rests on three levels: normative commitment is embedded in social norms or personal ethics, creating a perceived obligation to be loyal. Then, affective commitment refers to emotional attachment when individuals identify with the values of a brand, thereby developing a sense of belonging that motivates them to stay out of affinity. Finally, continuity commitment discourages them from leaving for fear of

losing acquired benefits or incurring termination costs.

Attribution theory(Fiske & Taylor, 2013)

This theory relies on social cognition and appears relevant to our topic. Companies seeking to communicate their CSR initiatives and foster a positive connection with consumers must understand these social and cognitive mechanisms: Consumers, evaluate CSR commitments through the lens of their « naive psychology ». They are influenced by their perceptions, [...] motivations, emotional states and connection to their self-concept.

The theory of congruence (Sirgy, 1982)

According to this theory, congruence between self-image and the image of the brand influences purchasing motivation via self-esteem needs. Positive alignment strengthens self-image, emotional connection and brand preference, satisfying the need as well for self-esteem. Brand attachment thus develops when consumers perceive a high degree of congruence between the brand image and one or more dimensions of their self-concept.

Table-1: Summary of the relevant theories and their link to CSR

Variable studied	Relevant theory	Link to CSR
Perceived quality	Social cognition (Fiske et Taylor) The theory of congruence (Sirgy)	CSR enhances perceived quality
Satisfaction	Consumer behavior theory (Kotler)	Aligning CSR with personal values leads to post-purchase satisfaction.
Loyalty	Commitment theory (Allen et Meyer)	Affective and normative commitment
Purchase Intention	The theory of congruence (Sirgy)	Identification with the company’s CSR values

2.3 Perceived value and PERVAL value scale

The perceived value is central to marketing theory and consumer behavior research (Zeithaml, 1988). Scholars recognize that perceived value is not a one-dimensional concept but rather a complex and rich construct.

According to Sánchez-Fernández (2007), a comprehensive understanding of customer perceived value requires capturing its diverse dimensions, given that consumers assess goods using various criteria that extend beyond mere functionality considerations. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) developed the PERVAL scale (Consumer Perceived Value Scale) to explore consumers’ perception in the context of

durable goods. It identifies four distinct dimensions that form a consumer's perception of value:

- Emotional value,
- Social value,
- Quality Value,
- Price value.

The PERVAL framework is well-suited to study consumer responses towards corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices in the agri-food sector for several reasons. First, food consumption involves both utilitarian and symbolic dimensions, making multidimensional value approaches more explanatory than unidimensional ones (Chaudhuri & Ligas, 2009). Consumers evaluate food products not only on the basis of taste, nutrition and safety but also on symbolic meanings related to identity, ethics, and lifestyle (Höfling et al., 2025).

Second, CSR attributes, such as environmental responsibility, fair trade, and animal welfare often generate value that is not purely functional but also emotional and social (Gadekar & Brandão, 2025). For instance, purchasing fair-trade or organic products may evoke feelings of moral satisfaction (emotional value) and signal prosocial identity to others (social value). These dimensions, captured by the PERVAL scale, are essential for understanding how CSR initiatives translate into consumer perceptions and behaviors (Romagnoli Freire Campos et al., 2024).

Third, the price/value-for-money dimension allows researchers to capture the trade-offs consumers make when choosing responsible products that may command a premium price. Studies have shown that consumers weigh perceived ethical benefits against monetary costs, and this trade-off significantly influences purchase decisions in the food context (Latka et al., 2026).

Finally, by applying the PERVAL model, this study provides a theoretically grounded framework for understanding how CSR practices shape consumer outcomes such as satisfaction and purchase intention in the agri-food sector (Romagnoli Freire Campos et al., 2024).

2.4 Consumer perception

«Organizations send out numerous signals to their stakeholders to reveal their [...] qualities, skills and intentions, while seeking to influence desired outcomes - such as purchase intent, loyalty and perception.» (Spence, 1973) Consumer perception describes the way in which individuals interpret, evaluate and react to information about products or services, thereby influencing their purchasing decisions. (Solomon, 2023)

Recent studies on the foundations of CSR point to the need to assess stakeholders perception and reaction regarding CSR initiatives (El Akremi et al., 2018). It is relevant to define what customers equate with CSR actions, given the impact of CSR perception on organizational performance. (Torres et al., 2012).

3 VARIABLES IN THE PERCEPTION OF CSR

3.1 Perceived quality

Perceived quality is a key concept in understanding how consumers perceive a brand. (Zeithaml, 1988) states that perceived quality is shaped by consumer perception and reflects the consumer's assessment of the overall superiority of a product. A number of research studies have shown that CSR actions reinforce perceptions of quality. (Aljarah & Alrawashdeh, 2021).

X. Xie (2017) stresses that CSR actions could boost consumer satisfaction, an element that has a direct impact on perceived quality. It has been noted that companies perceived as socially responsible are viewed more positively and their products or services are often considered to be of better quality. Other research shows the impact of alignment between the values of the company and those of consumers on perceived quality. It is true that consumers evaluate more favorably the quality of products from companies whose CSR practices are in harmony with their own values (Sul & Lee, 2020). Moreover, the authors have mobilized the concept of congruence to explain this phenomenon, considering that the alignment between consumer values and brand identity reinforces the positive evaluation of quality (Sirgy, 1982). This dynamic can also be explained by the theory of signals (Spence, 1973) : *« CSR commitments, perceived as indicators of reliability, alleviate consumers' doubts and shape their qualitative judgement.»*

3.2 Satisfaction

Consumer satisfaction regarding a product or service is based on the overall experience of buying a good or service over time. (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Satisfaction is central to consumer well-being and the stability of economic structures (Oliver, 2010). Organizations' proactive attention to customers and their efforts to exceed consumer expectations significantly stimulate word-of-mouth referrals, as customers become interested in the offerings of committed companies (Hua et al., 2024). On the same page, when the quality of a service or product is based on ecological innovation, it ensures consumer commitment (F. Li & Zhang, 2024). In this way, organizations that align their offerings with customers' environmental expectations, through eco-responsible products and services, enhance their legitimacy while optimizing customer satisfaction. (Y. Kim et al., 2025). In view of the foregoing, CSR acts as a competitive edge likely to foster long-term customer loyalty.

3.3 Loyalty

Customer loyalty is defined as a multi-dimensional construct that extends beyond repeat purchase and encompasses a mix of attitudes and intentions that favor a brand over its competitors (Bergeron et al., 2003). In addition, external factors such as ecological values also influence loyalty, with consumers who are concerned about ecological practices demonstrating a marked loyalty and commitment to the brand. (Teng & Wu, 2019). Finally, the application of commitment theory to consumer behavior

reveals that lasting loyalty requires a combination of three dimensions: liking the brand (affective), enjoying tangible benefits (continuity) and feeling ethically aligned (normative). However, if loyalty is based exclusively on constraints such as cancellation fees, it becomes fragile, and once these obstacles are removed, the customer may turn away. (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

3.4 Purchase intention

Purchase intention is a key variable for understanding consumer behavior. It serves as an essential role in a context where some consumers base their purchasing decisions on a company's social commitment and level of environmental responsibility (Grimmer & Bingham, 2013). While (Bhalla & Overton, 2019; Hua et al., 2024; Martínez García De Leaniz et al., 2019) highlight the interdependence between consumers' ecological commitment and their purchase intentions, the research of (Bello et al., 2021) takes this link a step further by suggesting that the purchase intentions of consumers with a high level of CSR awareness are influenced by a (Desveaud et al., 2024). It is the result of trust, the absence of conflict, and maintaining a relationship between a company and its customers (Kumar et al., 2015). As (Dick & Basu, 1994) indicate, "The long-term success of a brand depends on the company's CSR commitments". However, this relationship is not systematic, but only when product quality is high. The literature establishes a direct link between (CSR) and purchase intention. However, the mechanisms underlying this relationship remain complex. (Herrador-Alcaide et al., 2024). In fact, this relationship could be moderated by the effect of customers' positive emotions, such as enthusiasm, happiness and joy (Afzali & Kim, 2021; M. Li, 2021).

As a result, CSR provides a competitive advantage only when it is accompanied by a positive customer experience. (Herrador-Alcaide et al., 2024). In line with congruence theory, Desveaud (2024) concludes that consumers are more predisposed to buy socially responsible products when they align with their self-image.

4. METHODS

This research explores the impact of perceived CSR on Moroccan consumers' behavior, using a comprehensive Weberian approach that examines the subjective meanings that social actors attribute to their actions (Labuschagne, 2003). The qualitative research was considered suitable as the study aims to explore and deeply understand the concept in the local context (Ridder, 2017).

We conducted 35 semi-structured interviews because we considered them relevant to the research question. It enables the collection of rich, spontaneous verbatim data (Longhurst et al., 2023). The following figures represent the main sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

(n=35). Sociodemographic data description is illustrated in Fig.1, Fig.2, and Fig.3 below:

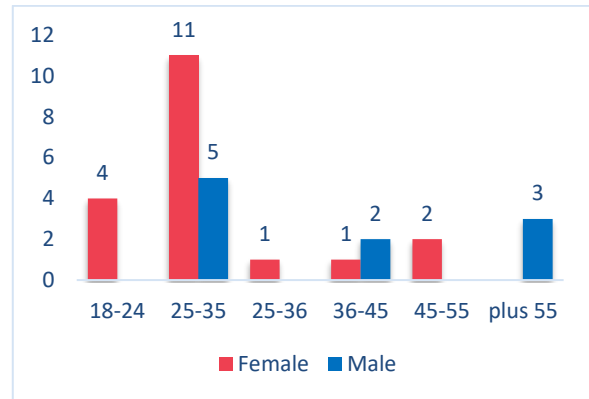


Fig -1: Intersection of age group and gender

We collected data in the Greater Casablanca and Rabat-Kenitra regions between February 08, 2025, and March 30, 2025. According to the 2024 General Population and Housing Census (RGPH)¹, these regions are among the most urbanized in the country, with urbanization rates of 73.3% and 70.7%, respectively. They represent 35.8% of Morocco's active population, with 22.2% in Casablanca-Settat and 13.6% in Rabat-Salé-Kénitra (HCP, 2026). The concentration of active population and economic activity in these regions makes them particularly suitable for examining CSR practices. However, this regional focus introduces certain limitations, as it will miss how CSR operates in other areas of the country or rural settings.

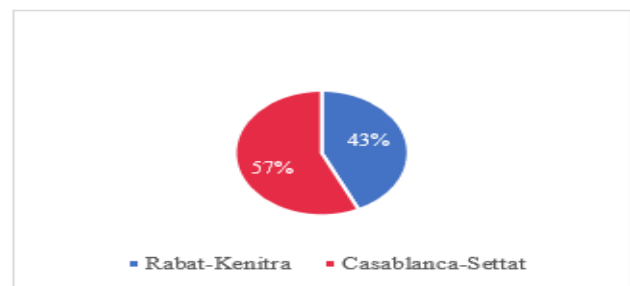


Fig-2: Geographical distribution of the study

¹ https://www.hcp.ma/region-tanger/Note-d-information-sur-les-premiers-resultats-du-RGPH-2024_a676.html

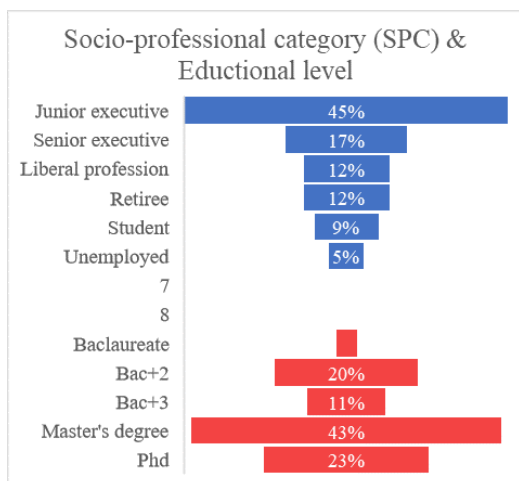


Fig-3: intersection of socio-professional category (SPC) & educational level

The interview guide (provided in the appendix) was inspired by the work of (Bello et al., 2021; Hua et al., 2024; Phillips et al., 2019). To capture different perspectives, the interview was administered to a variety of profiles (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We held interviews face-to-face. The responses were transcribed using Google Forms and then converted to Microsoft Word, where a faithful written version of each interview was preserved. The interviews were conducted in French and Arabic, then translated into English for manual thematic analysis. Data analysis was based on thematic analysis to identify and analyze recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To understand how CSR shapes perceptions among the interviewed consumers. The open codes were first grouped into thematic categories named "perception of CSR". Axial coding was then applied to organize these initial labels within the four PERVAL dimensions (Table-2). Following the same pattern for the remaining questions, participants' responses were initially sorted by tone: positive, neutral, or negative. Then, in the axial coding, the identified tonal categories were linked to the variables of perceived quality, satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intention.

The discussion of the results is followed by a summary that compares them with the theoretical models used: PERVAL model, consumer behavior theory, congruence theory, and commitment theory. To address the research questions, we will use the following hypothesis: Perceived quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction during a purchasing act. If the first experience is satisfactory, the consumer gradually develops loyalty, and their future buying intention is consequently higher (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The verbatim quotes were structured around the following 5 main themes:

- 1- The corporate social responsibility and Moroccan consumers' perception.

- 2- Consumer perception of CSR actions and perceived quality.
- 3- Perception of CSR actions and customer satisfaction.
- 4- Perception of CSR actions and Loyalty.
- 5- Perception of CSR actions and purchase intention.

Theme 1: The pillars of corporate social responsibility and Moroccan consumers' perception

While certain participants were able to elaborate a multidimensional definition, Others limited the scope of CSR to the societal aspect, reflecting an intuitive understanding. We codified the verbatim according to the PERVAL framework. This model was chosen for its ability to structure respondents' representations of CSR. This model was chosen because it is considered more suitable for consumer-oriented studies. Unlike the classical models, which are better adapted for businesses, it should be remembered that the "Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 2004) focuses on three pillars (social, environmental, and economic), which are nonetheless considered crucial in analyzing consumer priorities. The stakeholder model (Freeman, 1983) would have required categorizing stakeholders (suppliers, shareholders, consumers, etc.), whereas the study targets only consumer perceptions. Some respondents seem skeptical about the impact of CSR:

- "I sometimes remain skeptical about the real impact of CSR actions". Male,36-45, manager, Casablanca-Settat

- "I don't think it's a determining factor." Male,25-35, Self-employed, Casablanca-Settat.

The expectations of Moroccan consumers regarding social responsibility align with the PERVAL model, placing importance on economic practices, favoring quality products that are accessible and come from reliable companies that support local producers through short circuits. As for emotional value, it is seen as visible and emotionally engaging and is associated with support for local communities and national solidarity, reinforcing the image of a « good corporate citizen ». Finally, the social value is perceived as an obligation associated with compliance with the labor code and employee safety. This disparity is also confirmed in (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006)'s work in their reaction to CSR initiatives: « *what appeals to one target has no resonance with another* ». On the other hand, the mistrust expressed by some respondents indicates a lack of credibility: CSR actions are sometimes deemed insufficiently concrete or even aesthetic lacking concrete impact. As Afzali and Kim (2021) point out, consumers' skepticism about the motivations behind CSR actions can lead to negative reactions to the company's CSR efforts.

Table- 2: Synthesis of participant perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as analyzed through PERVAL's model

PERVAL Dimension	Frequency	Some Verbatims
Emotional Value	8	<p>«I remember when I was a kid « La coupe scolaire Danone² » organized by the Centrale Danone group for primary school pupil» Male, 25-35, self-employed, Rabat-Kenitra</p> <p>- «I prefer to buy local products to support the national economy. » Male,36-45, manager, Casablanca-Settat</p> <p>« My employer offered gift packs to employees to celebrate International Women’s Day. What was special about them? These gifts were bought from women’s cooperatives in the South, with the aim of supporting working women in rural areas”. Woman, 25-35, mid-manager, Casablanca-Settat.</p>
Quality Value	15	<p>“What matters the most to me is the quality and safety of the products.” Male,25-35, Self-employed, Casablanca-Settat</p> <p>« For me, a responsible agri-food company tries to use natural ingredients and GMO-free products to preserve public health.» Woman, 25-35, mid-manager, Rabat-Kenitra</p> <p>«I choose products with recyclable packaging.» Woman, 25-35, Student, Rabat-Kenitra</p> <p>«I prefer to buy products that seem healthier and of good quality, and if CSR is part of this criterion, then that's a plus.» Male,46-55, Self-employed, Casablanca-Settat</p>
Social Value	6	<p>« It corresponds to management of the well-being and safety of employees in companies [...] » Male,25-35, mid-manager, Casablanca-Settat</p> <p>« It seems to me that respect for the labor code and human rights are very important CSR practices.» Male,46-55, Self-employed, Casablanca-Settat</p> <p>« For me, a responsible company is one that is transparent, communicates honestly about its actions [...] and ensures gender equity. » Female,46-55, manager, Rabat- Kenitra</p>

Price Value	16	<p>“I prefer to buy products from a short circuit.” male,25-35, mid-manager, Casablanca-Settat</p> <p>“[...] I think the most important thing is good, affordable products.” Male, over 55, retired, Rabat-Kenitra</p> <p>“My satisfaction depends on quality and price.” Female,36-45, mid-manager, Rabat- Kenitra</p>
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Theme 2: Consumer perception of CSR actions and perceived quality.

The verbatim quotes reveal that some of those interviewed associate CSR with superior product quality.

« I perceived products of a company committed to CSR as more reliable and environmentally friendly,» male,25-35, manager, Rabat-Kenitra

«Better quality [thanks to] respect for the cold chain». Female,25-35, mid-manager, Rabat-Kenitra

« Companies committed to CSR [comply] with strict standards (certifications, labels, quality audits). [...] they take greater care in the manufacturing process, which reduces the risk of contamination. » Female,45-55, manager, Rabat-Kenitra.

« An uncommitted company might focus more on cutting costs, which can sometimes affect quality. » Female,25-35, mid-manager, Rabat-Kenitra

In addition,(Aljarah & Alrawashdeh, 2021; J. Xie et al., 2024) confirm that CSR initiatives support the perception of quality. The way customers perceive CSR actions plays a key role, directly affecting their assessment of the services offered. As Mandhachitara & Poolthong (Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011) point out, CSR initiatives also influence consumer attitudes towards a company and its products. However, this relationship remains conditional: some consumers only favor CSR-committed products if they are affordable.

« Personally, [...] If the price difference is significant, I might hesitate, but if the difference is reasonable, I would choose the more responsible product» male, 36-45, mid-manager, Casablanca-Settat

Nevertheless, part of the sample holds that CSR does not inherently guarantee quality, which is judged by global criteria such as provenance and ingredients, although it can lend credibility to a brand.

«Quality [...] needs to be assessed more globally, taking into account provenance, ingredients, transparency and

² School Football Cup

production methods, whether or not a company is committed to CSR», Male, 46-55, Self-employed, Casablanca-Settat

« It's irrelevant: quality depends on the product itself, but the commitment only lends credibility to the product. » Female, 25-35, mid-manager, Rabat-Kenitra.

These results are confirmed by Luo & Bhattacharya (2006), who indicate that CSR actions could increase consumer satisfaction, a key to quality.

Lastly, the negative criticisms of some of those questioned reduced CSR to a « marketing argument » or « misleading advertising », with the emphasis more on value for money.

« What motivates me most is the quality of the product and its price, not its social or environmental commitments. » Male, over 55, retired, Casablanca-Settat

«Marketing argument » Male, 36-45, manager, Rabat

These results show that CSR is perceived as added value only by informed consumers, but remains secondary according to another group sensitive to economic criteria.

This finding can be explained by the consumer utility model proposed by Roe and Sheldon (2007). According to this model, consumer utility is calculated by the function $U=u(y-p)$, where u represents the quality of the product, y income, and p the price. In short, higher quality generally justifies a higher price because it offers greater utility. However, consumers' willingness to pay this surplus depends directly on their income. The good is purchased if the price is lower than the income $p < y$. CSR, acting as a quality signal, could increase the value of u , allowing companies to justify a higher price p without reducing perceived utility.

Theme 3: Perception of CSR actions and customer satisfaction:

The data collected suggests that CSR, although valued by a small number of the sample. For the latter, societal commitment serves as a catalyst for satisfaction, provided that products meet quality and accessibility standards. This conditional adherence confirms the complementary rather than central status of CSR.

« Yes, I'm satisfied when the company pays attention to CSR, but the quality has to be there as well. » Female, 25-35, Student, Rabat-Kenitra

« I prefer artisanal products from cooperatives, the social commitment reinforces my satisfaction [...] » Female, 25-35, mid-manager, Rabat-Kenitra

Analysis of the verbatim responses has enabled us to identify the purchasing motivations that have a direct impact on consumer satisfaction with a food product:

- Sensory hedonism: taste and texture;
- Price-quality ratio.

« It depends on my first tasting. If I enjoy the taste and texture, I'll be satisfied with the product, and I won't consider any other criteria. » Female, 18-24, Student, Casablanca-Settat

« Honestly, I'm satisfied when I buy the best quality at a competitive price. » Female, 25-35, mid-manager, Casablanca-Settat

The conclusions of Maehle et al. (2015) converge on the following: in the agri-food sector, price and taste are dominant criteria, whether linked to pleasure (hedonic) or to functional needs (utilitarian). However, when consumers are segmented by their purchasing preferences, environmental impact and health become more essential attributes for segments aware of sustainable development, while these dimensions remain marginal for other groups. The results concur with the conclusions of Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) that CSR directly improves customer satisfaction and consequently increases the company's market value.

However, some quotes specify that their satisfaction is first and foremost rooted in a calculated logic, where constant quality and competitive pricing are indisputable prerequisites.

« Not really, I mainly look at the price, quality, and brand. Maybe if it were clearly explained on the packaging or talked about more, I might be interested. » Male, over 55, retired, Casablanca-Settat

Some respondents even expressed strong skepticism regarding CSR as a marketing argument with no concrete impact. CSR will only contribute to satisfaction if it is part of an overall competitive offer.

« I'm not going to keep the product in the long term because it practices CSR !!! What concerns me about the products on the Moroccan market is the service quality-to-price ratio, regardless of anything else. » Female, 18-24, student, Casablanca-Settat

« I remember when Danone was the subject of boycotts in 2018; the fact that it was the subject of controversy diminished my satisfaction with all its products. » Female, 25-35, mid-manager, Casablanca-Settat

Product quality, and in particular compliance with consumer expectations, is closely linked to a company's profitability; by aligning their actions with customer expectations, companies improve satisfaction, optimize total quality management and consequently boost their profitability. (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

These observations are in line with the hierarchy of expectations theory (Oliver, 2010), according to which basic requirements such as performance and cost management must first be met for CSR to have an impact on customer loyalty, and only then, once functional expectations have been met.

Theme 4: Consumer perception of CSR actions and loyalty

The results show that the influence of CSR on consumer loyalty is conditional. For some, CSR can strengthen loyalty in the long term, provided that products maintain a consistent quality and that societal commitments are credible.

« If a brand whose products are of high quality communicates more about its commitment to CSR, this can strengthen my loyalty in the long term. However, this also depends on the consistency of its actions. » Female, over 55, mid-manager, Casablanca-Settat

« Yes, I validate my purchases when the company pays attention to CSR, but the quality has to be there as well. » Female, 25-35, Student, Rabat-Kenitra

« Centrale Danone, for example. After the boycott, they spoke directly to consumers, lowered prices, and demonstrated their support for small Moroccan producers. The brand listened and adapted, making me want to trust them again. » Male, over 55, retired, Casablanca-Settat.

On the other hand, for the majority of respondents, loyalty is based on advantages such as competitive price, availability, and purchasing habits, reducing CSR to a secondary factor.

« CSR policy can have a positive effect on my loyalty in the long term [...], but I will not remain loyal to a brand solely because of its CSR policy. » Male, 46-55, Self-employed, Casablanca-Settat

« More or less, but sometimes I use competing products and substitutes when there is a promotion or when they are not available. » Female, 25-35, mid-manager, Rabat-Kenitra

The results reveal that CSR can amplify loyalty only once basic expectations are met, in line with the work of Bhattacharya & Sen(2003): « If you keep supporting what your customers believe in, they keep coming back ».

The results are partly in line with commitment theory, with consumers becoming emotionally attached to a company when its identity matches their self-perception of themselves, thereby experiencing a sense of belonging. The analysis also underlines that loyalty is stronger when the consumer benefits from concrete and lasting advantages (continuity)(Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Theme 5: Perception of CSR actions and purchase intention.

While a majority recognizes the importance of CSR commitments, this inclination is not systematically converted into a purchase.

« Not really, I mainly look at price, quality, and brand. » Male, plus 55, retired, Casablanca-Settat

« If I have a choice between two products of similar quality, I'll choose those from a company that promotes responsible practices. But for the moment, I haven't looked into each brand's CSR commitments. » Male, 25-35, Self-employed, Casablanca-Settat.

« CSR commitments are an additional factor, but not always a determining one. » Female, 25-35, mid-manager, Rabat-Kenitra

The priority given to price aligns with observations of (De Matos et al., 2026) in developing countries, where budgetary constraints limit the adoption of sustainable consumption.

« If I see that a brand supports local or sustainable production, I'm more likely to buy it, as long as it's not too expensive. » Female, 18-25, Student, Rabat-Kenitra

This reluctance to pay extra for the products of a socially responsible company was also confirmed by the study (Bello et al., 2021). Only a small proportion of those with high CSR awareness recognize this possibility.

Although the results suggest a positive judgment of CSR approaches among agri-food brands, this perception is tempered by socio-economic constraints in Morocco. However, in an inflationary economic climate, price and quality take precedence over ethical considerations. Indeed, the annual consumer price index (IPC) for agri-food products has been rising since 2022 (Fig-4). High inflation in agri-food products occurred between 2021 and 2024, driven by external economic and geopolitical factors, including global inflation and the Ukrainian crisis.

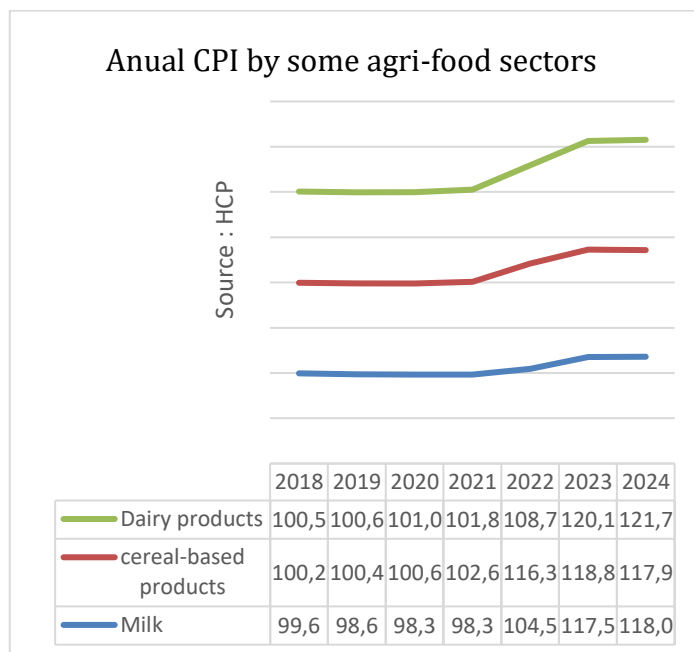


Fig-4: Evolution of annual CPI (Consumer Price Index) in Morocco (2018–2024), showing the rise in inflation for some food products, including dairy products, milk, and cereal-based products. (Source: HCP¹)

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this exploratory research aimed to discuss the mechanisms by which CSR could influence the perception of Moroccan consumers. The findings show that Moroccan consumers' expectations of CSR follow the PERVAL Model, with price and quality value being prioritized first, while emotional and social value are positioned second, yet it remains valuable for fostering emotional engagement, per for this sample.

Cross-analysis of the results indicates that the variables interact: perceived quality and satisfaction are linked, the data collected suggests that satisfaction is closely related to perceived quality. Marketing plays a role in aligning these actions with customer expectations, companies increase satisfaction, optimize total quality management (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Furthermore, attribution theory (Fiske & Taylor, 2013) confirms that how customers perceive CSR actions plays a key role in their evaluation of the services offered.

Examination of the data confirms that CSR has only a complementary effect on consumer perception; loyalty and purchase intention are connected, and that connection is itself linked to perceived quality. However, this relationship is mediated more by intervening variables such as brand trust, taste, price-to-quality ratio and consumer educational level.

Even if companies' commitments foster consumers' interest, their impact on the variables studied, perceived quality, satisfaction, and loyalty remains secondary rather than central. The qualitative results conclude that CSR, although welcomed by a committed proportion of the sample, acts as a catalyst only if products maintain standards of quality, accessibility, and sensory hedonism. Finally, while a majority recognizes the importance of CSR commitments, this inclination does not systematically translate into purchasing decisions, due to economic constraints that slow the adoption of responsible behavior in Morocco. The results recommend giving priority to basic expectations, in particular, price-to-quality ratio, accessibility, and taste, and then investing in ethical and philanthropic initiatives.

This study used a qualitative approach; the limited sample size is a major limitation of this research. The conclusions drawn will be better supported by a quantitative study to measure the impact of CSR on consumer perception, and then validated on a larger scale, taking into account the new criteria identified by the participants.

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APPENDIX

Interview guide (translated)

1. Can you describe what you know about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)? And what does “responsible” food company mean to you?

2. In your opinion, how do you rate the quality of food products from a company committed to CSR compared to one that is not?

3. If a brand communicates about its CSR practices, how does that affect your satisfaction after purchase?

4. Could you give an example where a company’s social commitment has increased or decreased your satisfaction with its products?"

5. Does a food brand’s CSR policy influence your long-term loyalty?

6. Are you willing to pay slightly more for a food product from a company with strong CSR commitments? Why?