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Corporate Responsibility under the ECSI model: An application in the hotel sector

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the study of Corporate Responsibility (CR) under the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI). The methodology of this empirical study, conducted among 629 customers staying at hotels in the city of Seville, is based on structural equation modeling (PLS). The results obtained demonstrate the applicability of the European model to the hotel sector, although not all the relationships from the original model have been proven. The main contributions are derived from a better understanding of the model's components, a variable not studied before having been incorporated: the importance of Corporate Responsibility (CR). Moreover, it means to contribute to the field of research on CR as, despite the growing interest in the subject, the effects of this construct are still poorly understood.

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1. Introduction

All organizations are faced with the need to appropriately respond to the expectations of their stakeholders. These expectations translate increasingly more into the consideration of social criteria in decision making, concern about environmental deterioration, transparency in business activities and a preference for buying products which contribute to helping groups in need. Guided by this social trend, organizations are incorporating diverse social practices to attract and retain customers. Hence, a dynamic oriented toward fostering Corporate Responsibility (CR) is being generated as one of the critical elements to contribute value to the customer and to society, and thus differentiate firms from their competitors (Palacios-Florencio, Revilla-Camacho, & Cossío-Silva, 2015).

Once CR has been implemented, it is crucial to analyze the reaction of the different stakeholders to these practices. In the case of customers, the population which is the aim of this research, it seems that recognizing CR practices can have a positive influence on their attitudes toward the firm (Haski-Leventhal, 2014), its image and loyalty (Martínez, Pérez, & Del Bosque, 2014). It has also recently been noted that CR can influence the consumer's satisfaction (Arikan, Kantur, Maden, & Telci, 2016) through different variables. In a highly competitive market, the customer's satisfaction is of vital interest for organizations, due to practically all the firm's activities being able to be evaluated in terms of their contribution to their customers' satisfaction (Wu & Tseng, 2015). This is why this work partly examines these relations through the use of the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI).

Based on the arguments described, we mean to attain a double aim. Firstly, to determine if perceived quality, corporate image, perceived value, satisfaction, expectations, communication, loyalty, complaints, trust and CR are appropriate conceptual variables for a satisfaction index of the customers of hotels in Seville. Secondly, via applying and broadening the ECSI model, to propose a CR-based satisfaction index of the tourists staying in hotels.

To respond to these objectives, we propose an empirical study centered on the hotel sector. This framework has been chosen due to the current situation of the hotel industry. This is under constant pressure, has customers who are increasingly more demanding and is experiencing continuous technological changes. On the other hand, hotel activity falls within a context of maximum personal interaction in which these contacts are fundamental for the service provision. Finally, within the framework of carrying out CR at both an administrative and an institutional level, it is worth emphasizing that the nature of the sector entails a greater interaction and involvement between the different stakeholders.

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Table 1
Theoretical background about the ECSI model.

Authors	Constructs
Kristensen, Martensen, and Gronholdt (1999)	Image, expectations, perceived quality (hardware), perceived quality (human ware), perceived value, customer satisfaction and loyalty
Kristensen, Martensen, and Gronholdt (2000)	Image, expectations, perceived quality, perceived value, consumer satisfaction and loyalty
Gronholdt, Martensen, and Kristensen (2000)	Image, expectations, perceived quality (hardware), perceived quality (humanware), perceived value, customer satisfaction and loyalty
Martensen, Gronholdt, and Kristensen (2000)	Image, expectations, perceived quality (hardware), perceived quality (humanware), perceived value, customer satisfaction and loyalty
Bayol et al. (2000)	Expectations, image, loyalty, perceived value, perceived quality, satisfaction and complaints
Vilares and Coelho (2003)	Satisfaction, loyalty, commitment, perceived quality of products, perceived quality of services, expectations, image and perceived value
Ball et al. (2004)	Image, loyalty, expectations, perceived value, perceived quality, satisfaction, complaints and communication
Aydin and Gökhan (2005)	Expectations, perceived quality, complaint management, customer satisfaction, trust, loyalty, corporate image and costs
Ryglová and Vajcnerová (2005)	Image, expectations, perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction, loyalty and complaints
Ball, Coelho, and Vilares (2006)	Image, loyalty, expectations, perceived value, perceived quality, satisfaction, communication and complaints
Chitty, Ward, and Chua (2007)	Image, technical dimension, functional dimension, price, perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty
Türkyilmaz and Özkan (2007)	Image, expectations, perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty
Kaveh et al. (2012)	Image, perceived value (technical dimension, functional dimension), price, satisfaction, trust and purchase intention
Turkyilmaz, Oztekin, Zaim, and Omer (2013)	Image, expectations, perceived value, perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty
Askariazad and Babakhani (2015)	Image, expectations, perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction, loyalty, complaints and trust

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. The European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI model)

Customer satisfaction models are methods to evaluate the quality of the services provided by organizations in the public and private sectors (Johnson, Gustafsson, Andreassen, Lervik, & Cha, 2001). There are many indexes used by these studies (SCBS, ACSI, NCSB and ECSI, among others).[1]

The ECSI methodology has been developed by European experts based on a set of requirements (ECSI Technical Committee, 1998). This model studies the relations of seven constructs: image, expectations, the product's perceived quality, the service's perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty.

Setting out from this model (ECSI), researchers have made changes to adapt it to their studies. Bayol, De la Foye, Tellier, and Tenenhaus (2000) research stands out. Their model has seven interrelated variables: (a) a core model: perceived quality, expectations, perceived value, satisfaction, loyalty and image, and (b) the same model but with the inclusion of complaints. Another investigation worth highlighting is Ball, Coelho, and Machas (2004). Loyalty is explained in their model by customer satisfaction, the firm's image, the handling of complaints, communication and the customers' trust (including these last two constructs in the model). Other constructs in the model (expectations, perceived value and perceived quality) are used to explain satisfaction. These authors explicate loyalty by including communication and trust, adding the communication-trust, loyalty-satisfaction, trust-loyalty, image-trust and complaints-trust relations to Bayol et al.'s (2000) model. Other authors who have used the full model or have employed it with some modifications are Kaveh, Mosavi, and Ghaedi (2012), and Askariazad and Babakhani (2015), among others.

In line with this, a review of previous studies is carried out. Our main goal is to know how the different researchers have improved the model and thus demonstrate that the ECSI index has been a very popular topic in both the academic and empirical literature (Table 1).

The ECSI model's most important conclusions are that it offers a good structure to explain satisfaction and that including the two previously explained elements of quality can have different influences, depending on the area of application. Nevertheless, our study is the first that has analyzed the effect that customers' perceptions of companies' CR strategies have on the ECSI model.

2.2. Conceptual model

The theoretical review enables the proposing of the conceptual model shown in Fig. 1. This is based on incorporating the CR construct into the evolved ECSI model and it is formulated at an exclusively theoretical level by Yanqiu and Xing (2009).

Perceived value: The perceived value-satisfaction relation is, a priori, quite complex due to the difficulty of distinguishing them, as both are formed from evaluative judgments. However, while perceived value occurs at different stages of the shopping process, satisfaction is universally recognized as a post-use or post-purchase evaluation. It seems clear that this statement enables satisfaction to be understood as the result of value perception (Gil, Sánchez, Berenguer, & Gallarda, 2005). In the context of tourism there are numerous studies which show a direct relation between perceived value and satisfaction (Moliner, Sánchez, Rodríguez, & Callarisa, 2007; Yang, Liu, Jing, & Li, 2014). Based on this, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1. There is a positive and significant relation between perceived value and satisfaction.

Satisfaction: Studies show that satisfaction influences customers' behavior patterns, their repurchase intentions (Ranjbarian, Sanayei, Rashid, & Hadadian, 2012) and their positive word of mouth communication (Markovic, Raspor, & Segaric, 2010). These antecedents lead to the proposal of the following hypothesis:

H2a. Satisfaction has a direct and positive influence on loyalty.

In the consumer satisfaction literature, Moliner and Fuentes (2011) investigate complaints behavior as a study area which emerges from an unsatisfactory shopping and/or consumption experience. The customers' dissatisfaction diminishes their repurchase intention and their brand loyalty, and their negative word of mouth increases (Moliner & Fuentes, 2011; Oh, 2006), while a rise in satisfaction lowers the occurrence of complaints (Johnson et al., 2001). Due to this, we propose the following hypothesis:

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[1] SCSB (*Swedish Customer Satisfaction Barometer*), NCSB (*Norwegian Customer Satisfaction Barometer*), ACSI (*American Customer Satisfaction Index*) and ECSI (*European Customer Satisfaction Index*).

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