



Socially Responsible Consumption: Myths And Realities in the Context of Agri-Food Companies

TIONA WAMBA Joseph Herman¹, NGUEISSARA MANGALBAYE², NDIMA Richard³, TIEKAM FOTSO Daniel⁴, POKAM FONGANG Raïssa Inès⁴, NDOUME MASSOPO Alvine Diana Lady⁴, DIALLO MAMADOU Alpha⁴, KONE DOTIAN Idriss⁴, WAKAM WAFO Sophie⁴

¹ Senior Lecturer, Lasallian Laboratory of Management Science Engineering, Douala, Cameroon

^{2,3} Lecturer, Lasallian Laboratory of Management Science Engineering, Douala, Cameroon

⁴ Masters Students, Lasallian Laboratory of Management Science Engineering, Douala, Cameroon

ABSTRACT: The objective of this article was to analyze the factors explaining socially responsible consumption within agri-food companies in Cameroon. We achieved this by conducting a quantitative study using a questionnaire as a data collection tool. The questionnaire was administered to 50 respondents, whose responses were coded using SPSS software, and the determinants of SRC were highlighted using SmartPLS software. The main finding is that all the factors studied have a positive impact on the implementation of SRC in agri-food companies in Cameroon, but with very different degrees of influence; they must therefore be ranked in order of importance. However, governance and certification criteria are more important than the others.

KEYWORDS: SRC, corporate governance, certification, social, stakeholders, corporate social responsibility.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a global context marked by profound economic, social and environmental changes, consumer behavior has undergone significant changes. Consumers are becoming increasingly discerning and critical in their purchasing decisions, going beyond strictly economic criteria such as price or quality to include social, ethical and environmental considerations. This new consumer attitude has gradually led to the emergence of a form of consumption known as socially responsible consumption, commonly abbreviated SRC.

According to Webster (1975), socially responsible consumption encompasses all consumer behavior in which "the individual takes into account the public consequences of their private consumption and uses their purchasing power to bring about change in society". This definition highlights the active role of the consumer, now perceived as an actor capable of influencing corporate practices through their consumption choices. In this dynamic, Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001) emphasize that SRC involves voluntarily taking into account the social and environmental impacts of purchasing decisions, while seeking to encourage companies to adopt more responsible practices.

Furthermore, as Fouquier (2004) points out in his analysis of the alternative consumer, modern consumers have become increasingly demanding and critical of companies' production and management practices. Corporate responsibility is no longer limited to marketing practices, but extends to corporate citizenship, forcing companies to adapt to various socially responsible consumption criteria. This evolution also incorporates ethical concepts, placing consumers in situations that are sometimes complex and experienced as real dilemmas, particularly when it comes to boycotting certain companies or favoring the consumption of local products.

In the Cameroonian context, socially responsible consumption takes on a particular dimension. As François-Lecompte and Valette-Florence (2006) point out, SRC is based on values of solidarity, social equity and respect for the environment. In Cameroon, these values are often expressed through support for local producers, the purchase of products "made in Cameroon" and certain consumption practices inspired by community and cultural logic. Thus, characterizing socially responsible consumption in Cameroon means analyzing how consumers, consciously or unconsciously, integrate these concerns into their daily choices, while taking into account local socio-economic realities.

It is in this context that the present study aims to better understand the forms, issues and determinants of socially responsible consumption in Cameroon, based on a survey conducted among a sample of consumers in Cameroon. To this end, after establishing the theoretical framework for SRC (2), we present the methodological framework (3) and the results (4), which we then discuss (5).



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The concept of Socially Responsible Consumption

Socially Responsible Consumption (SRC) refers to purchasing behavior that incorporates ethical, social and environmental considerations, going beyond the satisfaction of personal needs. According to Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001), it involves basing purchasing choices on the impact of companies on society, supporting those with responsible practices and avoiding those perceived as harmful.

Socially responsible consumers seek to minimize the negative effects of their consumption on society while maximizing its long-term positive effects (Roberts, 1995). This involves favoring environmentally friendly products that are fairly traded and manufactured under acceptable social conditions.

However, there is often a gap between consumers' stated intentions and their actual behavior, which is influenced by price, quality and product availability (Auger & Devinney, 2007). SRC is therefore an economic act, but also a form of identity expression and social participation.

2.2. Stakes of Socially Responsible Consumption (SRC) for both companies and consumers

Socially responsible consumption (SRC) is an extension of major theoretical approaches: R. Edward Freeman's stakeholder theory and John Elkington's Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept (People, Planet, Profit). Freeman (1984) argues that companies must create value for all their stakeholders, among whom consumers occupy a central place, thus integrating social responsibility as a strategic imperative. Elkington (1994) complements this vision by extending corporate performance to social (people) and environmental (planet) dimensions. These two theoretical frameworks converge to make SRC a lever through which consumers, through responsible purchasing choices, influence corporate practices and contribute to a more sustainable economy. Other authors such as Max Clarkson (1995) and Jean-Pascal Gond & Jacques Igalens (2008) have also highlighted these contradictory yet complementary variables.

With reference to the theories of Freeman and Elkington, SRC presents both positive and negative challenges for consumers. On the positive side, stakeholder theory emphasizes the active role of consumers as key players, whose responsible purchasing choices reinforce satisfaction, trust and loyalty towards committed companies. When it is authentic and aligned with the Triple Bottom Line, SRC can generate a marked preference for responsible brands, an increased willingness to pay a higher price and a sense of personal commitment to social and environmental causes, with the company no longer being evaluated solely on price and quality. However, SRC also has its limitations: it can be perceived as costly for a particular social class, or equated with greenwashing. Insufficient or complex information undermines its credibility, leading to skepticism, loss of trust and consumer sanctions, as highlighted by Freeman.

Socially responsible consumption (SRC), in line with Clarkson's stakeholder theory (1995) and the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) approaches developed by Gond and Igalens (2005), raises several issues for companies. Positive issues include strengthening organizational legitimacy, improving reputation, creating sustainable value, integrating stakeholder expectations and developing a competitive advantage based on responsible practices. However, it also involves negative issues or challenges such as increased strategic adaptation costs, the risk of greenwashing, increased pressure from stakeholders, the difficulty of aligning economic performance with social and environmental requirements, as well as uncertainty about the actual behavior of responsible consumers. In summary, Freeman (1984), Elkington (1994), Max Clarkson (1995) and Jean Pascal Gond and Jacques Igalens (2008) show that SRC creates sustainable value, but its success depends on the commitment of companies and consumers, thereby contributing to a sustainable economic, social and environmental balance for all stakeholders. Hence our research hypothesis: *SRC is a reality within the socio-economic environment of Cameroon.*

3. APPROACH ADOPTED AND SAMPLING PLAN

As seen at the end of the theoretical part of this article, there are hypotheses that we intend to verify. As such, we intend to tackle at least 50 respondents across the country using online techniques, especially a google form throughout various networks. Given the impossibility to physically get in touch with the expected consumers and buyers, the most suitable method is the quantitative method. The most suitable tool for data collection being the questionnaire. The questionnaire that we administered was built based on the operationalization of our variables.



3.1. Model variables

Based on our research objectives and hypotheses, the variable being explained here is the explanatory factors of socially responsible consumption (SRC). We consider SRC to be our dependent variable, while the determinants will stand for our independent variables.

Table 1: Operationalization of variables

Main drive	Hypothesis	Dimensions
Socially responsible consumption	Socially responsible consumption is a reality in the Cameroonian socioeconomic environment	Environmental
		Social
		Economic
		Governance
		Consumer behavior
		Rules and regulations

Source: The Authors

A questionnaire was built based on the above table. The questionnaire’s main topics are taken from the “dimensions” sub-column of the operationalization table. The questionnaire is made up of 24 questions making it possible to capture the expected explanatory variables.

The online administration technique made it possible to tackle half of a hundred of consumers/buyers across the nation. The information collected with the questionnaire were then analyzed with specific tools and techniques that we present in the next paragraph.

3.2. Methods and tools of data analysis

After the data were collected, we had to go through numerous data analysis techniques to come out with the results. The techniques involve longitudinal analyses, principal component analyses and simultaneous regression analyses. The table below depicts the resume of the various techniques employed for the purpose of our data analyses and the tools used:

Table 2: Tools and techniques for hypotheses testing

Purpose of analysis	Techniques	Tools
Characterize SRC	Longitudinal analysis	SPSS
Identify the most important items	Principal Component Analyses	Excel, SmartPLS
Hypothesis testing	Structural Equations Modeling	

Source: The authors

The starting point was to describe the various dimensions of SRC; afterwards, we were able to identify the most important items among the existing ones. We then rounded up by selecting and ranking in a hierarchical order, the various dimensions, from the most important to the least.

4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1. Overview of SRC in Cameroon

To characterize SRC in Cameroon, we selected each of the most representative indicators for the selection criteria. The table below highlights the descriptive statistics for these indicators.



Table 3 : Statistics

		Biodegradability of packaging	Gender approach in recruitment	Sales promotions	Commitments to disadvantaged groups	Company specialising in customer relationship management	Local and/or international certifications
N	Valid	50	50	50	50	50	50
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2,2800	2,8200	2,1000	2,1000	2,0200	1,9600
Standard error of the mean		,18525	,18668	,16475	,16475	,15777	,16403
Standard deviation		1,30993	1,32002	1,16496	1,16496	1,11557	1,15987
Variance		1,716	1,742	1,357	1,357	1,244	1,345
Minimum		1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
Maximum		4,00	6,00	5,00	4,00	5,00	4,00

Source : The authors

Looking at the table above, we can see that the general trend for the averages of each variable fluctuates around the "AGREE" category. In other words, for each of the above indicators, the consumers surveyed believe that it is necessary to take each of these indicators into account: **consequently, SRC is a reality in our context**. It is therefore important to prioritise these criteria in relation to SRC.

4.2. Factors explaining SRC in Cameroon

The aim of this subsection is to further clarify the determinants of SRC within agri-food companies in Cameroon, as identified by the customers surveyed. We have also classified them hierarchically, from the most weighted determinant to the least weighted. To do this, we used SmartPLS software to perform simultaneous regressions. After completing the analyses, we obtained the empirical model below:

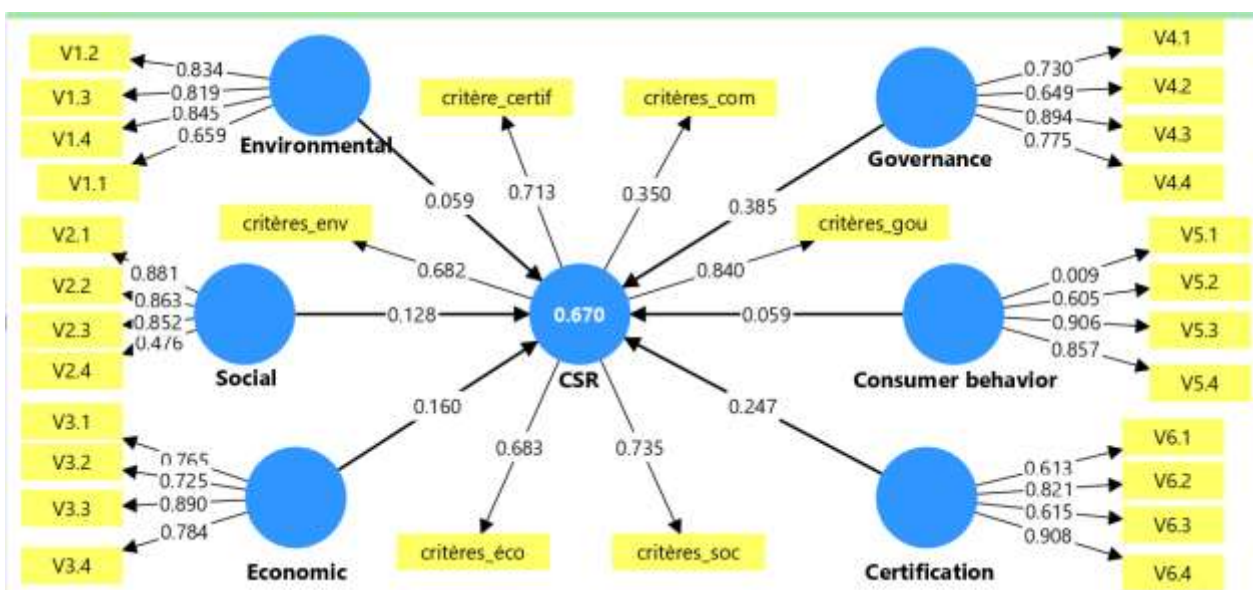


Figure 1: Empirical model of CSR determinants

Source : Our analyses on SmartPLS



Looking at the image above, we can see that each of the criteria grouping together the explanatory factors of SRC has a positive coefficient, regardless of the value. This proves that the criteria selected all contribute to the implementation of SRC by agri-food companies in Cameroon. However, we note that there is a difference between these coefficients. This proves that these criteria do not have the same explanatory power. For this reason, in addition to verifying our hypothesis, we will rank these factors. But before ranking them, we must ensure the statistical reliability of each of the six criteria selected. Hence the table below, which shows the overall reliability.

Table 3: Reliability analysis

	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)..
CSR	0.802	0.834
Certification	0.780	0.833
Consumer behavior	0.857	0.731
Economic	0.826	0.871
Environmental	0.807	0.870
Gouvernemental	0.808	0.850
Social	0.878	0.861

Source: Our analyses on SmartPLS

According to the table above, all of the explanatory criteria for SRC are statistically significant (each Rho_C > 0.7); this result can therefore be generalized to all customers of agri-food products. This validates our hypothesis: *SRC is a positive and significant reality within the Cameroonian socio-economic environment in the agri-food sector.*

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In Cameroon, companies face problems of corruption, poor governance, fair practices, ethics and transparency; this is why socially responsible consumers prioritize governance aspects (coefficient = 0.385) above all other criteria. However, in a context where governance variables are not within the control of consumers, the latter can rely on external and independent variables such as: the registration of the structure, its QHSE commitment, the cleanliness of points of sale, certification, in short, legal criteria (coef = 0.247).

But as contextual realities dictate, economic criteria should not be overlooked (coef= 0.160). Indeed, customers need greater price transparency, affordable prices and multiple payment methods. All this without neglecting sales promotions. Above all, social criteria are also important (coefficient = 0.128), as customers may be interested in the working conditions of employees and the gender approach in the HR policies of the companies concerned.

Finally, environmental and consumer behavior criteria are negligible in this case.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this article was to analyze the factors explaining socially responsible consumption within agri-food companies in Cameroon. To achieve this, we reviewed most of the literature on this concept, which enabled us to establish the methodological framework. This framework began with the design of an online questionnaire administered to volunteer consumers.

The data from this questionnaire was coded using SPSS software, which also enabled us to produce a frequency table. The research hypothesis was then verified using SmartPLS software. Our analyses show that all the factors studied have a positive impact on the implementation of SRC in agri-food companies in Cameroon, but with very different degrees of influence; they must therefore be ranked in order of importance.



In Cameroon, socially responsible consumers give absolute priority to governance (coefficient 0.385) due to the prevailing corruption and lack of ethics. Next come: legality/visible compliance criteria (0.247); economic aspects: transparent, affordable prices, means of payment, promotions (0.160); social criteria: working conditions, gender equality (0.128). Environmental and consumer behavior dimensions have very little influence in this context.

REFERENCES

1. Auger, P., T. M. Devinney, T. M., and J. J. Louviere: 2007, 'Using Best-Worst Scaling Methodology to Investigate Consumer Ethical Beliefs.
2. Elkington John, Robins Nick, Environmental Reports: A Tool to Measure Industry's Progress Towards Sustainable Development (Paris: UNEP, 1994).
3. Fouquier E. (2004), L'alterconsommateur et le qualitatifiste, *Décision Marketing*, vol 4, n°36 ;
4. François-Le Compte, Valette-Florence (2006), Mieux connaître le consommateur socialement responsable, *Décisions Marketing*, No. 41 (Janvier-Mars 2006), pp. 67-79 (13 pages)
5. Freeman R.E. (1984), *Strategic Management : A Stakeholder Approach*, Pitman. Freeman R.E. et Evan W.M. (1990), « *Corporate Governance : A Stakeholder*
6. Gond Jean Pascal et Jacques Igalens (2008), *La Responsabilité Sociale de L'entreprise: Que sais je?*, PUF;
7. Gond Jean Pascal et Jacques Igalens (2005), *Measuring Corporate Social Performance in France: A Critical and Empirical Analysis of ARESE Data*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, Volume 56, pages 131–148, (2005)
8. Max Clarkson (1995), *A Stakeholder Framework for Analyzing and Evaluating Corporate Social Performance*, *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Jan., 1995), pp. 92-117
9. Mohr, L.A., Webb, D.J. and Harris, K.E. (2001) *Do Consumers Expect Companies to Be Socially Responsible? The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Buying Behavior*. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 35, 45-72.
10. Stock, Robert (1995) *Africa South of the Sahara. A Geographical Interpretation*. New York, The Gilford Press, 435 p. (ISBN 0-89862-406-1)
11. Webster Jr., F.E. (1975) *Determining the Characteristics of the Socially Conscious Consumer*. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2, 188-196.

Cite this Article: TIONA WAMBA, J.H., NGUEISSARA, M., NDIMA, R., TIEKAM FOTSO, D., POKAM FONGANG, R.I., NDOUME MASSOPO, A.D.L., DIALLO MAMADOU, A., KONE DOTIAN, I., WAKAM WAFO, S. (2026). Socially Responsible Consumption: Myths And Realities in the Context of Agri-Food Companies. International Journal of Current Science Research and Review, 9(3), pp. 1472-1477. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/V9-i3-35>