Title: Do Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives Influence the Consumers?
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Abstract
In the last two decades we are witnessing a tremendous growth on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This growth shows that CSR proliferates on the boardroom agenda across many sectors and thus proves that modern corporations understand the need to give to their business a more holistic sense in order to ensure their viability. This paper starts with an introduction to the term of CSR presenting the main notions that have accompanied CSR through the years of its evolution. Thereafter, we present the literature review based on international studies on how CSR policies influence the consumers. In addition, we present some evidence based on past research that we conducted in the University of Bath as part of our postgraduate thesis; showing the extent that CSR initiatives of the UK mobile phone operators influence students purchasing decisions. Thereafter we emphasize to the few surveys that illustrate the discussion about CSR in Greece. Finally, the paper concludes by showing the existing research gap in this field and suggests new research’s directions.

Key Words: Corporate Social Responsibility; Consumer Behavior

1. Introduction
In the last decades, we are witnessing a tremendous growth on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). More than eighty per cent (80%) of the fortune-500 companies address CSR issues on their websites (Esrock and Leichty 1998). CSR proliferates now powerfully on the boardroom agenda across many sectors suggesting that modern corporations understand the need to give to their business a more holistic sense in order to ensure their viability.

This paper tries to highlight the neglected research area of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) focusing on the influence that CSR initiatives have on the consumer’s behaviour. In the beginning, we try to unfold the notion of CSR realising that no term has dominated in the international literature and we focus on the way CSR is being used and interpreted in Greece. Thereafter, we present a secondary analysis on the way CSR initiatives influence the consumers, counting on international relative studies. After that, we present some evidence based on past research that we conducted in the University of Bath as part of our postgraduate thesis; showing the extent that CSR initiatives of the UK mobile phone operators influence students purchasing decisions. Moreover, before we conclude, we illustrate findings from the two biggest studies that deal with the CSR perceptions of the Greek public.

2. The Notion of Corporate Social Responsibility
In an attempt to accurately define the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) we realise that no single conceptualisation has dominated past research (Maignan and Ferrell 2004). We can say that CSR is the umbrella that covers a variety of theories such as Corporate Citizenship; Stakeholder Theory; Corporate Philanthropy; Corporate Responsibility; Corporate Social Policy. Of course, there are some differences among these concepts and in some cases; one theory is the
continuation of another. However, in an endeavour to have a holistic view, this paper accepts all their similarities and interprets all concepts as one, using the term “CSR”. Besides, this is the case in Greece where the term CSR, endorses all social and environmental, corporate actions. CSR evolved in Greece later than other countries like USA and UK. Because of that delay, all theories and discussions about CSR have been put aside and the term CSR was adopted generally describing all the relative corporate initiatives.

One of the first ideas of corporate social responsibility was the concept that managers needed to accept their social responsibilities (Clark 1916 cited in Andriof and Waddock 2002). However, the term of CSR has elaborated since that early approach. Bowen (1953) illustrated that Corporate Social Responsibility relies on two fundamental values that have constituted the basic premises for the development of its thinking: First, businesses operate at the satisfaction of society and second, businesses act as a moral representative within society (Bowen 1953 cited in Andriof and Waddock 2002).

Carroll (1979), after suggesting clearly that the cornerstone of the economic system and the main role of every corporation is to be profitable by the selling of products and services that have demand; gives his own definition: CSR includes all the economic; ethical; juristic and philanthropic demands that society requires from them any given moment.

A very important step for the launch of CSR was the Green Paper on CSR which presented by Commission in July 2001 and defined CSR as ‘a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concern in their business operations and in their interaction in their stakeholders in a voluntary basis’ as they are aware that responsible behaviour leads to sustainable business success (European Commission 2002). Some European governments put CSR in high priority like the UK’s where a CSR minister in March 2000 appointed (Idowu and Towler 2004).

It is worth noting that Corporate Social Responsibility is dealing with the attention of business to various matters such as community involvement, socially responsible products and processes, and socially responsible relations among the employees (ICSSR website 2003). Bowen (1995) argues that a corporation operates on a social responsible way when the corporation’s aim to make profit is been achieved while the corporation acts respecting individual rights and justice, and honours the moral minimum (cited in Andriof and Waddock 2002).

Additionally, it is notable that one of the most responsible things an organisation can do is to be profitable, providing that way ‘sustainable jobs for its employees, good returns for investors and prosperity for the communities in which it operates’ (Andriof and Mcintosh 2001). Besides, when a firm is profitable, pays a big amount of money in taxes and some of that money returns to the community in forms of government programmes and investments. Likewise, Drucker (1984) argued that the first social responsibility of business is to immunize adequate profit to cover the future costs.

The increasing power of corporations coupled with the globalisation phenomena creates even greater need for corporate transparency and accountability. An intense anti-globalisation movement in issues such labour, human rights, transparency and
anti-corruption programmes, and environmental protection and sustainability, has accused the modern corporations. An endeavour to answer these shifts has been by many corporations the acceptance of CSR (Andriof and Waddock 2002). Moreover, corporations and stakeholders are likely to increase their collaboration, as intensive pressures demand higher levels of CSR while at the same time corporations face greater pressures from supporters and the public for environmental protection (Rondinelly and London 2002).

In addition, CSR becomes even a necessity of the modern corporations due to the maturing and growth of the social responsible investment (SRI) trend (Sparkes and Cowton 2004). Similarly, CSR gets to the centre of the UK corporations because of the expansion of ethical consumerism (Zadek et al 1997). Hence, corporations should have to take all these in consideration and adopt CSR practices in order to avoid boycotts and to attract sophisticated customers.

It is noteworthy that the vague definition of CSR creates difficulties in tracing and explaining the socially responsible corporation. Some believe that a socially responsible company is the one that adopts CSR policies. Nevertheless, how can we recognize as a responsible one, a corporation that uses CSR practices for the environment and the society but at the same time treats unfairly its employees? In parallel, for some it is adequate to recognize a responsible company when nothing bad for immoral behaviour is being heard against it. Moreover, some define a responsible company when the CSR principles are well embedded in the strategic planning and are the basic prerequisite of every action and behaviour.

We have to clarify that the CSR policies do not require and do not guarantee the social responsibility of the firm. This view is empowered by the fact that the firms that were participating in the biggest corporate scandals that shocked the world (Enron; Qwest; Worldcom; Xerox; Microstrategy; K-Mart) had at least one CSR practice. Swift and Zadek (2002) traced different CSR generations that can help us have a better understanding of the relation between CSR and the responsibility of the firm. Organisations that belong in the first generation of CSR follow the standards of their industry and adopt particular CSR practices in order to avoid risk in the long run. Their CSR commitment confines to their CSR practices and CSR is being used as another management tool (Papafloratos 2007). On the contrary, corporations that have been evolved to the second CSR generation, use CSR strategically as part of new management and corporate governance models. CSR is being placed in the centre of administration and determines every action and behaviour.

It is noteworthy that CSR debate takes place in Greece mainly during the last decade, showing great growth. Nevertheless, this does not mean that companies in Greece were disregarding their societal role or that no CSR policies could have been traced (Papafloratos 2007). Quite the opposite, the examples of corporations that were pioneers regarding CSR are many and important. However, the vital difference is that no systematic CSR action existed, the actions were mainly philanthropic; the employees were not participating and every initiative was depending on the good will of the owners of the (usually) family company.

If we follow the recent CSR developments in Greece and go through the CSR reports, we can say that the vast majority of corporations that deal with CSR belong in the first CSR generation. Greek corporations often equate their social responsibility with their external CSR actions or their participation in CSR networks. The most important CSR network in Greece is the Hellenic Network for CSR (www.csrhellas.gr), which gives
its own CSR definition: “As CSR, we mean the ethics a business uses for its relations with society. More specifically, this includes the responsible activities of its management in its relations with other stakeholders”.

3. The Relation between CSR Initiatives and the Consumers

After the endeavour to understand the notion of CSR, we can see now the literature on studies that explore the relation among CSR initiatives and the consumers. The first worldwide survey on the expectations that the public has from corporations, was developed and coordinated by Environics in 1999 named ‘The Millennium Poll on CSR’ and involved representative sample groups of 1,000 citizens from 23 respective countries globally. The survey revealed, among other things, that two third of citizens desire the companies’ contribution to broader societal roles, setting higher ethical standards and helping the creation of a ‘better’ society. Moreover, twenty percent (20%) of the consumers during the past twelve months had either rewarded or punished companies on the basis of their social performance and almost the same amount of consumers have considered doing so. The percentage of people that have actually engaged in such behaviour reaches thirty-nine per cent (39%) in Northern Europe, with fourteen per cent (14%) having considered doing so. Furthermore, as the findings of the survey illustrate, half of the respondents get influenced in the way they perceive a company, according to its social performance.

Similarly, on the findings of the Millennium Poll on CSR, Environics International conducted the 2002 CSR Monitor involving sample groups of 1,000 citizens from twenty five different countries. The results of the research show that one third of the consumers actively reward ethical corporate behaviour and in contrast punish the unethical one. In addition, thirty per cent (30%) of shareholders declared that they would sell off their shares in a company that acted in a socially irresponsible way; even if the earnings were important.

Furthermore, according to the MORI research conducted in 2003 on British public’s views of Corporate Responsibility (2,026 GB adults), the majority of the respondents did not think that most companies listen and respond to public concerns on social and environmental matters although that was a vital issue for them (Dawkins 2004). At the same time thirty-eight per cent (38%) of the public, stated that when they decide to purchase it is very important for them that the company they are going to choose shows a high degree of social responsibility. Thus, answering the question ‘when forming a decision about buying a product or service from a particular company or organisation, how important is it that it shows a high degree of social responsibility?’ Eighty-four per cent (84%) answered that it is important for them (38% answered very important and 46% fairly important). This percentage was seventy per cent (70%) in 1997 which shows that the consuming public has become more sophisticated and sceptical about its purchasing decisions.

Similarly, a Walker survey (1994) showed that half of the consumers are more likely to purchase from an organisation which has good social reputation, while six in ten are more likely to avoid an organisation with a bad reputation (Goodmoney website). In addition, research conducted in 1999 by “Fleishman-Hillard”, an international public relations agency, found that eighty-six per cent (86%) of the respondents would consider themselves more likely to buy a product or service if they learnt that
the company which offers the product or service helps to improve society (Prpundit website).

One of the most important surveys about American consumer attitudes towards CSR was conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide and Cone/Coughlin Communications in 1993 using as a sample of 2000 men and women aged 18 years or over (Cone/Roper 1994 cited in Simon 1995). Sixty-four per cent (64%) of the respondents stated that CSR should always be included in a firm’s activities and eighty-five per cent (85%) declared that they would look more favourably upon a company that supports a cause they cared about. In addition, the survey shows that CSR attracts new customers, as seventy-six per cent (76%) would look more favourably upon a company that supports a cause they cared about. In addition, the survey shows that CSR attracts new customers, as seventy-six per cent (76%) would consider switching to brands that share their interest for the community (Jones 1997 cited in Maignan and Ferrel 2001).

Brown and Dacin (1997) showed that a negative image of CSR can damage the consumer’s valuation of a product or a service while in contrast a positive CSR image can improve product evaluations. Hence, CSR can create the context where the consumer develops purchase intentions because he/she has a positive image for the company. A survey conducted by Creyer and Ross in 1997 highlighted the way consumers think about corporate responsibility issues and the factors that influence their purchase decisions. Among others, consumers reported that they expect corporations to behave ethically; they included the ethicality of a firm as one of the key factors they take into account when purchasing and they are ready to reward ethical actions by paying higher prices for a product from an ethical company. In the same direction, the UK TGI survey for 2002 indicated that sixty-seven per cent (67%) of respondents agree with the statement ‘it is important that a company acts ethically’ (Bmrb website, a).

One of the few studies that focused on students’ attitudes towards CSR was conducted by the Pathfinder Research Group which worked on the responses of 772 students in eight countries (Goodmoney website). Eight in ten students said they were trying to recycle on campus and seven in ten preferred products and packaging that were environmental safe while fifty-eight per cent (58%) reported their willingness to pay slightly more for these kinds of products. Likewise, a survey involving over 1.000 students worldwide revealed that CSR is one of the important issues that students take into consideration when forming an impression about a corporation (Globescan website). The same research also indicates that CSR has a crucial role in the students’ future employment decisions as one in two students claim that they would not apply for a job with an irresponsible company. It is notable, that especially the North American and the West European students engage CSR actively in their purchase decisions as the majority claims to have punished a company that behaved in a socially irresponsible manner.

In contrast to the above arguments, we can find evidence suggesting an opposite view. It has been argued that consumers do not feel strongly about corporate ethics, which can be illustrated by three factors (Millard Brown website). Firstly, if social responsibility was an important issue; the market share of most ethical brands would not be so small (only few of the ‘ethical’ brands take a share in the market of over 3 per cent (2004). In addition, research shows that an overall link between corporate perceptions and the consumer’s apprehension of brands does not exist. For instance, although ‘Nike’ received one of the lowest corporate reputation scores in a BRAND
study, it received at the same time one of the highest bonding scores in the market. Similarly, whereas in a research by “Millward Brown” in 2002, some seventy-five per cent (75%) of the sample of UK consumers had boycotted a brand or chosen to purchase a brand stating as a criterion the way the company behaves, a significant number of consumers did not include ethics in the reasons that made them take such decision.

The awareness among the public for social and environmental corporate practices is very low (Dawkins 2004). Only thirty per cent (30%) are able to name a company that they think is particularly ethically, environmentally or socially responsible and only thirty-seven per cent (37%) can name a particular company that has practices to help society or the community. MORI research may indicate that the Western consumer has become more sophisticated and sceptical but a sophisticated consumer does not perforce consume ethically (Titus and Bradford 1996). It is notable that the majority of the public is merely expressing concerns about these issues but does not place ethical considerations above other criteria regarding purchasing decisions. As a previous survey of MORI (2000) for the Co-operative bank shows, only 5% of the public puts ethical considerations as the most important criterion for buying a product or service (cited in Dawkins 2004).

In addition, although the MORI research (2003) shows thirty-eight per cent (38%) of respondents thinking as very important the social responsibility of a firm when purchasing, it is notable that the equivalent percentage in the research of 2001 was forty-six per cent (46%). Some may argue that this decline means that public lost its interest in CSR issues. However, the writers of the MORI research justify this downshift because of the difficult economic times after the September 11th terrorist attacks and the company scandals that reduced people’s trust such as the Enron and Worldcom cases (Dawkins, 2004).

Furthermore, as the research of Carrigan and Attalla (2001) demonstrates, consumers will purchase in an ethical way only if it is convenient to them and they will not incur any extra cost in terms of added price or loss of quality. Yet, although more than half of the respondents of the Cone/Roper (1994) study stated that they are willing to pay more for a product or service whose company support a cause they care about; only the one fifth reported having bought a product or service over the past twelve months for the above reason (Simon 1995). Moreover, only twenty six per cent (26%) could recognize from a list a company as “most socially responsible” and only eighteen per cent (18%) could name a “least responsible” one, although the list included firms with sizeable differences in their social responsibility status.

Present research shows that CSR is not of great importance in the purchasing behaviour of the majority of the respondents while the most important criteria are price; value; quality and brand familiarity (Boulstridge and Carriggan 2000). Therefore, although consumers have the good will to buy ethical products or services they do not necessarily take purchase decisions having social responsibility issues as a top criteria (ibid).

It seems that ‘all consumers react negatively to negative CSR information whereas only those most supportive of the CSR issues react positively to positive CSR information’ (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001:238). Although the upside of being seen to
act ethically is limited to small portion of the population (only 5 per cent), the downside of behaving unethically is much greater as ‘it is likely to repel the much larger number of consumers who have that latent desire for companies to behave ethically’ (Millard Brown website). Unethical corporate behaviour can cause a dramatic shift on the corporation’s brands irrespectively of whether corporate ethics are not top priorities for the consumers’ purchasing decisions (ibid).

The above findings agree with the arguments of some writers that consumers punish irresponsible behaviour more than they reward its ethical counterpart (see for example Reeder and Brewer 1979; Skowronski and Carlston 1987). Yet, it is noteworthy that the patterns of consumers’ behaviour in a previous decade show differences when compared with the consumer of today’s world. Thus, those arguments might be true but do not assure their validity today.

Hence, Simon (1995) confutes these arguments suggesting that more consumers would encourage positive practices than boycotting the unethical behaviour. Furthermore, Dawkins (2004) argues that consumers feel the need to get more informed about Corporate Social Responsibility and the majority state that their purchases would be influenced if they were more informed about CSR practices. The observed lack of public awareness does not signify lack of interest in corporate responsibility issues, as seventy-four per cent (74%) of the public think that their purchase decisions would be influenced if they had more information about companies’ ethical behaviour. Twenty-five per cent (25%) agree strongly with the above statement while forty-nine per cent (49%) slightly agree (ibid).

It is noteworthy that a comparison of the above studies can be ambiguous and the relationship of CSR and the consumer’s behaviour is not a straightforward one. As it can be observed from the previous research findings and as we have already stated, there is a lack of consensus on the way the public appreciates CSR and on the way CSR influence purchasing decisions. However it is important to bear in mind that the above surveys used different methodologies, were targeted at different samples and some of them were focused on particular CSR initiatives. Thus, the full comparison between the findings must be avoided in order not to be misleading. Moreover, the development of CSR does not equally occur around the globe and so the value of worldwide percentages in general and not for each country in particular is questionable. Moreover, it is noteworthy that most of the large surveys were conducted from private research companies and not from academics. This can be justified because of the large budget long surveys require that often makes them “forbidden” to academia. Furthermore, a limitation of the above studies is that they try to find the influence of CSR in purchasing decisions in general and not in particular industries. That could be wrong as consumers often use different purchasing criteria for different categories of products.

Having that in mind, we can carefully try to identify some common findings in all previous research. First of all, the modern consumer demands a greater societal contribution from the businesses. The consumer in modern democratic societies involves a political dimension in the way of his thinking and action (Tsakarestou 2005). The contemporary business cannot give to its traditional role of profit maximisation an exclusive character. People understand the tremendous power that
corporations have and thus expect them not only to behave ethically but also to be the carrier of change towards a better world.

In addition, it is commonly accepted that the way the public sees a corporation gets influenced by how responsible the company is. The more responsible a company is the better impression it gives to the public while the opposite applies when the company behaves irresponsibly. However, it is not always clear what exactly is meant by the term responsible and irresponsible behaviour.

However, the dispute among the various surveys is not the importance of a business’ responsible performance on the impression the public forms for this business, but the extent that this has on the consumers’ purchasing decisions. Some research findings argue that consumers are ready to pay even more for a “responsible” product or service while others claim that consumers will choose the “responsible” solution only when it is convenient and does not make them sacrifice other factors more important to them.

Furthermore, even the surveys that argue for the great importance that CSR has on consumer’s behaviour recognize that awareness about particular CSR practices is very low. Although consumers would like to encourage CSR policies and practices, they are not always familiar with specific CSR policies and thus they do not consume “ethically”. This lack of communication could lie both on companies and consumers. On companies because they do not make their CSR programmes better known via advertisement and on consumers because they do not always fully investigate the companies’ profile before they choose to purchase. Of course today, the choices that a consumer has are too many and perhaps it is utopian to expect a consumer to have such particular knowledge anytime for any given product.

4. Personal Research on this Field
In an endeavour to contribute filling the above; vague research gap, we conducted research in 2004 as part of our Master of Science in Business and Community program in the University of Bath. We examined the extent that CSR initiatives of the UK mobile phone operators influence students purchasing decisions. In order to do that we analyzed secondary data material from companies’ documentation; conducted semi structured interviews with the CSR managers of two mobile phone operators (Vodafone and O2) and dispensed questionnaires to postgraduate students of the University of Bath (departments of Social Policy and Management). Some of the questionnaire findings are going to be presented next as a continuation to our above discussion.

When we asked the students to choose from a list and rank their key decision criteria for choosing an operator, call debits was the most common criterion and the most important one. As figure I illustrates, forty-four per cent (44%) of the respondents

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1 For methodology and analytical findings see Papafloratos, T. (2004). “To What Extent Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives of the UK Mobile Phone Operators Influence Students’ Purchasing Decisions?”, Unpublished Msc Thesis. University of Bath. Or contact via email: tpapafloratos@yahoo.gr
considered as a criterion the call debits of the operators (38.67% had rank it first; 4% second and 1.33% third). It is significant that the responsible performance of the mobile phone operators was a criterion only for less than six per cent (6%) but from the people that chose it; four in five had it as the most important. The social performance of the operators was the least important criterion that people take into consideration when they choose an operator, left behind customer service, offers on handset, network and masts and call debits.

As figure II shows, more than twenty-one per cent (21%) of the respondents think that a responsible business is a business that adopts social responsibility policies while thirteen per cent (13%) compromises if there is no evidence of irresponsible behaviour against it. Yet, the vast majority (60, 87%) has in mind when thinking of a responsible business a business that there is no evidence against it proving that behaves irresponsible to its stakeholders but at the same time adopts CSR policies.
When you think about responsible business you have in mind a business which:

- There is no evidence against it proving that behaves irresponsible to its stakeholders (4.35%)
- Adopts Social Responsibility policies (21.74%)
- Both of the above (13.04%)
- Other (60.87%)

The vast majority of the students confirmed the importance that CSR has on the way they see a business. As we can observe in figure III almost seven in ten of the respondents tend to agree that an organisation that does not adopt CSR policies is not acting responsibly to its stakeholders. In fact thirty-nine per cent (39%) agreed with that and twenty-nine per cent (29%) slightly agreed. In contrast, only fourteen per cent (14%) disagreed and seven per cent (7%) disagreed slightly.
In addition, as our findings demonstrate most of the respondents showed how important is for them that a company behaves responsibly and claimed that they would change their purchase decisions and boycott a mobile phone operator if they would realize that it behaved irresponsibly to its stakeholders. Thus, half of the students said they would probably do that and thirteen per cent (13%) stated they would. Two in ten are not sure if they would boycott an irresponsible mobile phone operator and only near three per cent (3%) said they would not do that while thirteen per cent (13%) said they would probably not. However, things were different when students were asked if they would choose a specific mobile phone operator in order to encourage and reward particular CSR practices. Again, the majority said they would do that with forty-two per cent (42%) stating that they probably would and thirteen per cent (13%) stating that they would. The percentage of those who were unsure was twelve per cent (12%) and the ones saying they would probably not engage in such behaviour reached twenty-six per cent (26%) while students who answered a straight no, were equal to five per cent (5%). The responses to the above two questions are presented in correlation in figure IV.
Moreover, as we clearly see in table 1, most of the respondents could not distinguish the responsible performance of the mobile phone operators and they scored them as ‘neutral’ on an average of eighty per cent (80%). In the best position on the respondents’ view seems to be Vodafone which has been scored ‘neutral’ from “only” sixty-two per cent (62%) while one in ten scored Vodafone’s social performance as ‘very good’ - the highest of six and fourteen per cent (14%) scored it as ‘good’. In the next positions seems to follow Orange and O2 where the ‘neutral’ evaluation of social performance is near seventy-one (71%) and seventy-four per cent (74%) respectively. In the case of O2, fifteen per cent (15%) graded it as ‘good’ and three per cent (3%) as ‘very good’. In Orange’s case seventeen per cent (17%) scored it as ‘good’ while three per cent (3%) as ‘very good’. However, it is noteworthy that O2 and Orange had been scored ‘bad’ and ‘very bad’ from the least respondents (1.56% and 1.59% respectively) while Vodafone’s social performance was scored as ‘bad’ and ‘very bad’ from six per cent (6%). Three, T-mobile and Virgin did not receive ‘very good’ from the respondents but five per cent (5%) scored Three and T-mobile as ‘good’ and in the case of Virgin eleven per cent (11%).
Furthermore, the findings of the questionnaire reveal the low level of awareness that public has about particular CSR practices. Near seventy-eight per cent (78%) responded that they were not familiar with any CSR practices that mobile phone operators have. Sixteen per cent (16%) were able to recognize a CSR practice of Vodafone while ten and nine per cent could recognize a CSR policy from O2 and Orange respectively. It is notable that only 1, 45% per cent was familiar with a CSR practice of Three and T-mobile while no one was able to recognize a policy from Virgin.

In addition, close to one third of the respondents think that most mobile phone operators in the UK respond to public concerns on social and environmental issues with five per cent (5%) to agree with this statement and twenty-four per cent (24%) to agree slightly. More than half of the respondents were unsure about this while twelve per cent (12%) slightly disagreed and five per cent (5%) disagreed. However, one third of the respondents did not think that most UK mobile phone operators are doing their best to meet their social and environmental responsibilities. Almost one in two respondents was unsure whereas twenty per cent (20%) believed that the UK mobile phone operators are doing their best in this field.

The respondents’ opinion varied about the information given out from mobile phone operators regarding their responsible behaviour. More than one third trusted this information with thirty-four per cent (34%) stating that they probably trust it and only 1, 5 per cent trusts it completely. Less than thirty per cent (30%) were unsure whether they trust or not this information while thirty-five (35%) per cent reported that they probably do not trust it and 1,5 per cent does not trust it at all.

We observed that the majority of students would be expected to boycott a mobile phone operator if evidence showed that it behaved irresponsibly to its stakeholders. But for the students, irresponsible behaviour means that mobile phone operators do not use CSR practices. In fact, students confirmed the above point directly when seven in ten stated that an organisation that does not adopt CSR policies is acting irresponsibly to its stakeholders (figure 3). That implies that they would boycott a mobile phone operator that does not include CSR in its business. In parallel, more
than half of the students stated that they would prefer a mobile phone operator in order to encourage its particular CSR practices.

Nevertheless, only less than six per cent (6%) used the responsible performance as criterion to choose the mobile phone operator they were using. We believe that the answer to this ambiguity is the fact that most students do not have any knowledge for the CSR initiatives of the mobile phone operators. As we saw, the vast majority believes that the mobile phone operators’ social performance is neutral and is not able to recognize CSR initiatives of those companies. However, our findings imply that the purchasing decisions of the students would be influenced if they had knowledge about CSR. So, most students not only would prefer a mobile phone operator if they knew that adopts CSR practices but at the same time they would boycott one operator that does not use CSR initiatives.

5. The Case in Greece

Research in the CSR field in Greece is limited. CSR has just recently got the attention of a few Universities departments but academia besides some minor exceptions does not deal with research in this area. The most important research is being conducted 5 times in different years by the Institute of Communication (Non for profit organisation) with the collaboration of the department of Communication, Media and Culture of Panteion University and under the support of the Hellenic CSR network. This is part of a universal research project of Globescan Inc. and deals with 1,001 citizen’s sample from each country of the 31 countries that is being conducted. The findings of this research highlight the murky CSR landscape in Greece. Thus, it is useful to see the most important ones (www.ioc.gr).

The Greek consumers that have actually rewarded a social responsible business either by buying its products or by talking for it positively to others reach fifty two per cent (52, 2 %). This is an increase of thirteen per cent (13, 1%) regarding the findings of 2008 and an impressive increase of forty one per cent (41%) in relation with the findings of 2004. Respectively, the consumers that have not thought to be engaged in such behaviour constitute the forty six percent (46, 4%) marking a decrease of thirteen (13, 8%) in relation to 2008. However, it seems that Greeks prefer to punish the unethical businesses than to reward the ethical ones. Greeks came second among nine European countries in people who punished or consider punishing an unethical business by boycotting its products or by talking for it negatively to others. Italians came first, Greeks second and consumers from UK; Spain; Turkey; France; Portugal; Germany and Russia, follow respectively. It is notable that sixty four per cent (64%) of the respondents have been engaged in such behaviour with forty six per cent (46%) claiming that have actually punish a company which they do not consider it as socially responsible and eighteen per cent(18%) thought doing so.

Moreover, according to this research, Greek consumers want to see the corporations be active and innovative towards the improvement of society and the local community. It is very important that the respondents place the environment as a matter of high priority for the corporations to act. Poverty; human health; education and vocational training; criminality and security; arts and culture complete the list of the issues that modern corporations have to take action towards a better world. An interesting point is that the option: all of the above ranks third among the above
choices in contrast with the option: *none of the above*, which got the lowest percentage.

Another important survey which deals with CSR issues in Greece is the Awareness and Social Behavior Index (A.S.B.I.) conducted by Greek company: “MEDA communication S.A.” ([www.meda.gr](http://www.meda.gr)). This research is being conducted since 2003 tracing citizens’ behavior regarding CSR and providing a social Barometer of the Greek society. At the same time, the vast majority of employees in private and public sector declare that is quite and very important for them to work for an organization which has social or environmental actions. It is notable that nearly six in ten of Greeks say that their consumer behavior would have been (enough or much) influenced if they had been more informed for the social and environmental initiatives of the corporation they work for. Moreover, according to the research, one in three (31,4%) citizens wishes the corporate evolvement in actions for the environmental protection; one in four (25,8%) prefers to see a responsible attitude to the consumers and the market’s function while about one in five (21,2%) demands the corporate participation to the solution of social problems. Finally, the rest eighteen per cent (18,5%), wishes a corporate involvement in issues that have direct relation to the employees (A.S.B.I. 2008).

The above studies show that Greek society starts forming consciousness on socially responsible consumption issues, something that was missing in the near past (see Tsakarestou 2005). As Tsakarestou predicted in 2005, CSR has started being integrated in Greek society through the actions of The Hellenic Network for CSR, CEOs of several companies, business federations, the academic community and the Greek government which raise business and public awareness on CSR.

6. Epilogue

This paper tried to highlight the undeveloped research area of Corporate Social Responsibility focusing on the extent the CSR initiatives influence the consumers. Firstly, we wanted to elaborate the notion of CSR as a concept and tool that has been evolved through the decades. We observed a lack of a leading term in the literature and that CSR is being used as an idea that covers a variety of actions and suggested behavior. Moreover, we debated the difficulty in tracing the socially responsible business and discussed briefly the CSR evolution in Greece where CSR is used as an impulse that adopts all relative theories.

Thereafter, we highlighted the area that the title of this paper indicated. What the relation between CSR and the consumers is. We reviewed past studies on this research field and realized that contradictory findings exist. There is research evidence proving that consumers really care about CSR initiatives when purchasing but at the same time other studies undermine such positive relation. Thus, the title’s question is hard to be answered with a straightforward way and we proved theories suggesting that there is a lack of consensus on the way the public appreciates CSR and on the way CSR influence purchasing decisions. Thereafter we presented briefly some findings of personal research in this field conducted as part of the Msc in Business and Community in the University of Bath noticing among others, according to our findings, that the purchasing decisions of the students would have been influenced if they had better knowledge about CSR issues. It is important to notice that the development of CSR does not equally occur around the globe and so the value of
worldwide percentages in general and not for each country in particular is questionable.

Ensuant to the above, we presented briefly some relative findings from the few studies that focus on the way Greek public deals with CSR issues. It is notable that Greek citizens-consumers make progress regarding their sensitivity and their reactions to CSR related topics. The relation between Greek public and CSR and especially the extent that CSR initiatives influence purchasing decisions has not been studied in an adequate way, offering space and incentives for further research. CSR would play an empowered role in the new governance models in Greek and European level so new studies in this field are needed in order to understand its dynamics.

References

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