

## Socially responsible consumption in Morocco: an exploratory study

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**Abstract:** The rise of ethical, social, and ecological concerns has emerged as a significant consumer trend in recent decades. Individuals are increasingly incorporating non-economic, ethical considerations into their purchasing decisions, as evidenced by the popularity of fair trade and organic products. Consumers now pay greater attention to a company's behavior and product manufacturing processes. This trend has led to actions such as boycotting companies with irresponsible practices and refraining from buying products linked to unfavorable political stances. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of socially responsible consumption (SRC).

This article aims to define the SRC concept's parameters and develop a SRC measurement scale tailored to the Moroccan context. The first section explores SRC-related aspects and summarizes prior work in this domain. The subsequent section focuses on constructing the SRC measurement scale, discussing reliability outcomes and the impact of socio-demographic factors on consumer behavior. The article concludes by discussing the findings and outlining potential avenues for future research.

**Keywords:** socially responsible consumption, ethics, measurement scale.

### 1. Introduction

The rise of ethical, social and ecological concerns is undoubtedly one of the most significant consumer trends of recent decades. Indeed, individuals are increasingly influenced by non-economic, ethical criteria in their purchasing behavior (Burke, Milberg, Smith 1993, Dowell, Goldfrab, Griffith 1998, Thøgersen 2000).

The success of fair trade and organic farming is tangible proof that consumers are increasingly attentive to the behaviour of companies and the way in which the products they buy are manufactured. Boycotting companies because of irresponsible actions, or refusing to buy products from countries whose political positions they disapprove of, show that consumers are taking into account the public consequences of their purchases in order to bring about change in society. This brings us directly back to the concept of socially responsible consumption (SRP). Apart from the research carried out by Webster (1975) and Roberts (1995), however, few studies have focused on this form of consumption. Most have focused on fair trade, organic consumption, green consumption, ethical consumption and corporate social and ecological behavior.

Roberts (1995) breaks down SRC into two dimensions: ecological and environmental. Crane (2001), in his work on ethical consumption, identified four factors that can influence the consumer:

Product characteristics

Company behavior

The way it is sold

The product's country of origin

In this article, we attempt to delimit the contours of the SRC concept, and to construct a SRC measurement scale adapted to the Moroccan context.

The first part of this article will examine the aspects linked to SRC and summarize the work on this theme. The second part will be devoted to the different stages in the construction of a SRC measurement scale, the results relating to reliability, and the influence of socio-demographic variables on consumer behavior. We conclude with a discussion of the results obtained and future research prospects.

### II. Literature Review

In this section, we will attempt to clarify the concept of SRC, adopting a definition from among those proposed by leading authors, before reviewing the dimensions linked to this concept.

### **1. Defining socially responsible consumption : a difficult birth**

Since the work of Anderson and Cunningham in 1972 and Webster in 1975, the notion of socially responsible consumption has evolved in line with consumer concerns. Thus, definitions are more or less focused on the environment or society (Lecompte, 2005; Webb, Mohr and Harris, 2007).

Webster (1975) was the first author to work specifically on the concept of SRC. His approach was inspired by sociological work on the social responsibility of individuals, in particular Berkowitz and Lutterman's social responsibility scale (1968). This corresponds to an individual's degree of involvement in his or her community. The socially responsible consumer is "a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his private consumption and tries to use his purchasing power to bring about changes in society" (Webster, 1975). Subsequent measurement scales (Anderson and Cunningham, 1972, Webster, 1975, Belch, 1979 Belch 1982, Antil, 1984) are criticized for reducing SRC behavior to a single concern, namely that of the environment.

Roberts (1995) first introduced the social aspect into the measurement of responsible consumption. He reflected the notion of good-seeking in purchasing behaviour. Roberts' (1995) scale, which is probably the most reliable tool ever built to measure SRC, is made up of two dimensions: an environmental factor and a social factor. According to Roberts, the socially responsible consumer

"purchases goods or services that they perceive as having a positive impact on their environment, and uses their purchasing power to express their social concerns". Finally, in the same vein as the work of Webster (1975) and Roberts (1995), a broad vision of SRC can be adopted:

"the purchase of products and services perceived as having a positive (or less bad) impact on the consumer's entourage (understood in the broadest sense) and/or as the use of purchasing power to express social or environmental concerns" (Lecompte, Valette-Florence, 2004).

For their part, Webb, Mohr and Harris (2007) take a broader view of consumption, taking into account all the practices isolated by Heilbrunn (2005): sourcing, use and disposal. These authors define a socially responsible consumer as "a person who bases his or her approach, use and disposal of products on a desire to eliminate any negative effects and maximize the long-term beneficial impact on society".

However, more than 30 years after Webster's seminal work (1975), the concept of SRC has not yet reached "conceptual maturity". Researchers have focused their efforts more on green or ethical consumption. Ethics refers to the set of rules of action and values that function as norms in a society. To consume ethically would mean to consume in accordance with the principles of a society (Smith, 1990). Individuals are increasingly expressing their moral values in their consumption choices, with the aim of contributing to the social or environmental well-being of others (Engel and Blacwell, 1982). Alongside traditional economic choices, individuals are influenced by ethical criteria in their consumption (Burke, Milberg, Smith, 1993, Dowell, Goldfarb, Griffith, 1998, Thøgersen, 2000). Ethical consumption implies selfless motivation and behavior directed solely towards others (Holbrook, 1994 and Cooper-Martin and Holbrook, 1993). The egoism/altruism dimension is very dominant in distinguishing "good" from "evil". Ethically superior" consumption experiences, such as not buying products tested on animals, feeding the needy, recycling waste, are located in the altruistic/active quadrant. Ethical consumption would be altruistic and rather active. Conversely, "unethical" consumption would be irresponsible and selfish.

Smith (1996) rejects Holbrook's (1994) conception of ethical consumption as disinterested. However, many consumer behaviors have ethical connotations, without affecting the well-being of those around the consumer: alcohol consumption, condoms (Lecompte, Valette-Florence, 2004). The moral stakes for the individual do not necessarily have negative effects on society.

The field of ethics goes beyond that of SRC, whereas every act of SRC is first and foremost ethical: seeking to protect the interests of those around us is in line with the expectations of our society.

### **2. The different dimensions of SRC**

In this section, we present the different measurement scales that have been developed to measure SRC. Building on the work of Smith (1990), Crane (2001) bases his analysis on Levitt's (1980) augmented product theory. This postulates that there are different levels of analysis for a product: the product expected by the consumer, corresponding to a basket of tangible attributes, and the augmented product, including all the services and benefits offered to consumers. Taking this approach, ethical considerations are ethical augmentations of the product. Crane (2001) discusses the four possible levels of ethical augmentation: product, marketing, organization, country of origin: an ethical augmentation at the product level corresponds to the product's potential to bring "good" or "evil" to the consumer or those around him. Fair trade products fall into this category.

An increase at marketing level corresponds to ethical considerations regarding the way in which the product is marketed. The case of "promotions partages" is a typical example of a socially responsible increase at the marketing level, where the price increase is donated to a cause (Thiery, 1996, Thiery-Seror, 2000).

Organizational behavior: consumers are more likely to punish companies that fail to live up to their expectations, rather than reward those that behave ethically. Country of origin: citizen consumers prefer to buy a product made in their own country.

Crane's analytical framework can be transposed to the case of SRC. Thus, the "socially responsible" aspect influences a product in 4 ways: the product's capacity to do good or harm to society, the way it is sold, the behavior of the company that made it, and its geographical origin (Lecompte, Valette-Florence, 2004).

Using a qualitative approach, Lecompte (2005) identifies five dimensions:

(1) corporate behavior: this involves

"Refusing to buy from companies whose behavior is deemed irresponsible".

(2) the purchase of sharing products: this involves buying products for which "part of the price will be donated to a good cause".

(3) support for small shops: "don't buy everything in the supermarkets, and support small shops".

(4) taking into account the geographical origin of products: this means "giving preference to products from our own community".

(5) reducing the volume of consumption: "consumers avoid 'over-consumption' and try to do things themselves as much as possible".

Webb, Mohr and Harris (2007) adopt an approach similar to that of Lecompte (2005) to construct a measure of socially responsible consumption. However, they identify a much broader conception of consumption. In addition to taking corporate social responsibility into account in the decision-making process, these authors add recycling behaviors and environmentally-friendly consumption patterns, such as using public transport or favoring non-polluting products.

### III. Methodology and Results

In this section, we first describe the steps involved in constructing the measurement scale, and the final version adopted following exploratory analyses. Secondly, on the basis of factorial analyses, we present the results of the purification of the measurement scale, which we will finally submit to a reliability test.

#### 1. Building the scale

We have followed the steps recommended by Churchill's paradigm (1979) to construct our measurement scale. Churchill developed a methodological approach that integrates knowledge of measurement theory and techniques for improving it into a systematic procedure. This approach makes it possible to rigorously construct multi-scale questionnaire-type measurement instruments (Benraiss L & Peretti, J.M. 2001).

In order to position ourselves in relation to previous research, we have adopted the SRC definition (Lecompte 2005): the purchase of products and services perceived as having a positive or less bad impact on the consumer's entourage and/or as the use of purchasing power to express social and environmental concerns.

##### 1.1. Item generation

The second stage of Churchill's paradigm consists in generating items relating to the defined concept. We conducted a series of semi-directive interviews with a sample of 9 consumers, aged between 30 and 55, made up of 5 men and 4 women, with different profiles (age, CSP, religion...). The average length of the interviews was 90 minutes.

little known in Morocco, part of the interview was devoted to explaining the concepts. This involved answering the question of what it means to be a socially responsible consumer, listing SRC practices and the reasons for practice/non-practice. For uninspired respondents, we proposed several SRC opportunities.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full, taking into account the anonymity of the respondents.

This series of 9 interviews seemed sufficient, given the saturation effect (answers became redundant). The analysis was carried out manually, and all the themes covered are described as follows:

- Consider product origin.
- Take into account staff conditions and inter-venants in production.
- Consideration of subsequent product use.
- The possibility of recycling the product.
- Encourage local products.
- Encourage regional products.

- Buy products with recyclable packaging.
- Buy from local grocery stores.
- Save local businesses.
- Avoid buying from multinationals; buy domestic instead.
- Buy from companies that don't pollute.
- Buy from companies that participate in charitable causes.
- Buy from companies that devote a portion of their profits to social and environmental development, and to sending children to school.
- Do not buy from companies that do not respect wage conditions.
- Support local businesses through your purchases.
- Buy UNICEF greeting cards.
- Do not buy from countries whose political regime you condemn (Israel).
- Buy organic products.
- Reduce consumption volume.
- Do not buy expensive jewelry or fashion products.
- Buy in accordance with the Muslim religion.
- Consume in moderation, as advised by the is- lam, and don't waste too much.
- Buy fair trade products.
- Buy products where part of the price goes to a good cause/developing countries.
- Don't buy products from companies that use child labor.
- Invest in ethical funds.
- Don't buy everything from the big chain stores.

In the absence of research on SRC in Morocco, the literature review provided us with other items, notably those cited by Lecompte (2005). The religious dimension, by way of example, completes the picture. From an academic point of view, several authors present religion as a founding element and one of the essential specificities of the fields of Business and Society and Business Ethics (Pasquero 1995; Epstein 2002; Pasquero 2005).

In all, we were able to develop 56 items, which we submitted to 3 independent experts for assessment, to ensure that their content was valid. Following their recommendations, we withdrew 18 items deemed unclear or not corresponding to socially responsible consumption behaviors, leaving us with 38 items.

## 1.2. Data collection

Our questionnaire was administered directly to a convenience sample of 180 individuals over a period of two and a half months, while respecting the diversity of age, gender, place of residence, socio-professional category and religion. Only 115 questionnaires were returned, of which 15 were unusable. We therefore selected a sample of 100 older people (65% over 30), 58% male and 42% female. The majority (86%) live in cities with populations of over 100,000, and 51% are couples with children.

## 2. Results

With the help of SPSS Version 20.0 data processing software, exploratory principal component analysis with Promax rotation on the 38 selected items enabled us to refine our measurement scale by retaining only those items with a factor weight greater than 0,5.

### 2.1. SRC dimensions:

After a series of factorial analyses and by exploiting the eigenvalue graph, we retained 17 items representing 5 dimensions and explaining 65.27% of the total variance.

The items retained are shown in Table 1.

	Variance explained	Cronbach's Alpha
Q18 .dans mes achats, je privilégie les produits fabriqués au Maroc Q16.j'investis (investirais) dans des entreprises marocaines, plutôt que dans des entreprise étrangères	<b>0.56</b>	<b>0.80</b>
Q22.quand j'ai le choix entre un produit marocain et un produit fabriqué ailleurs dans le monde, je choisis le produit marocain		
Q15.j'achète de préférence des habits fabriqués au Maroc		
Q14.uand j'ai le choix, j'essaie d'acheter des produits fabriqués dans ma région		

Q28.I refuse to buy from a company that lays people off while it is still making a profit.	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.77</b>
Q33.I try not to buy from companies that have disrespectful practices towards their employees.		
Q38.I try not to buy from companies that pollute heavily Q.31.I try not to buy from companies that make children work		
Q34.I give my support through my purchases to companies or retailers known for their ecological commitment.		
Q6.I buy products where part of the price is donated to a humanitarian cause.	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.70</b>
Q30.I buy fair trade products (products that guarantee a decent standard of living for small producers in southern countries).		
Q13.I buy products whose proceeds go to developing countries		
Q3.I buy from small shops (bakery, butcher's, grocer's) as often as possible.	<b>0.78</b>	<b>0.73</b>
Q5.I support my local shopkeepers through my purchases		
Q19.I try to limit my consumption to what I really need	<b>0.72</b>	<b>0.60</b>
Q11.in general, I try not to consume too much		
Total	<b>0.65</b>	<b>0.83</b>

Table1: Dimensions of SRC

The first factor corresponds to purchasing according to the geographical origin of the product. It concerns the preference for Moroccan over foreign products, and for regional over national products. The second factor corresponds to purchases based on company behavior. It's not just a question of refusing to buy from companies that use child labor or have disrespectful practices towards employees or the environment, but also of buying from ecologically committed companies. Factor 3 represents purchases linked to a good cause, such as supporting fair trade and buying from third-world countries. Factor 4 represents the idea of reviving local shops in response to the proliferation of superstores. The final factor is about reducing the volume of consumption to what is necessary.

We thus find the 5 dimensions identified by Lecompte (2006), but with different degrees of importance. In the case of France, corporate behavior purchases come first, followed by purchases linked to a good cause.

The reliability of the scale was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This reached a value of 0.83 for all items. All the coefficients were above 0.70, except for the consumption reduction coefficient, which was around 0.60, allowing us to postulate good reliability for our scale. (See Table 1).

## 2.2. Socio-demographic determinants

The process of constructing a measurement scale includes its operationalization. The literature has repeatedly tested the influence of socio-demographic variables on consumer behaviour with regard to SRC.

### Gender and SRC

In the work of Roberts (1996), Webster (1975) and F. Lecompte (2006), socially responsible consumers are more likely to be women than men.

In our case, a comparison of average SRB scores leads us to conclude that men are slightly more socially responsible than women: is SRB in Morocco primarily a male affair? (Table 3).

### Age and SRC

The results of previous research do not all agree on the effect of age on SRC. For some, they are old (Roberts 1996, Lecompte 2006), for others they are rather young or middle-aged (Anderson and Cunningham 1972).

A comparison of the averages revealed higher SRC scores for the older group. This suggests that older people have higher SRB intentions than younger people.

### Marital status and SRC

The work of Lecompte (2006) has shown that having children has a positive influence on SRC. The results of the comparison of means confirm this proposition. (Table 5).

With regard to CSP category, we were unable to verify its effect on SRC due to a lack of homogeneity in the sample.

### Discussion:

The literature review and the semi-structured interviews revealed that SRC cannot be segmented according to the two dimensions, ecological and social, proposed by Roberts (1996). Following on from the work of Lecompte (2006), we were able to construct a scale for measuring SRC, divided into 5 dimensions:

- Preference for regional/Moroccan products.
- Refusal to buy from companies deemed irresponsible.
- Buying products that support a good cause.
- Buying from small shops
- Reducing consumption volume

Our results converge with those of Lecompte (2006). However, they differ, in the case of SRC in Morocco, on two levels:

For the Moroccan consumer, regional/Moroccan purchasing is the determining factor, followed by purchasing according to corporate behavior. Curiously, Moroccan consumers seem to be less sensitive than Moroccan consumers to the practice of SRC.

### Conclusion

The results of this research confirm the work carried out on a sample of French consumers. SRC is not just a matter of buying according to the company's com- portment, a theme that has dominated the research, but has several facets: preference for local/regional products, buying to support a good cause, buying from small shops and reducing the volume of consumption.

Our work has enabled us to conclude that Moroccan consumers are very sensitive to the origin of the product, and therefore prefer regional and national products to foreign ones. In addition, they will not hesitate to refuse to buy from companies that lay off employees or are disrespectful of the environment. On the other hand, they will be ready to buy from those who are ecologically committed.

Moroccan consumers are also sensitive to products where the money goes to a humanitarian cause, and to fair trade products. Aware of the importance of local commerce, they are ready to support small shops against the proliferation of superstores.

To preserve natural resources and reduce pollution, Moroccan consumers tend to limit their consumption to what is necessary. Companies wishing to appeal to socially responsible consumers will need to direct their marketing to individuals who are more likely to be male, of advanced age, live in couples with children, and showcase their made-in-Morocco products.

Our study suffers from a number of limitations, and at the same time opens up several avenues for future research. Indeed, our measurement scale needs to be tested on a representative sample of the Moroccan population, in order to ensure its external validity. The results concerning the effect of socio-demographic variables, such as gender, age and CSP, also need to be operationalized to lead to the establishment of a typology of the Moroccan consumer in terms of SRC.

It seems to us that refining the notion of religiosity on the one hand, and its influence on SRC on the other, represents a fruitful avenue of research.

Finally, our study presents the classic social desirability bias associated with the nature of work on the gap between intention and action.

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