

The impact of corporate social responsibility on consumer brand engagement and purchase intention at fashion retailers

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Abstract

Consumers have demonstrated new ways of engaging with fashion retailers and experiencing their brand values. This research aims to understand better how fashion consumers form their purchase intentions, by exploring how their expectations about corporate social responsibility influence consumer brand engagement and purchase intention. The research comprises two studies, using different methodologies. The first study is quantitative; it involved 1296 individuals and the results were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The second study is qualitative and utilizes expert opinions from the fashion industry; it seeks to derive managerial and practical implications from the findings of the first study. The results show that corporate social responsibility influences the purchase intention of fashion consumers, but mainly through brand engagement. Consequently, fashion companies should focus on building consumer trust in the sustainability initiatives of brands, including by utilizing local suppliers.

KEYWORDS

consumer brand engagement, corporate social responsibility, CSR, fashion, purchase intention, retailer

1 | INTRODUCTION

Although many studies have examined the influence of consumer brand engagement and purchase intention, few have addressed the impact of social responsibility on the relationship between these two concepts (Malodia et al., 2022). Previous studies have shown that corporate social responsibility contributes to an overall positive evaluation of the organization (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al., 2017). Other positive factors include consumer attitudes and behavior towards the company and its brands, brand image, and loyalty (Cuesta-Valiño, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, Núñez-Barriopedro, 2021). However, most research has focused on one or two dimensions of

corporate social responsibility (Pomeroy, 2017). There is, then, a gap: no work has examined the impacts of corporate social responsibility in a comprehensive global framework in such a way as to clarify its influence on consumers' purchase intention. As a result, little attention has been paid to the construction of corporate social responsibility and consumer brand engagement with the intention of identifying the actions required for developing a consumer-responsible brand engagement strategy.

Therefore, we need to broaden our understanding of the perceived dimensions of corporate social responsibility and their correlation with factors that impact consumer brand engagement and purchase intentions among fashion consumers. The main objective of

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this study is to examine the influence of the four dimensions of corporate social responsibility—economic, ethical, legal, and discretionary—on the relationship between consumer brand engagement and purchase intentions in the fashion sector.

To address this gap, we analyze the role of corporate social responsibility in a purchase intention influence model. Such models often study variables strategically and cannot therefore detail the possible actions required for the intended results. In this research, the dimensions of corporate social responsibility and consumer brand engagement are developed to offer a better understanding of how purchase intention is influenced. Here we formulate the following research question:

How can we be sure that corporate social responsibility will achieve consumer engagement in the fashion sector, leading to higher levels of purchase intention?

To achieve this, we designed a two-part research study aimed at understanding how to increase purchase intention through responsible consumer brand engagement by the company. First, we conducted an empirical study ($n = 1296$; Table 2) and used a partial least squares (PLSs) structural equation model to explore the importance of the dimensions in the variables that affect corporate social responsibility and consumer brand engagement and their influence on purchase intention. Then, we conducted a qualitative study ($n = 20$; Appendix A) focused on identifying the operational actions that can positively affect the consumer decision-making processes that lead to engagement with a brand and make for responsible purchase intentions.

The results confirm implicit positive relationships in the conceptual model that underlies the research. We also identified the main variables that influence the ultimate goal of using responsible consumer brand engagement to market fashion company products effectively. Our qualitative study then offers an enhanced understanding of the processes and practical actions needed to implement the strategy and carry out the proposed actions. We contribute new theoretical knowledge of the factors influencing consumer purchase intentions through responsible consumer brand engagement, and we clarify the multidimensional concepts of consumer brand engagement and corporate social responsibility. We also propose a framework for the operational application of appropriate actions to achieve those purchase intentions.

The article is organized as follows. First, we define our conceptual framework and research model and present the methodology used to test the hypotheses. Next, we present and discuss the results, and conclude by outlining the contributions and limitations of the work presented here and suggesting avenues for future research.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Corporate social responsibility

The first step is to understand how corporate social responsibility has been conceptualized. This has varied with authors' views of the role of

business in society (Agudelo et al., 2019). In contemporary definitions, the strategic significance of corporate social responsibility is evident when it becomes seamlessly integrated into a company's mission, vision, and organizational principles (Arco-Castro et al., 2020).

The first of two broad theoretical strands that have contributed to our understanding of corporate responsibility is stakeholder theory. It suggests that corporate activities related to social responsibility impact not only primary stakeholders but also other stakeholders (Invernizzi et al., 2022; Ramlugun & Raboute, 2015). Corporate social responsibility is defined as “the voluntary allocation of corporate resources to enhance social well-being, serving as a mechanism to foster positive relationships with key stakeholders” (Barnett, 2007, p. 801). One of the main stakeholder groups is the customers, who are susceptible to corporate social responsibility initiatives because, in making their purchasing decisions, they are increasingly influenced by the adoption of corporate social responsibility initiatives by brands (Ndasi et al., 2022; Sen et al., 2016).

The second significant body of relevant research has linked social responsibility to the integration of marketing activities with a social focus. These activities encompass environmental conservation, community investment, resource preservation, and altruistic contributions (Nejati et al., 2017). Similarly, González-Ramos et al. (2023) propose a model that includes three dimensions: economic (related to product marketing), social (ethical conduct within and outside the organization), and ecological (encompassing responsible behavior towards the environment). Another noteworthy contribution is Carroll's model (Carroll, 1979, 1991; Carroll & Brown, 2018), which delineates four dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic.

For Maignan (2001) and Park et al. (2014), companies are socially responsible to the extent that they assume four types of responsibility towards their stakeholders: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic. We will use this formulation in presenting our hypotheses below.

2.2 | Creating lasting brand connections: Engaging with consumers

The basis of the current work is the exploration of the three-stage linear process: (i) corporate social responsibility; (ii) brand engagement; (iii) purchase intentions. The second stage—helping to improve communication with customers, guiding them through the buying process, and fostering loyalty—has gained significance in recent times. In this area, the concept of consumer brand engagement relates to relationship marketing, which refers to the cognitive, affective, behavioral and co-creative components of the consumer's positive relationship with the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014). In the last decade, this concept has attracted the attention of practitioners and of academics interested in advancing understanding of brands and consumers (Algharabat et al., 2020). Some authors have shown that experiential relationships can be created through consumer brand engagement activities (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Three distinct factors were employed, and the effectiveness of their measurement

has been demonstrated in multiple studies yielding comparable outcomes (Ferreira et al., 2020).

However, next, to grasp the importance of consumer brand engagement, it is necessary to understand what engagement represents in academic research, and here there is a problem. For many authors, it represents a paradigm change (Algharabat et al., 2020), but the unanimity in the literature on the paradigmatic character of the concept of engagement is not reflected in any analysis of the concept's origin. Some authors have argued that engagement needs to be viewed from the consumer's perspective (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Others have concluded that it is co-created, involving both the company and its consumers (Harrigan et al., 2018). This disagreement about the origins of engagement is reflected in disagreement on its constituent dimensions. Thus, for some authors it is a unidimensional concept while for others it is multidimensional, comprising at least the social, cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (for some, even more) (Lourenço et al., 2022).

2.3 | Purchase intention

One of the primary objectives of this study is to portray, via a thorough examination of the pertinent literature, the factors influencing consumers' purchase intentions. Most previous studies have concentrated on the impact of consumer characteristics on purchase intention, the merchant and the product or type of products, and have used purchase intentions to predict sales (Chan et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, several authors have shown how customers' favorable emotions towards a product brand contribute to the formation of purchase intentions. Cuesta-Valino, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, Sierra-Fernandez, et al. (2021) suggest that when a brand successfully captures customers' attention and interest, it can be referred to as an innovation strategy. In developing countries, consumers rely on brands for their purchases, trusting that their expectations will be fulfilled.

3 | RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The first set of hypotheses is based on the four types of responsibility proposed by Park et al. (2014). They attempt to determine whether it is legitimate to assume this composition of corporate social responsibility.

The first element is economic responsibility: the firm's commitment to productivity, maximizing profitability and preserving economic wealth: that is, to be efficient and competitive (Carroll, 1979; Carroll & Brown, 2018; Sipilä et al., 2022). Firms are economic institutions that make products and services available to society to maximize profit (Carroll, 1991; Carroll & Brown, 2018). Thus, firms have economic obligations, and if they do not fulfil them, they cannot fulfil any other obligations (Carroll & Brown, 2018; Ramlugun & Raboute, 2015). The economic dimension of corporate social

responsibility is highly valued in the studies of Visser (2016). Based on the rationale outlined above, the first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a). Economic responsibility is a corporate social responsibility dimension.

The second element is legal responsibilities, which reflect the ethical principles encoded in law by society. More specifically, they encompass the foundational principles of fair and regulated exchange transactions as mandated by legislators. Legal corporate social responsibility entails compliance with laws governing consumer protection, privacy, health and safety, labor standards, and environmental stewardship (Ramlugun & Raboute, 2015). Recent studies argue that corporate social responsibility reporting is not just about financial data but communicates a variety of purposes to stakeholders (Invernizzi et al., 2022). Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1b (H1b). Legal responsibility is a corporate social responsibility dimension.

The third element, ethical responsibility, goes beyond the law. It entails upholding and safeguarding the moral rights of stakeholders, encompassing adherence to norms, standards, or expectations and thus demonstrating a commitment to meeting the needs of consumers, employees, shareholders, and society as a whole (Ramlugun & Raboute, 2015). Hence, ethical responsibility recognizes that a company's values and moral conduct must exceed legal requirements. Ethical responsibility, therefore, focuses on the 'voluntary commitment of business to public welfare' (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022).

The motivations for corporate social responsibility have been much questioned and debated. According to Amatulli et al. (2018), engagement in corporate social responsibility is associated with intrinsic motives, whereas Sipilä et al. (2022) argue that consumers ascribe extrinsic motives to corporate social responsibility engagement within the luxury industry (Hang et al., 2021).

Given such suspicions, organizations need to establish that their corporate social responsibility initiatives have evolved into a set of moral and ethical standards relevant to modern society, with ramifications for customer behavior and company performance (Grolleau et al., 2022). Consumers are interested in the authenticity of an organization's corporate social responsibility intentions. Therefore, companies should prioritize honesty and sincerity (Sen et al., 2016). Companies must ensure successful communication strategies if they want to convey their corporate social responsibility initiatives to the intended audience and foster ethical perceptions among consumers (Grolleau et al., 2022).

Importantly, consumers are inclined to make ethical choices that cost nothing in terms of price, quality, or convenience (Bianchi et al., 2019), which means that ethical responsibility becomes more advantageous in competitive markets. Based on these considerations, the following hypothesis is put forward:

Hypothesis 1c (H1c). Ethical responsibility is a corporate social responsibility dimension.

The fourth element can be regarded as discretionary: it comprises philanthropic activities promoting the welfare and development of society (Carroll, 1979, 1991; Gilal et al., 2021; Mickelsson et al., 2023). Philanthropically-motivated corporate social responsibility can satisfy people's needs—at all levels, from basic to self-fulfillment—and it can enhance the overall quality of life, contributing to increased happiness, fulfillment, benevolence, and a greater willingness to embrace universal values (Ogunmokun et al., 2021). In this way, companies that actively participate in such corporate social responsibility activities fulfil the role of responsible corporate citizens, aligning with the expectations set by society (Carroll, 1991; Ilyas et al., 2022).

Arguably, businesses should adjust their operations so as to meet social and environmental needs more comprehensively and even become activists, engaging in awareness campaigns, volunteering and donations. Companies should assume some philanthropic responsibilities in society (Ahn, 2021; Ramlugun & Raboute, 2015). After considering price and quality, consumers prioritize philanthropic giving as a significant attribute when making purchasing decisions (Gilal et al., 2021). Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1d (H1d). Philanthropic responsibility is a corporate social responsibility dimension.

We now turn to the link between corporate social responsibility and brand value. Corporate social responsibility positively impacts a company's brand value as perceived by consumers, according to the theoretical framework proposed by Maignan (2001). Therefore, companies that differentiate themselves by carrying out corporate social responsibility initiatives receive greater brand loyalty and enhanced customer engagement (Chuah et al., 2020). Thus, the overall perception of a company, which is influenced by its corporate social responsibility initiatives, affects the evaluation of its products (Sen et al., 2016).

Previous research has suggested that corporate social responsibility positively influences various factors, including purchase decisions, brand preferences, recommendations to others, and firm value (Apaydin et al., 2020; Sen et al., 2016). Hence, the next hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). Corporate social responsibility has a positive influence on consumer brand engagement.

Returning to the concept of consumer brand engagement, it is important to acknowledge that brands play a central role in this concept, with engagement being an integral part of the consumer-brand relationship. The literature review highlights the prominence of a three-dimensional approach and the utilization of scales derived from this theoretical framework (Pérez et al., 2022). Lourenço et al. (2022) explain that the theoretical discussion on the subject seems to

accept that three dimensions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) are the result of the generation of psychological conditions of interest, that is, internal and mental conditions (represented not by bodily reactions but by experienced personal states, difficult to describe and identify).

The first dimension analyzed and studied in the literature is the cognitive dimension. Some authors argue that every time consumers interact with a brand, cognitive stimuli are produced (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022). That is, consumers will constantly assimilate and accommodate cognitive stimuli.

The second dimension, the affective, seems to be a key element, since different emotional states arise during interactions with brands. For some authors, these emotional states show a relationship with the consumer's behavior (Hollebeek et al., 2021; Ndhlovu & Maree, 2022) and support the inclusion of a behavioral perspective. This approach, arguably, does not deny the emotional origin of this dimension in its relationship with the brand; on the contrary, it highlights the idea of a hierarchy of emotions that helps to build the dimension. Thus, emotions can produce more subtle primary emotional states, from which more intricate emotional states emerge (Loureiro et al., 2020).

Finally, the behavioral dimension manifests itself in the individual's external reactions and responses, because of the internal resources invested in relationships with brands. The literature has ascribed great importance to the behavioral dimension of consumer brand engagement, and more so to individual aspects than to the social (Hollebeek et al., 2021). Therefore, the literature analyzes the effort that consumers make to enjoy social situations in the process of maintaining a relationship with brands (Kwon & Kim, 2022). Therefore, it is possible to state the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a (H3a). Behavioral is a significant component of consumer brand engagement.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b). Cognitive is a significant component of consumer brand engagement.

Hypothesis 3c (H3c). Affective is a significant component of consumer brand engagement.

Moreira et al. (2017) developed a model that elucidates how sensory stimulation influences purchase intentions towards a brand. Their findings reveal that sensory stimulation positively affects brand experience and brand equity, which, in turn, positively impact purchase intentions for the specific brand. In a more recent study, Kim and Manoli (2022) investigated the association between brand engagement and brand love, and their combined influence on overall brand equity and purchase intention. They asserted that brand love, brand experience, overall brand equity, and purchase intention are interconnected. It is logical to assume that consumers are more inclined to purchase products with which they have a stronger engagement (Prentice & Loureiro, 2018).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated a direct positive relationship between customer engagement, loyalty, and purchase intention (Hollebeek et al., 2021; Prentice & Loureiro, 2018), and the level of consumer brand engagement has been found to correlate with brand success (Ghouse et al., 2022). Customers' intention to engage with a brand can, thus, directly influence their intention to purchase.

Based on the prior studies linking brand equity to purchase intention, the following hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). Consumer brand engagement has a positive influence on purchase intention.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the impact of corporate social responsibility practices on customers' purchase intentions, indicating a direct positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and purchase intention (Ahn, 2021).

Other research has shown that corporate social responsibility plays a partial mediating role in the association between green marketing awareness and purchase intentions. Similarly, the empirical evidence confirms the relationship between corporate social responsibility and purchase intention (Bianchi et al., 2019).

Based on the evidence of the association between corporate social responsibility and customers' purchase intentions, the following hypothesis is put forward:

Hypothesis 5 (H5). Corporate social responsibility has a positive influence on purchase intention.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual and theoretical model, and its corresponding hypotheses.

4 | METHODOLOGY

4.1 | Survey methodology (Study 1)

Study 1 is cross-sectional descriptive research utilizing primary data from a questionnaire completed by a representative sample of the Spanish population aged 16 to 64 years between May and August 2022. Here, 1296 valid questionnaires were collected, resulting in a sampling error of ±2.78% (with a 95.5% confidence interval assuming $p = q = 0.5$).

The development of the questionnaire incorporated insights from the literature review to enhance the validity of the measurement scales for the constructs. To ascertain the relevance of the items, the team conducted a focus group of nine participants in March 2022. The group included three professionals from fashion retail companies, three frequent fashion shoppers, and three researchers specializing in fashion retail. The findings from this qualitative research guided the process of refining and finalizing the questionnaire.

In April 2022, the questionnaire was pre-tested on a representative sample of the Spanish population. The sample consisted of 36 individuals aged between 16 and 64 years, and the distribution of participants by gender and age reflected the proportions of the Spanish population. The objective of the pretest was to assess the adequacy of the measurement scales. Following this process, typographical errors were rectified and all the questions were validated. Subsequently, the final version of the questionnaire was launched on major social networks between May and August 2022, utilizing a discretionary non-probabilistic sampling approach based on quotas for gender and age.

The questionnaire consists of two main sections. The first captures the demographic characteristics and behaviors of the

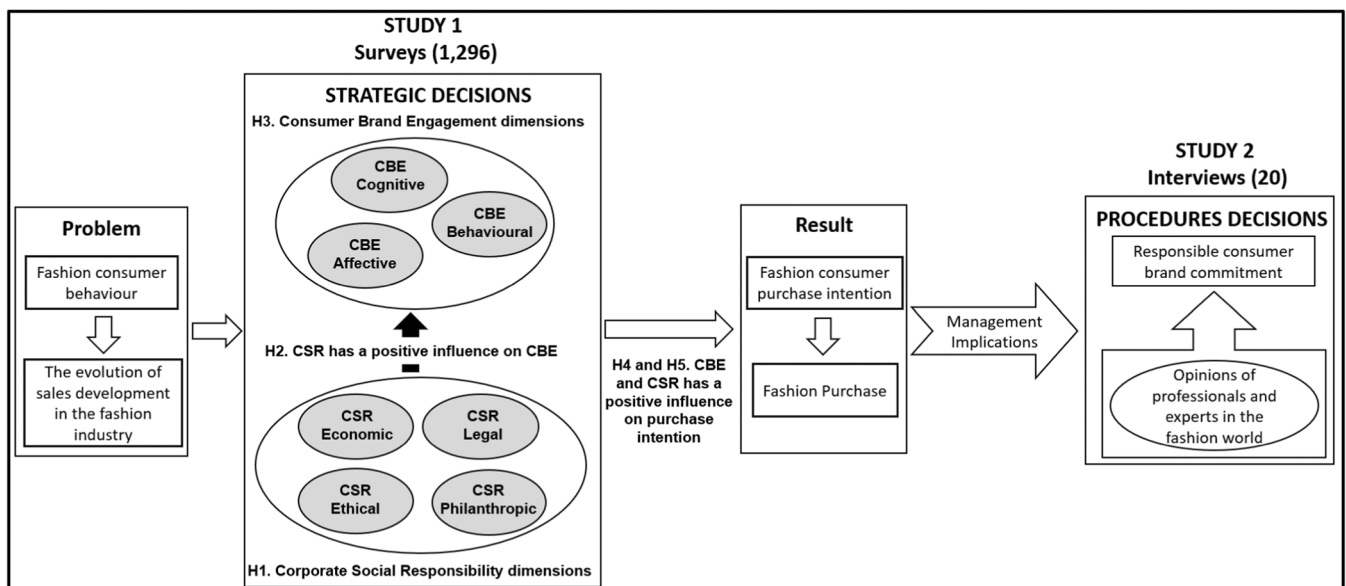


FIGURE 1 Theoretical model of the research.

respondents, and the second assesses the five dimensions of the proposed model using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("completely disagree") to 5 ("completely agree"). Initially, the questionnaire included 37 items, but the items were filtered through data analysis, resulting in a final set of 32 items. The origin of the scales and their corresponding references can be found in Table 1 and Appendix B.

4.2 | Characteristics of the sample

The study's 1296 participants represent a diverse sample of the Spanish population in terms of gender and age. Forty-five percent are male and 55% female. The age distribution was as follows: 9% 15–19 years, 44% 20–39 years, 30% 40–54 years, and 17% 55–64 years. Regarding educational attainment, 9% had completed elementary schooling, 34% had completed secondary school, and 57% had attended tertiary education (Table 2).

4.3 | Qualitative study (Study 2)

Once the results of the model in Hypotheses 2 and 4 had been established, the qualitative study—Study 2—was conducted, focusing on how various actions on consumer brand engagement can be conducted responsibly (Casaló et al., 2017). It obtained more detailed information from fashion professionals involved in decision-making, to identify how those actions can be operationalized.

The interview approach adopted is based on the results obtained in Study 1 and the analysis of the observed variables, alternatives and their relationships. We conducted 40 min interviews with 20 participants (see Appendix A for more details) and then manually coded each interview using Bardin's (2013) method (Figure 1).

5 | RESULTS

5.1 | Assessing the measurement model: Reliability and validity analysis

The interrelationships between variables and test theoretical constructs and concepts were examined using structural equation modeling (SEM). Specifically, the PLS was used to estimate the model proposed, because it is especially useful when working with questionnaires, where there are usually non-normal distributions, and it is crucial not to employ variable transformations that could introduce challenges in interpreting the model. Recently, evaluations of models have been carried out that allow confirmation of the investigations evaluated with the PLS-SEM model. Hubona et al. (2021) introduced the terms "measurement quality confirmation method" (MCMQ) and "partial least squares confirmatory composite analysis" (PLS-CCA). To validate the confirmation

objectives of multi-item measurement confirmation in PLS-SEM, the team decided to apply stepwise CCA to the results of the analysis. The results obtained from the loadings within the different latent variables show values above 0.707, except for one of the observed variables of the economic dimension of corporate social responsibility (with a value of 0.69, which is near the predetermined threshold). The other 31 items (of the 32) showed loadings results (Table 1) higher than 0.707 (Hair et al., 2011). The 32 final items remained after eliminating four items from the original scale (two cognitive and two behavioral). The assessment of internal consistency employs Cronbach's α , composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). In the first two cases, the coefficients surpass the threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory levels of internal consistency. For the AVE, values ≥ 0.5 are recommended, which is exactly what we have in these results. While AVE is commonly utilized for evaluating discriminant validity, Heterotrait–Monotrait Correlations are frequently employed in the PLS-SEM model for the same purpose, because they offer several advantages. To obtain this value, a bootstrap routine was run (10,000 bootstrap samples in this calculation) and all the coefficients of the model show a value lower than 0.9 (which is the recommended value).

It is costly and difficult to separate the sources of the independent and dependent variable measures to mitigate the possible influence of common method variance. Therefore, we applied several procedural remedies drawn from the existing literature. In formulating the questions in the survey, we first ensured the separation of the measures of the variables by including the circumstances that refer to the measures of the independent and dependent variables. Second, we defined unknown terms, avoiding vague concepts and complicated and ambiguous syntax. Finally, we protected the respondents' anonymity in order to minimize any possible evaluation apprehension. All these procedures help minimize the bias of the method in the reporting or response-editing phase (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In PLS-SEM, common method bias (CMB) is detected through a comprehensive collinearity assessment approach (Kock, 2015). The VIF values should be below the threshold of 3.3 (Hair et al., 2017; Kock, 2015) to ensure that the proposed model contains no CMB. Our findings indicate that the model remains unaffected by CMB.

The last step in analyzing confirmatory validity is to test the model's predictive validity. With this aim in mind, Shmueli et al. (2016) developed an algorithm called PLS predict. The Q^2 indicates whether a model exhibits predictive relevance. Q^2 values greater than zero indicate successful reconstruction of values and demonstrate the model's predictive relevance. The results of the model confirm its predictive validity for all variables.

Lastly, Henseler et al. (2014) proposed the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) as a measure of goodness-of-fit for PLS-SEM. There is ongoing discussion of its representation as a fit measure, but values below 0.10 are generally regarded as indicative of a good model fit. In the case of our model, the SRMR result is 0.08, indicating a highly satisfactory model fit.

TABLE 1 Scales of the model's constructors, factor loading, reliability, and validity.

	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	AVE	Loading	Sources of adoption
Economic corporate social responsibility					
Eco1	0.79	0.80	0.62	0.83	Podnar and Golob (2007); Perez and Rodríguez-del-Bosque (2015); Ramlugun and Raboute (2015)
Eco2				0.86	
Eco3				0.75	
Eco4				0.69	
Legal corporate social responsibility					
Leg1	0.86	0.86	0.78	0.85	Podnar and Golob (2007); Ramlugun and Raboute (2015); Pomeroy (2017)
Leg2				0.90	
Leg3				0.90	
Ethical corporate social responsibility					
Eth1	0.85	0.86	0.70	0.84	Podnar and Golob (2007); Ramlugun and Raboute (2015)
Eth2				0.87	
Eth3				0.85	
Eth4				0.78	
Philanthropic corporate social responsibility					
Phi1	0.90	0.90	0.67	0.79	Podnar and Golob (2007); Ramlugun and Raboute (2015)
Phi2				0.83	
Phi3				0.81	
Phi4				0.84	
Phi5				0.80	
Phi6				0.83	
Behavioral consumer brand engagement					
Beh1	0.71	0.71	0.61	0.73	Hollebeek et al. (2014); Dwivedi (2015); Fernandes and Moreira (2019)
Beh2				0.78	
Beh3				0.82	
Cognitive consumer brand engagement					
Cog1	0.80	0.80	0.72	0.83	Hollebeek et al. (2014); Dwivedi (2015); Fernandes and Moreira (2019); Ahn (2021)
Cog2				0.87	
Cog3				0.83	
Affective consumer brand engagement					
Aff1	0.91	0.91	0.74	0.86	Hollebeek et al. (2014); Dwivedi (2015); Fernandes and Moreira (2019); Ahn (2021)
Aff2				0.88	
Aff3				0.88	
Aff4				0.81	
Aff5				0.85	

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	AVE	Loading	Sources of adoption
Purchase intention					
Pur1	0.93	0.93	0.82	0.92	Duffett (2015)
Pur2				0.89	
Pur3				0.91	
Pur4				0.91	

Abbreviation: AVE, average variance extracted.

TABLE 2 Sample information.

	%	Total 1296
Gender		
Male	45.3	587
Female	54.7	709
Age (years)		
16–19	9.0	116
20–39	44.3	574
40–54	30.3	392
55–64	16.5	214
Level of studies		
Primary education	9.3	121
Secondary education	33.8	438
Tertiary education	56.9	737

5.2 | Direct effects with the PLSs approach

We assessed corporate social responsibility and consumer brand engagement as reflective second-order constructs. The above discussion on reliability and validity demonstrates the sound measurement of the model's components. It is also essential to analyze the loadings of the dimensions of the 2 s-order variables. As depicted in Tables 1 and 3, the indicators for corporate social responsibility—Economic (0.82), Legal (0.86), Ethical (0.90), and Philanthropic (0.88)—and for consumer brand engagement—Behavioral (0.77), Cognitive (0.81), and Affective (0.94)—suggest that they capture these variables effectively across all dimensions (refer to Table 1). Hence, Hypotheses H1 and H3, along with all subhypotheses, are supported and not rejected.

Collectively, the hypotheses propose a positive relationship between corporate social responsibility, consumer brand engagement, and purchase intention, and that this relationship is significant, positive, and meaningful. The influence values on consumer brand engagement (0.66) and purchase intention (0.18) underscore this notion. As a result, hypotheses H2 and H5 are not rejected. Regarding the relationship between consumer brand engagement

and purchase intention, the coefficient of 0.54 indicates a substantial positive influence of consumer brand engagement on intention. Thus, hypothesis H4 is not rejected.

To conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the results, it is valuable to examine not only the direct effects between variables but also the total and indirect effects. Among the observed values, particular attention should be given to the total influence of corporate social responsibility on purchase intention (0.54), which demonstrates a robust and positive coefficient, primarily mediated by the variable consumer brand engagement. Moreover, all loadings are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

5.3 | Qualitative study: Comments from respondents

Here we offer some of the most representative responses (verbatim) from the interviewees on their views and actions to promote the relationship between corporate social responsibility and consumer brand engagement.

About the commitment to more sustainable fashion brands: “There are shared visions and values that transcend just fashion and sometimes can generate a greater commitment, translated into loyalty, beyond retention” (R4) and “Consumers will feel more engaged with those firms that offer quality and design, ensuring that the main objective is to take care of the environment” (R11).

On making fashion brands more sustainable, the following recommendations are made, “Working with local suppliers and taking care to optimize processes” (R2) and “Care for the planet must be present at each and every stage of product creation” (R15). Consumers can recommend sustainable brands because “Consumers recommend a clothing brand just because it is sustainable” (R6) and “Due to their personal awareness and values, social influence, communication in social networks and participation in online communities” (R9).

Consumers may recommend sustainable brands because they “Work with promotions on social networks, keep track of what consumers post to reposted or retweeted” (R3) and “Awareness-raising and information campaigns about the benefits for the territories in which the companies are located” (R17).

TABLE 3 PLSs results.

Effects (hypotheses)	R ²	β	T statistics	p	Result
CSR → Economic CSR (H _{1a})	0.68	0.83	65.1	*	Supported
CSR → Legal CSR (H _{1b})	0.74	0.86	93.7	*	Supported
CSR → Ethical CSR (H _{1c})	0.81	0.90	135.0	*	Supported
CSR → Philanthropic CSR (H _{1d})	0.77	0.88	99.1	*	Supported
CSR → CBE (H ₂)	0.43	0.66	32.0	*	Supported
CBE → Behavioral CBE (H _{3a})	0.59	0.77	61.0	*	Supported
CBE → Cognitive CBE (H _{3b})	0.56	0.81	48.1	*	Supported
CBE → Affective CBE (H _{3c})	0.89	0.94	272.8	*	Supported
CBE → Purchase intention (H ₄)	0.46**	0.54	19.5	*	Supported
CSR → Purchase intention (H ₅)	0.46**	0.18	5.6	*	Supported

Note: **R-squared result of the relationship with CBE and CSR.

Abbreviations: β, path coefficient; CBE, Consumer Brand Engagement; CSR, Corporate social responsibility; PLS, partial least square.

*Significant at $p < 0.001$

On differentiating sustainable brands, “Commitment to sustainability and local commerce” is proposed (R5) and “They should communicate their values, as they already do. Identify themselves with a certification label to avoid greenwashing” (R7).

The analysis of the qualitative study provides some concrete actions and solutions for promoting purchase intention through consumer brand engagement.

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1 | Discussion

Although sustainability-based strategies are already in place in most organizations, and contribute to value creation (Invernizzi et al., 2022), little research has explored the influence of consumer brand engagement and its impact on purchase intent. In an industry such as fashion, companies need to understand the effects of corporate social responsibility on improving brand experience through engagement. Although the geographic scope of the sample is narrow, this research confirms that corporate social responsibility can play a pivotal role in improving consumer brand engagement and acquiring consumers with high purchasing potential. Other research conducted in other countries has reached similar conclusions (Park & Jiang, 2020).

Significantly for our thesis, though, the results also show that corporate social responsibility needs a mediator to achieve truly remarkable influence on consumers' purchasing intentions. Research in other countries has demonstrated a strong positive correlation between customer purchasing behavior and corporate activities related to social responsibility (Yeo et al., 2018). Hence, brands must adopt a sustainability-focused strategic approach, enabling enhanced customer experience and stronger brand affinity across both digital

and physical retail channels. The model proposed in this study highlights the importance of adopting a proactive and future-oriented strategic outlook in which companies strive to anticipate customer needs.

However, this study's second, qualitative, element has gone further by enhancing our understanding of how companies can operationalize the appropriate actions for implementing the strategy in terms of processes and concrete activities (Figure 1). Study 2's findings will be valuable decision-making resources for brand managers, retailers, and academics. To enhance customer experience and foster customer loyalty, organizations should manage corporate social responsibility effectively across all its dimensions (which these results have shown to be relevant) to influence the three elements of consumer brand engagement that the literature shows determine its formation (Hollebeek et al., 2021).

The results also indicate that affective experience plays a positive role in consumer engagement. Claffey and Brady (2019) also found these relationships in their research. The greater the level of happiness, stimulation, and autonomy experienced by the consumer, the stronger their affective experience in their relationship with the brand. Thus, customer experience also produces other previously studied benefits by improving consumer brand engagement, which benefits the company in several ways, such as the intention to make repeat purchases, willingness to recommend the service to others, and resistance to switching to competitors, all of which contribute to fostering customer loyalty.

6.2 | Theoretical implications

The current study sheds light on the evolving consumer landscape and the emerging retail values that marketers must consider when formulating organizational marketing strategies. In pursuit of this

objective, the theoretical framework of this study centers around the shifts in purchase intention trends, considering how these are influenced by consumer brand engagement and corporate social responsibility. The resulting theoretical implications coincide with the findings of other research conducted with samples from different countries (Kim & Manoli, 2022; Prentice & Loureiro, 2018). At the same time, however, there is a growing consumer preference for novel fashion brands, meaning that companies must develop strategies that appeal to these consumers. This paper, therefore, makes an original contribution by examining the role of corporate social responsibility as a determinant of consumer brand engagement within the fashion industry. Companies' corporate social responsibility efforts are rewarded when consumers (Hoang & Nguyen, 2020) display higher levels of consumer brand engagement (Algharabat et al., 2020).

Which dimensions turned out to be most impactful? Our findings show that the ethical dimension heads the list. This is consistent with the findings of Sen et al. (2016), who emphasize the importance of companies demonstrating sincerity and honesty in their corporate social responsibility initiatives. The second most influential is the philanthropic dimension, which again aligns with previous studies (Ramlugun & Raboute, 2015; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). This may be because in developed countries there are problems of inequality. The legal and economic dimensions share last place. Contrary to Ramlugun and Raboute (2015), consumers in the present model do not prioritize the economic dimension. Fashion consumers, it seems, are more socially oriented than economically oriented.

Perhaps our most significant contribution—in addition to confirming the generally accepted relationship between corporate social responsibility and the brand (Kim & Manoli, 2022)—is to demonstrate that corporate social responsibility plays a significant role as an antecedent of consumer brand engagement in influencing purchase intention. The findings highlight that engaging in socially responsible practices can foster trust and attachment to a company (Sen et al., 2016), so social responsibility can influence purchase intention (Hoang & Nguyen, 2020; Maignan, 2001). This work, therefore, increases our understanding of how perceptions of corporate social responsibility influence brand engagement and consequently the purchase intention of consumers in the fashion sector.

Our findings differ significantly from those of Visser (2016), who argued that economic responsibility is the primary responsibility in corporate social responsibility, followed by philanthropic, legal, and ethical responsibilities. This may be because Visser's work is studied, respectively, from the perspectives of Pakistan and Africa, where the economic environments are very different from those of Spain and other European countries.

6.3 | Managerial implications

The major central implication is that the main benefits of engagement should be made sustainable. It seems clear that organizations should

commit to sustainable brands, but this commitment should be based on shared visions and values that generate greater consumer commitment and loyalty (Pantano & Stylos, 2020). Companies should also ensure that they always address quality and design responsibly.

It is also recommended that fashion brands wishing to become more sustainable should use local suppliers. In addition, all production processes should be environmentally optimized, so that care for the planet is present at all stages of product creation and marketing (Cuesta-Valiño, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, Núñez-Barriopedro, 2021). The ultimate goal is for consumers to recommend these sustainable brands because their awareness and personal values coincide with those of the brand. Companies, therefore, need to be present on social networks, monitoring what consumers publish and conducting awareness and information campaigns (Han et al., 2019).

Finally, certification labels—declaring a commitment to sustainability, to local trade, and to communicating values—can help differentiate sustainable brands (Ogunmokun et al., 2021). Through these actions, fashion industry brands can generate value in relation to cognitive benefits (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al., 2020), affective benefits (Lai & Perminiene, 2020), and behavioral change (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2022). Building a robust brand is the most effective way of establishing and sustaining a significant competitive advantage.

6.4 | Social implications

This study enhances our comprehension of the impact of corporate social responsibility dimensions on consumer brand engagement. Specifically, the model highlights that the philanthropic dimension of corporate social responsibility strategies carries more weight than the economic dimension. This finding aligns with previous research that argues businesses should extend social marketing strategies beyond mere corporate social responsibility (Hoang & Nguyen, 2020). It facilitates the formulation of sustainability strategies within organizations, focusing on ethical brand values, to address the needs of all stakeholders in the value chain, including human capital, stakeholders, audits, consumers, and society as a whole (Cuesta-Valiño, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, Núñez-Barriopedro, 2021).

Prosocial marketing initiatives can be a market differentiation strategy, enhancing brand equity (Sipilä et al., 2022), influencing consumer purchases and producing other positive post-purchase consequences (Sen et al., 2016). When customers understand corporate social responsibility activities, brand recognition increases, and customer attitudes change, which in turn affects purchase intention (Algharabat et al., 2020).

Companies are increasingly incorporating corporate social responsibility programmes into their business strategies to generate benefits related to brand development (Hoang & Nguyen, 2020). Corporate social responsibility has been taken increasingly seriously in many companies across different countries and industries (Singh et al., 2008). Scholars and researchers have recognized corporate social responsibility as a crucial element for building brands in today's business environments and have found that corporate social

responsibility contributes significantly to brand loyalty, positive brand relationships, and perceived quality, ultimately enhancing brand equity (Guzmán & Davis, 2017).

6.5 | Limitations and future research

This paper aimed to study the role of corporate social responsibility in a framework that strives to enhance consumer brand engagement and, therefore purchase intention, in the fashion industry. While our study benefits from a broad and diverse sample, it is important to acknowledge a limitation with regard to its geographical scope, which is primarily centered on Spain. This restriction may impact the generalizability of our findings to the global context. The sample size within Spain allows for in-depth insights into local behaviors and trends, but cultural, economic, and regional variations could influence the applicability of our results to other regions or countries. Future research should consider expanding the geographical reach to enhance the external validity of our findings. It would also be desirable to extend the research to other industries: this would broaden the field of research and extend the model, including other consumer variables. A longitudinal study would also be valuable, using panel data from fashion companies that have implemented corporate social responsibility management strategies within their social marketing efforts. This would enable the assessment of the long-term impact of these strategies on brand loyalty.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX A

Tables A1 and A2.

TABLE A1 Detailed profiles of the respondents.

Respondents	Age	Years of experience in the fashion industry	Gender	Nationality
R1	56	30	Woman	Spanish
R2	48	20	Man	Spanish
R3	51	25	Woman	Spanish
R4	37	12	Woman	Chilean
R5	57	30	Man	Spanish
R6	55	30	Woman	Russian
R7	53	27	Man	Spanish
R8	46	20	Woman	Spanish
R9	39	15	Woman	Argentinian
R10	32	5	Man	Spanish
R11	41	18	Woman	Spanish
R12	40	15	Woman	French
R13	49	20	Man	Spanish
R14	27	8	Woman	Spanish
R15	49	20	Woman	Spanish
R16	55	30	Woman	Spanish
R17	50	28	Woman	Spanish
R18	53	5	Woman	Spanish
R19	51	21	Woman	Spanish
R20	48	11	Man	Spanish

Abbreviation: Experience, years of experience in the fashion industry.

TABLE A2 Emerging issues in brand engagement and their relationship to corporate social responsibility.

Themes	Respondents	Quotes
Engagement with the most sustainable fashion brands	R4, R9, R11	<p>R4: There are shared visions and values and that transcends just fashion and sometimes can generate a greater commitment, translated into loyalty, beyond retention.</p> <p>R9: Consumers may feel more committed to sustainable fashion brands due to environmental awareness, social responsibility, transparency and trust, as well as identification and belonging to communities with similar values. By choosing brands that align with their personal values, consumers find greater meaning and purpose in their purchasing decisions.</p> <p>R11: Consumers will feel more engaged with those firms that offer quality and design, ensuring that the main objective is to take care of the environment.</p>
Turn fashion brands into more sustainable brands	R2, R7, R15	<p>R2: Working with local suppliers and taking care to optimize processes.</p> <p>R7: Use recycled materials, promote the recyclability of its products and implement more sustainable logistics. In all this, involve your value chain, especially your suppliers. Recyclability and materials must come from suppliers and reach consumers.</p> <p>R15: Care for the planet must be present at each and every stage of product creation.</p>
Consumers can recommend sustainable brands	R6, R9, R18	<p>R6: Consumers recommend a clothing brand just because it is sustainable.</p> <p>R9: Due to their personal awareness and values, social influence, communication in social networks and participation in online communities.</p> <p>R18: Consumers who are committed to responsible consumption do not hesitate to recommend the brands they consume that are the most sustainable. They make recommendations via word of mouth, social networks, especially Instagram, and consumer groups.</p>
Motivate consumers to recommend your brands	R3, R9, R17	<p>R3: Work with promotions on social networks: keep track of what consumers post, repost or retweet.</p> <p>R9: They should focus on offering quality products, communicating effectively, creating relevant graphic design content, collaborating with influencers and participating in social and cultural causes that contribute to society.</p> <p>R17: Awareness-raising and information campaigns about the benefits for the territories in which the companies are located.</p>
Differentiating responsible brands	R5, R7, R9	<p>R5: Commitment to sustainability and local commerce.</p> <p>R7: They should communicate their values, as they already do. Identify themselves with a certification label to avoid greenwashing.</p> <p>R9: Establish a unique brand identity, offer innovative designs, focus on sustainability, engage in strategic design collaborations, implement creative marketing strategies, and enable customization and customer engagement.</p>

APPENDIX B

Table B1.

TABLE B1 The questionnaire.

Economic corporate social responsibility	Behavioral consumer brand engagement
This brand puts a lot of effort into understanding customer needs.	I would like to continue with this (brand) despite some problems with it (change).
This brand emphasizes maximizing customer benefits.	I am willing to pay higher prices for this (brand) (price premium).
This brand pays individual attention to the customer.	I always say positive things to others about this (brand) (positive word of mouth).
This brand seeks to achieve long-term economic success.	
Legal corporate social responsibility	Cognitive consumer brand engagement
This brand maintains adequate safety standards in its production methods and sales.	When I go shopping, I think of this (brand).
This brand respects the rules and follows the law.	This (Brand) stimulates my interest.
This brand's legal compliance certificates are transparent.	If I heard that a new (brand) product was available in the store, I would be interested enough to buy it.
Ethical corporate social responsibility	Affective consumer brand engagement
This brand knows what is right and wrong when manufacturing/supplying its products/services.	I am proud to use this (brand).
	Using this (brand) makes me happy.
This brand is committed to well-defined ethical principles.	I feel enthusiastic about this (brand).
This brand treats its employees fairly.	This (brand) allows me to appreciate the product even more.
This brand wishes to serve elderly and differently abled customers well.	I am committed to this (brand).
Philanthropic corporate social responsibility	Purchase Intention
This brand makes charitable donations or helps promote social causes.	I will buy products of this brand.
This brand tries to recycle its waste properly.	I want to buy products of this brand.
This brand tries to improve the quality of life of those in need.	I am likely to buy products of this brand.
This brand tries to take social factors into account to improve its management.	I plan/plan to buy products of this brand.
This brand tries to sponsor educational or cultural activities.	
This brand tries to sponsor activities in favor of the environment.	