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Pavlos A Vlachos



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Corporate Social Performance and Consumer-Retailer Emotional Attachment: The Moderating Role of Individual Traits

ABSTRACT

This experiment examines the influence of corporate social performance (CSP) on the emotional attachment of consumers to firms. The study uses scenarios addressing corporate social responsibility activities, manipulating domains like environmental protection, treatment of employees, and charitable giving. In contrast to past studies, this research investigates the role of personality variables as moderating factors. Results indicate that CSP influences consumer-firm emotional attachment and that this attachment constitutes an unrecognized mediational pathway in the CSP-loyalty link. The results identify the moderating and strengthening role of, altruism, need-for-activity, and esteem-enhancement, on the CSP-emotional attachment link. Finally, the study reveals that attributions are likely to moderate the influence of consumer altruism.

Keywords: Corporate social performance, Emotional attachment, Altruism, Need-for-activity, Esteem-enhancement

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a topic of intense debate in today's business agenda (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2009). On the one hand the adoption of social actions is rising rapidly as a corporate priority. According to the *Economist*, by 2011, the percentage of executives giving high priority to investments in social and environmental actions is expected to be 70% (Franklin, 2008). In general, there is an increasing pressure around the globe from stakeholders on corporations to engage in the attainment of social goals (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2009). Additionally, according to social responsibility proponents Corporate Social Performance (CSP) seems to enhance firm performance (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2009)¹.

The adoption of social responsibility actions can be described as a mechanism corporations use in order to gain social legitimacy for their operations. Research on the impacts of CSP indicates an emerging positive effect of corporate social performance on the market value of the company (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2009).

On the other hand, along with the rise of social initiatives, there have been a growing number of scornful voices (Reich, 2008; Vogel, 2005). For example, some authors suggest that the promise of social initiatives can deflect public attention from the need for stricter laws (Reich, 2008). In the same vein, according to the Friedmanisue view of corporate social actions, investors entrust managers with their money solely to maximize a company's long-term stock wealth, not so that managers can use the returns in order to satisfy their urge to make the world a better place (Friedman, 1970).

¹ At this point, it should be noted that building on Barnett (2007) we distinguish CSR from the notion of CSP. CSR refers to the programs a firm engages in, whereas CSP refers to stakeholders' assessments of those programs (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2009). CSP may be described as a summary of the firm's aggregate social performance at a particular point in time. On the other hand, CSR refers to actions that appear to further some social good and over time, aggregate into CSP (Barnett, 2007).

Given this debate, and in light of the current world economic crisis, future CSR initiatives done right will need to be grounded in more evidence-based perspectives (European Commission, 2008). Researchers strive to generate measurable empirical evidence in order to ascertain whether CSP is worthwhile: is CSP beneficial for the firm? Is the impact of CSP on positive firm outcomes unconditional? Providing answers to these questions is critical for financially accountable post-recession managers who are willing to know whether CSP pays-off and if so, by which routes and under which conditions.

This study aims at providing some empirical evidence regarding the moderated beneficial effects of CSP, relating it to consumers' affective reactions towards firms. Recently, Margolis *et al.*, (2007) concluding a meta-analysis investigating the CSP-financial performance link, called for more research on the mechanisms that translate CSP to positive outcomes. We empirically, examine these effects in the context of grocery retailing. Both scholarly research and the popular trade press suggest that grocery retailers are likely to have a greater need than others to be seen to behave responsibly, since they are institutions of unrivalled strength, which brings with it unique responsibility (Marcus and Anderson, 2006). Arguably, they are the only type of retailer that is truly indispensable and the one with which consumers spend the most time. The adoption of social initiatives is vital for supermarkets since they constitute the place where consumers can act on issues relating to packaging waste, farmers' prosperity and food miles (Marketing Society Forum, 2008). Existing studies investigating the business case of CSP tend to mainly focus a) on financial outcomes and b) on post-consumption evaluative and cognitive reasoning processes (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). To the best of our knowledge there are only few marketing studies investigating whether CSP can contribute to

positive firm outcomes (e.g., loyalty) through emotion-laden processes (e.g., Berger *et al.*, 2006). A focus on emotion-laden processes seems to be promising given that many questions remain regarding the power of the linkage between satisfaction to trust to loyalty, which serve as anchor for many customer relationship programs. Facing this unpleasant situation, marketers are now investigating whether managers should also invest in alternative intervening variables-namely in creating affectionate ties with their customers (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006).

Against this background, we develop and test a theoretical framework examining a) whether CSP is likely to bring about positive outcomes for the firm through customer-based emotion-laden processes and b) the role of personality traits in conditioning these effects. Regarding the latter, the study advances theory by examining the moderating effects of external factors on the CSP-outcomes linkage. Specifically the study posits the traits of *need for activity*, *altruism*, and *esteem-enhancement* as important consumer individual differences capable of moderating the CSP-emotional attachment link. We chose these three variables due their prominence in the prosocial behavior literature (Benabou and Tirole, 2006). These variables capture both other-, and self-centered motives for prosocial behavior, and have been consistently recognized as key motivators in the volunteering literature. For example, Mowen and Sujan (2005) identify need for activity as one of the most important predictors of consumers' volunteering behavior. Furthermore, Clary *et al.*, (1998) find altruism and esteem-enhancement as having the strongest effects on volunteerism satisfaction.

In what follows, the study first briefly reviews the corporate social responsibility and emotional attachment literatures. Then it develops a set of hypotheses linking CSP and emotional attachment to loyalty. It further develops

hypotheses suggesting personality traits as moderators in the CSP-emotional attachment link. These hypotheses are tested using a scenario-based experimental design in the context of grocery retailing. The paper concludes with a discussion of findings and implications for marketing theory and practice.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Corporate Social Responsibility

More and more companies consider the adoption of social initiatives to be an important strategic objective (Wagner *et al.*, 2009). Nonetheless, CSR is still considered to be an embryonic concept, in a “continuing state of emergence” (Windsor, 2006). A variety of theoretical perspectives has been used to explain the CSR phenomenon, and numerous definitions of the concept have been proposed (McWilliams *et al.*, 2006). Consistent with McWilliams and Siegel (2001, p. 117), this study defines CSR as “...actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law”.

These social initiatives include actions within as well as outside the firm and can take many forms; for example, companies may focus on incorporating “social” features into products, becoming carbon neutral, adopting progressive human resource management practices and donating money to charities, (McWilliams *et al.*, 2006).

Currently, most of the relevant literature examines whether the adoption of social initiatives is worthwhile. Empirical evidence relating CSP with firm outcomes provides mixed results (Margolis *et al.*, 2007). However, according to recent studies there seems to be an emerging consensus indicating a favorable but at the same time idiosyncratic linkage between CSP and firm outcomes (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2009). In general, researchers call for more research into the strategic implications of CSP (McWilliams *et al.*, 2006), relevant contingent relationships (Luo and Bhattacharya,

2009), and mechanisms that explain how CSP translates into (Margolis *et al.*, 2007) positive outcomes.

Emotional Attachment

Recently, Yim *et al.*, (2008), called for more consideration of emotion-laden processes driven by affection, finding that consumers are likely to develop affectionate ties in commercial relationships. Similarly, Paulssen and Fournier (2007) provide empirical evidence that commercial relationships behave in similar ways to personal relationships.

This emerging line of inquiry suggests that attachments can extend beyond person-to-person relationship contexts (Park *et al.*, 2007). Consumers seem to develop attachments to gifts, places, product and human brands and stores. In short, recent marketing research seems to support the application of attachment theory in marketing (Thomson and Johnson, 2006). In this study we define emotional attachment as “...a psychological state of mind in which a strong cognitive and affective bond connects a brand to an individual in such a way that the brand is an extension of the self” (Park *et al.*, 2007, p. 7). Research confirms that consumer-firm emotional attachment is distinct from attitude, satisfaction, or involvement (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). In the same vein, research identifies service quality, customer-firm identification, the satisfaction of self-expressive needs, and the quality of customer-staff relationships as direct determinants of consumer-firm emotional attachment (e.g., Yim *et al.*, 2008). This study builds on this literature and investigates whether emotion-laden processes are capable of translating CSP into positive firm outcomes.

The effect of CSP on consumer-firm emotional attachment

There are only few marketing studies examining the effects of CSP on consumer-firm emotional attachment. One such study is that of Lichtenstein *et al.*,

(2004). Though this study provides some first empirical insights into the CSP-emotional attachment link, its focus is not on this linkage. Using a survey methodology it empirically documents the effects of CSP on perceptual corporate benefits, operationalizing them using three different measures, one of which is emotional attachment. Further relevant argumentation can also be found in the popular business press. For example Gallup suggests that CSR actions are likely to make consumers more emotionally connected to firms (McEwen, 2010). Finally, another study that discusses the effects social actions have on employee-firm emotional attachment is the study of Berger *et al.*, (2006). These authors find that social alliances can help employees develop emotional connections with their employing organization. In what follows we complement the abovementioned studies providing a theoretical examination of the CSP-emotional attachment link.

According to Park *et al.*, (2007), individuals seem to develop attachments to firms they can rely on to fulfill needs to gratify the self, enable the self, and enrich the self. The following sections discuss the way CSP facilitates the connection to the self.

Gratifying the consumer's self. In patronizing a socially responsible firm, consumers may feel that the firm is doing good on their behalf—something that probably evokes a mood-altering response. Consumer and psychology studies support this speculation (e.g., Harbaugh *et al.*, 2007). For example, Liu and Aaker (2008) point out that giving likely relates to states of true happiness. In the same vein, Dun *et al.* (2008), find that spending money on other people has a more positive effect impact on happiness than spending money on oneself. While charitable giving may not be an act of joy, consumers likely derive pleasure from patronizing a benevolent firm that systematically acts towards helping others and the environment.

Enabling the consumer's self. Consumers may consider a company engaging in charitable giving to be indirectly helping them help others, as with cause-related marketing. Charitable giving through cause-related marketing is arguably an effective mechanism consumers may rest on to satisfy their desire to help others. Recently, Bhattacharya *et al.* (2009) described the workings of this mechanism: consumers (as well as other types of stakeholders) based on their perceptions gain personal psychosocial benefits such as helping others in need through their purchases of the brand that supports the initiative, which in turn leads to a sense of well-being.

Enriching the consumer's self. Since CSR is about doing good actions, consumers may use their evaluation of these actions (i.e., CSP associations) to define themselves and retain a positive inner and social self image. Berger *et al.* (2006) find that internal customers use corporate social initiatives in order to gain a greater sense of being whole, integrated persons. In the same vein, Sen and Bhattacharya (2001), building on the organizational identification literature, suggest that through identification, corporate social initiatives can contribute to consumers' needs for self-consistency and self-enhancement. Arguably, supporting a responsible company may help consumers satisfy self-expressive needs, deal with identity conflicts and compensate for past actions towards less fortunate others or the environment (Curras-Perez *et al.*, 2009). Therefore:

H₁: A higher level of CSP leads to higher levels of consumer-firm emotional attachment than a lower level of CSP.

Consumer-firm emotional attachment as a mediator in the CSP-loyalty link

Research indicates that the more affectively attached consumers are, the more likely they are to continue to repurchase from the service provider (Yim *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, strong emotional connections promise service providers many desirable

consequences, including prevention of consumer defections and tolerance in the face of negative information (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Consumers who are emotionally bonded with service providers will most likely be more committed to repurchase from these service providers. Therefore:

H₂: Consumer-firm emotional attachment positively influences loyalty intentions.

This study argues in favor of a more comprehensive model of consumer reaction to responsible retailers. Bagozzi's (1992) attitudinal framework of appraisal-emotional response-coping suggests that after evaluating an offering cognitively, consumers develop emotional reactions to this appraisal which then drive intentions and behaviors. In line with Bagozzi (1992), this investigation postulates consumer-retailer emotional attachment as a subprocess regulating the effect of CSP on loyalty. Whereas Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) suggest that consumer satisfaction acts as a mediational pathway linking CSP to desired firm outcomes, this examination postulates consumer-firm emotional attachment as an alternative pathway that consumers use to evaluate a firm's social initiatives. On the basis of this discussion:

H₃: Consumer-firm emotional attachment mediates the effect of CSP on loyalty intentions.

The moderating effects of altruism, need for activity, self-enhancement, and consumer attributions

Several individual differences variables seem likely to affect whether or how strongly consumers respond to a company's level of CSP (Mohr and Webb, 2005). However, the CSP literature contains little investigation regarding these important effects. The necessity to investigate these differences stems from the notion that, as people, consumers come with needs and motives important to them, and social

programs may or may not afford opportunities to satisfy these needs and motives. Consumers enact these defining traits as they become involved in firms' social initiatives (Clary *et al.*, 1998).

Consumer differences that are relevant to marketers include demographic factors, psychographic profiles, and personality traits. As Dabholkar and Bagozzi (2002, p. 187) succinctly point out, although psychographic and demographic studies offer important insights to marketers with respect to different consumer segments, they do not go far enough. The variation in consumer differences arising from personality traits is at the heart of consumer attitude formation.

The CSR literature incorporating the investigation of individual differences focuses mostly on socio-demographic and psychographic factors. In the domain of psychographic factors, Mohr and Webb (2005), find partial support for the moderating effect of the socially responsible consumer behavior psychographic variable on the CSP-company evaluation link. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) examine the effects of one psychographic variable, namely the consumer's personal support of the domain of the company's social actions. In the domain of socio-demographic factors, Diamantopoulos *et al.*, (2003) find that though, specific socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, number of children, education and social class all seem to influence environmental consciousness, their explanatory power is weak. They suggest that from a managerial perspective there is limited utility in the use of socio-demographics in profiling green consumers.

This study extends this line of scholarship by concentrating on two consumer personality traits (altruism and need for activity) and one consumer motivational factor (esteem-enhancement). Therefore, this study undertakes an examination from motivational and trait perspectives so as to investigate boundary conditions on the

CSP-emotional attachment link. These factors come from the volunteerism and literature (e.g., Clary *et al.*, 1998; Mowen and Sujan, 2005), where researchers call on them to explain people's tendency for volunteering behavior.

The volunteerism literature appears to be an appropriate theoretical framework for the investigation of consumer reactions to firms' social actions, since both volunteerism and involvement in social initiatives are important manifestations of human helpfulness. For example, Mowen and Sujan (2005), investigating motives underlying volunteerism, identify charitable giving (a CSR activity) as a volunteerism action. Fisher and Ackerman (1998), suggest that the volunteerism literature can be used in order to better understand how organizations can promote socially desirable behaviors such as recycling, energy conservation, and the purchase of green products. Finally, Bendapudi *et al.*, (1996) use the volunteerism behavior literature and develop an integrated conceptual framework linking charity controlled factors to helping behavior.

The expectation in this study is that consumers' individual differences will modify the CSP-emotional attachment link. Specifically, for consumers high in altruism, need for activity, and self-enhancement, CSP will weigh more heavily in the formation of emotional bonds with the firm. The following discussion addresses the moderating effects of these individual consumer differences on the CSP-emotional attachment link.

Altruism. Altruism is a general predisposition to selflessly seek to help others (Mowen and Sujan, 2005). The volunteerism literature identifies altruism as a primary motivator for volunteering to help others (e.g., Unger, 1991; Clary *et al.*, 1998), a definition leading to its inclusion in this study. Firms' social initiatives relate to doing good actions, thereby providing opportunities for individuals to express their values

related to humanitarian and altruistic concerns. Therefore, when judging whether a firm deserves their affection, people scoring high in altruism will weigh CSP more heavily than people scoring low in altruistic concerns.

H₄: The relationship between CSP and consumer-firm emotional attachment, will be moderated by consumers' predisposition to be altruistic. The CSP-induced changes in emotional attachment will be greater for consumers who are more altruistic.

Need for activity. Need for activity is an enduring motive to stay busy and always be doing something (Mowen and Sujan, 2005). The marketing literature contains several studies of the construct of need for activity. For example, Brown *et al.*, (2002) find that service personnel with a general disposition to always be busy will tend to exhibit more customer-oriented behaviors. Additionally, the volunteerism literature identifies need for activity as an important predictor of volunteering action (Mowen and Sujan, 2005).

Like unpaid volunteerism for a non-profit organization, firms' social initiatives can require extra effort and energy from consumers (Mowen and Sujan, 2005). Numerous actual examples support this claim. To reduce carbon dioxide emissions, an electric company might initiate a program calling for consumers to replace old light bulbs with new ones that are less energy-consuming. The company is willing to provide the new bulbs for free, but consumers must expend effort to go and get them and subsequently put energy and effort into replacing the old bulbs with the new ones. Another example relates to recycling initiatives. Electrical appliances retailers might initiate a recycling program that requests consumers to bring their old appliances to recycling locations pre-specified by the retailer—an action that requires a fair amount of effort on the part of the consumer.

The extra effort called for by some firm-initiated social actions suggests that consumers with a high motive to always stay active will weigh these actions more heavily when they evaluate whether the firm's actions facilitate the connection to their selves. Similarly, since people tend to prefer companies with similar personality traits, people high in need for activity will tend to prefer companies that are high in need for activity as well (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010). The active and discretionary involvement of companies in socially responsible activities likely signals a corporate character that matches the ideal self-concept of people who define themselves using the trait of need for activity. Therefore, a company scoring high in CSP, through its involvement in high effort-consuming social activities, likely facilitates the self-expressive needs of people who view and define themselves using the trait of need for activity. Based on this discussion:

H₅: The relationship between CSP and consumer-firm emotional attachment, will be moderated by the consumers' enduring motive to always be active. The CSP-induced changes in emotional attachment will be greater for consumers who are characterized by greater levels of the need for activity motive.

Self-enhancement. Self-enhancement is a motive that serves to make the person feel important (Mowen and Sujun, 2005). In the context of the present study, the term relates to consumers' need to derive a sense of personal importance from patronizing a socially responsible firm. The self-enhancement motive probably involves a motivational process that centers on the ego's growth and development and involves positive strivings of the ego (Clary *et al.*, 1998), and people may derive self-esteem and prestige from their ability to help others (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Curras-Perez *et al.*, 2009). According to volunteering behavior research, people seem to use helping as a means of maintaining or enhancing positive affect (Clary *et al.*,

1998). In the same stream of research, people report that they volunteer for reasons of esteem-enhancement and personal development. This discussion suggests that consumers with greater self-enhancement motives will give more weight to CSP when judging whether the firm enables, gratifies, and enriches their selves.

H₆: The relationship between CSP and consumer-firm emotional attachment, will be moderated by the consumers' need for esteem-enhancement. The CSP-induced changes in emotional attachment will be greater for consumers who are characterized by greater levels of esteem-enhancement needs.

Perceptions of a firm's motivation to support a cause can exert strong effects on consumer reactions to such campaigns (Sen *et al.*, 2006). Most of the literature has come to this conclusion, treating perceptions of motivations as a crucial moderator lessening the importance specific social responsibility tactics have on positive outcomes. For instance, Barone *et al.*, (2007) find that a negative perception of company motivation downgrades the effect of cause-company fit on consumer evaluations of the company.

Building from these writings, this study also investigates the moderating role of consumer attributions as a way to replicate previous findings in a different consumption setting and in a different relationship, namely the CSP-emotional attachment link. Therefore:

H₇: The relationship between CSP and consumer-firm emotional attachment, will be moderated by the consumers' attributions regarding the motives of firms involved in CSR actions. The CSP-induced changes in emotional attachment will be lower for consumers who attribute more negative motives to firms

Finally, consumers' attributions regarding firms' motivation to support a cause may moderate the moderation effect of consumer altruism. As previously mentioned,

CSR initiatives present an opportunity for consumers to express their values related to helping others. This notion suggests the hypothesis that for high altruistic individuals the CSP-emotional attachment relationship will be stronger. But what will happen in this link when these high altruistic consumers attribute profit and egoistic-driven motives to firms?

Altruistic motives of consumers participating in firms' social initiatives and perceptions of egoistic motives of firms involved in social initiatives are in deep contrast (Sen *et al.*, 2006). Negatively perceived motivations may shut off or weaken the moderation effect of altruism on the CSP-emotional attachment link. Put another way, a three-way interaction may occur suggesting that for people high in altruism but low in positive attributions, the CSP-emotional attachment link will be either weakened or shut-off.

Note that the hypotheses do not include analogous three-way interactions for the other two individual difference variables—need for activity and need for esteem enhancement. People seeking esteem enhancement and to be kept busy will most likely still weigh CSP more heavily when forming emotional bonds with firms, regardless of their attributions regarding the firms' motives. Unlike altruistic needs, esteem enhancement needs and need for activity are not necessarily antagonistic to negative attributions. Altruistic needs are other-centered prosocial motivations (Benabou and Tirole, 2006). When consumers ascribe negative motivational attributions to companies, they actually seem to believe to a company's selfish motivations. Such perceptions are in deep contrast with their own altruistic motivations. On the other hand, esteem enhancement and need for activity are selfish (i.e., self-centered) prosocial motivations (Benabou and Tirole, 2006). Consumers

with such motives are not likely to trade-off such needs with egoistic-driven company attributions.

H₈: The hypothesized synergistic effect of higher altruism and CSP on consumer-firm emotional attachment will be moderated by the consumers' attributions regarding the motives of firms involved in CSR actions. The hypothesized synergistic effect will be lower for consumers who attribute more negative motives to firms

<Figure 1 about here>

METHOD

The investigation tested the hypotheses through an experiment using scenarios to manipulate CSP². A fictitious company's CSP record served as the treatment variable for an examination of the effects of that fictitious company's social and environmental responsibility initiatives on subjects' emotional attachment levels. The CSP record factor had two levels (1 = positive CSP and 2 = negative CSP). Measuring subjects' altruism, need for activity, self-enhancement, and attribution levels allowed categorization of subjects into two groups around the median response. The study had two dependent variables: emotional attachment and intense loyalty intentions.

Stimuli. Scenarios exposed subjects to social initiatives of a fictitious company. Scenarios involved more than one social domains to create a greater range of settings and provide a more robust test of the hypotheses, which should lead to greater generalizability across types of social responsibility (Mohr and Webb, 2005).

To manipulate CSP to be either high or low, the scenario presented company XYZ as having the best or worst rating in the industry on environmental protection, treatment of employees, and charitable giving. Building from Mohr and Webb (2005)

² Due to space constraints scenarios and measures will be made available upon request to the author

and Sen and Bhattacharya (2001), the scenario described this rating as given by a highly respected, impartial organization (i.e., a public state university) that evaluates companies on their CSP every year to further ensure that respondents viewed the information as credible. Moreover, the positive and negative CSP records appeared in the form of a popular newspaper excerpt to enhance the credibility of the scenarios. The negative scenario mirrored the positive one. Building from Sen and Bhattacharya (2001), task realism in the negative scenario came from highlighting the company's lack of support to the aforementioned issues (in contrast with major competitors' support of the issues) rather than its active opposition of such issues.

Procedure. All subjects first provided their traits ratings (i.e., their ratings of altruism, need for activity, and self-enhancement) and were then exposed in the negative and positive CSP conditions to the fictitious retailer's CSP information. After that, all subjects indicated their attributions regarding the firm's motives for engaging in CSR initiatives, their loyalty intentions, and their emotional attachment ratings. The study took 20 min to complete. Participants were 132 undergraduate (65%) and executive graduate (35%), who were randomly assigned to experimental conditions. The sample was 55% male with a mean age of 27. The experimental groups were balanced in terms of sex, age and educational level.

Measures. With the exception of the attributions and loyalty intentions constructs, all constructs were operationalized using multi-item scales. All constructs were assessed by seven-point semantic differential and Likert scales. Emotional attachment measures came from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). Altruism and need for activity measures were adaptations from Mowen and Sujon (2005), and esteem-enhancement measures were adaptations from Clary *et al.*, (1998). CSP associations (i.e., CSP manipulations) were adaptations from Sen *et al.*, (2006). Loyalty intentions and

attributions measures were adaptations from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Sen *et al.*, (2006) correspondingly.

RESULTS

Confirmatory factor analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 7.0 tested the measurement properties of constructs employed. The Maximum Likelihood (ML) method was used to estimate parameters. The model had an acceptable fit, establishing unidimensionality ($\chi^2(116) = 194.21$ - $p=.00$, RMSEA=.072, CFI=.95).

The results demonstrate adequate unidimensionality, reliability, convergent and discriminant validity (see Table 1). All estimated loadings are significant (i.e., smallest t-value=4.896, $p<.001$) (see Appendix A). Composite reliability exceeds the .70 threshold for all involved constructs and ranges between .77 and .93). Owing to these acceptable reliability results, the analyses could combine the items of each measure into one using the mean (Mohr and Webb, 2005). AVE is greater than the .50 benchmark, establishing convergent validity. A Furthermore, as is evident in Table 1, the square root of the average variance extracted is greater than all corresponding correlations, securing discriminant validity.

<Table 1 here>

Hypotheses testing

In the analyses of variance used to analyze subjects' reactions to the firm's engagement in social actions, each subject constitutes a unit of analysis. ANOVAs analyzed subjects' reactions to the CSP record and the interaction of the CSP record with consumer individual differences and attributions as factors.

The CSP manipulation checks were successful. Three items measuring subjects' CSP associations for the grocery retailer served as manipulation checks (t-

value=-3,824, $p=.000$ for item1, $t\text{-value}=-4,345$, $p=.000$ for item 2, and $t\text{-value}=-5,310$, $p=.000$ for item 3). As hypothesized in Hypothesis 1, CSP is a predictor of emotional attachment in the retailer-consumer dyad ($t\text{-value}=4.008$, $p=.000$, mean positive CR=4.6 and mean negative CR=5.6—note that lower mean values indicate higher attachment levels).

Analyses of moderating effects employed ANOVAs with CSP and its interaction with each consumer trait and attributions as factors. Note that for theoretical reasons a full factorial design applied only in the case of the consumer altruism and attributions variables, since consumer altruism may have positive direct effects on affection, and attributions may have direct effects on firm evaluation variables and, in the case of the present study, emotional attachment. Ellen *et al.*, (2006) suggest that attributions have a direct effect on firm evaluation variables (i.e., purchase intent) and Mikulincer and Shaver (2005) find that altruism is positively related to affection.

Results indicate the moderating role of consumer altruism ($F(2, 114)=5.686$, $p=.004$, power level=0.75³), consumer need for activity ($F(2, 98)=3.802$, $p=.026$, power level =0.80) and self-enhancement ($F(2, 105)=2.783$, $p=.066$, power level=0.82) (see Tables 2, 3, and 4 respectively), supporting Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6.

<Tables 2, 3, and 4 here>

The study also investigates the moderating effect of consumers' attributions regarding the firm's motives underlying social initiatives (see Table 5). Simultaneous

³ These are observed power levels calculated using retrospective power analyses using G*Power (Faul *et al.*, 2007). Given a medium effect population size ($f^2=.25$, partial $\eta^2=.06$) calculated on a priori grounds (e.g., in the study of Lichtenstein *et al.*, (2004) the effect size of CSP on perceptual corporate benefits was .22, in the study of Brown and Dacin (1997) the effect size of CSP on corporate evaluations was .18, and in the study of Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) the effect of CSP on customer satisfaction was .51), a significance level of .05, and a desired power of .80, the sample size for this study should include 125 respondents. This figure is within the bounds of sample size obtained in our study, thereby strengthening the validity of our results

consideration of the attributions reveals that only the direct effect of attributions is significant ($F(1,105) = 121.643, p=.00$). Therefore, support for Hypothesis 7 is not forthcoming. Subjects belonging in the benevolent attributions group indicate higher emotional attachment levels. We tested whether this insignificant effect is due to low observed power levels. Though this seems to be the case ($\beta=.12$), the small effect size obtained for this effect (.08), indicates that a very big sample (i.e., $n=1303$) is needed in order to test this effect at an 80% power level. Given this piece of empirical evidence, it is likely that in this data set CSP-induced attributions do not seem to moderate the CSP-emotional attachment link. This suggests that the positive relationship between CSP and emotional attachment is not contingent upon positive attributions. It seems that consumers with negative CSP-induced attributions still find firms' involvement in social actions as emotionally rewarding.

<Table 5 here>

ANOVAs empirically examine Hypothesis 8, using a full factorial design with CSP, attributions, and altruism and their interactions as factors. The three-way interaction is significant as predicted ($F(1, 99) = 4.613, p=.034, \text{power level} = .73$) and therefore Hypothesis 8 is not rejected. Specifically, the results indicate that in the context of positive attributions and high consumer altruism, CSP has a significant effect on emotional attachment (negative $CR=4.311$, positive $CR=3.152$), whereas in the context of negative attributions and high consumer altruism, the effect of CSP on emotional attachment is no longer significant (negative $CR=6.550$, positive $CR=6.554$). Fig. 2 plots the moderating effects of the three consumer traits on the CSP-emotional attachment link. At this point it should be noted that the non-significant moderating effect of CSP-induced attributions found in Hypothesis 7 should be interpreted in light of the significant three-way interaction effect found in

Hypothesis 8. This significant three-way interaction effect indicates that main and two-way interaction effects are probably misleading. Consequently, the three-way interaction effect seems to better describe the data at hand. This higher-order interaction unveils that CSP-induced negative attributions are likely to temper the positive effect of altruism on the CSP-attachment link.

<Figure 2 here>

Panel A, Fig. 2 plots the significant moderating effect of altruism. Specifically, consumer altruism attenuates the effect of CSP on emotional attachment. Emotional attachment levels of the high altruism group are more sensitive to the CSP record than those of the low altruism group. The CSP-induced changes in emotional attachment levels of high altruism subjects (negative CR= 5.623, positive CR=3.883) (note that lower values indicate higher emotional attachment levels) are significantly greater than those of the low altruism subjects (negative CR=5.467, positive CR=5.115).

These results indicate that consumers' altruism levels are a key determinant of their sensitivity to a retailer's CSP. The more altruistic the target group, the greater the impact of CSP on emotional bonding.

Panel B, Fig. 2 plots the significant moderating effect of consumer need for activity on the CSP-emotional attachment link. CSP-induced changes in emotional attachment levels of high need for activity subjects (negative CR= 5.365, positive CR=4.133) are significantly greater than those of the low need for activity subjects (negative CR=5.669, positive CR=5.185).

In the same vein, subjects with high self-enhancement motives seem to be more sensitive to the CSP record than subjects that score low on self-enhancement

(high self-enhancement: negative CR= 5.500, positive CR=4.082; low self-enhancement: negative CR= 5.579, positive CR=5.081) (see Panel C, Fig. 2).

Panel D, Fig. 2 plots the significant direct effect of attributions on emotional attachment and further depicts that attributions likely moderate the effect of emotional attachment on CSP (note that the lines are not parallel). However, this effect is insignificant when considered with the direct effects of CSP and attribution.

Finally, we formally examine for the hypothesized mediation effect of emotional attachment (Baron and Kenny, 1986). The study first examines whether CSP influences emotional attachment and loyalty intentions and find significant effects using MANOVA (loyalty intentions: $F(1, 127) = 6.674, p = .011$; emotional attachment: $F(1, 127) = 16.068, p = .00$; Wilk's Lambda = .89, $p = .001$). Then, using regression analysis, the study examines whether emotional attachment influences loyalty. Results indicate that emotional attachment is a significant predictor of loyalty intentions ($b = .36, t\text{-value} = 4.298, p = .00$). Including emotional attachment in the model (using ANCOVA procedures) indicates that CSP is no longer a significant direct predictor of loyalty intentions ($F(1, 126) = .12, p = .73$).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Given the mounting importance of CSP many studies have examined its effects on customer- and financial-related outcomes (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2009). On the other hand, plenty of skepticism abounds on the merits of CSP (Reich, 2008). Given these contemptuous voices much research is needed in order to ground firm-induced social initiatives on more evidence-based perspectives. Although previous studies investigating the CSP-outcomes link have provided important insights, there is still limited understanding of *whether* and *how* underlying processes and personality

related contingency conditions change the way CSP is related to positive outcomes (Margolis *et al.*, 2007).

Building on the CSR and attachment literatures, the study investigates the extent to which CSP is capable of influencing customer loyalty through emotion-laden processes. In this respect, the study contributes to both literatures by identifying CSP as a strategic tool marketers can use to create affectionate ties with their consumers.

Furthermore, in contrast to previous research efforts, this study is one of the first examining whether differences in consumers' personality traits may affect the effectiveness of these corporate social initiatives. Finally, the study confirms the important role of consumers' perceptions of the motives behind firms' engagement in social initiatives.

Implications for marketing theory

Within its validity boundaries, the present study expands on the personality paradigm and posits personality traits as moderators in the CSP-outcomes linkage. The study finds that these moderating factors may interact with each other, adding more complexity to research inquiries involving reactions to firms' social actions. This investigation reveals that when altruistic consumers hold negative perceptions about the firms' motives behind social actions, the defining personality characteristic of altruism no longer strengthens the effect of CSP on emotional attachment. This finding confirms the prominent role of consumer attributions in CSP research. Many of the positive-or negative- effects of a firm's social activities may depend on consumers' perceptions of the motives of firms engaging in CSR.

Finally, this study shows that emotional attachment is a subprocess regulating the effect of CSP on loyalty. This finding is important in light of the study of

Margolis *et al.*, (2007), who call for more research on how CSP translates into outcomes. This result means that future studies investigating the impacts of CSP should take into account that this impact likely stems from emotional attachment as well. Therefore, this investigation extends the work of Luo and Bhattacharya (2006), who suggest satisfaction, as a mediational pathway linking CSP to firm outcomes, by suggesting an alternative pathway that consumers use to evaluate firms' social acts.

Implications for marketing practice

The results of the study offer several implications for the practice of marketing. First, the study helps retailers towards improved and more targeted social responsibility investments. Specifically, retailers targeting at consumer groups high in altruism, high in need for activity, and high in self-enhancement motives, are probably in a more advantageous position when investing in social initiatives as a way to build and further deepen emotional attachment, and indirectly consumer loyalty. Moderated effects found, indicate that social actions are more likely to be effective for retailers positioned along the three traits/needs described in this manuscript. For example, more upscale retailers (e.g., Waitrose, Sainsbury's, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom etc.) will probably reap more consumer-based benefits from CSR social investments compared to downscale retailers. Differently put, downscale retailer brands (e.g., Wal-Mart, Target etc.), are probably in a more disadvantageous position when deciding to invest in social initiatives, since for these retailers social acts will probably bring about less benefits. Brands, like individuals, have personalities, and consumers being high in, e.g., altruism, or in esteem enhancement needs, will tend to prefer brands with similar personality traits (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010). These brands help people express their current or ideal self-concept and facilitate their identity projects. Therefore, corporate or product brands in the retailing realm, high in

e.g., altruism are likely to be patronized more by people with similar ideal self-concepts. Building on this argument, our findings indicate that people with self-concepts characterized by altruism, need for activity and esteem-enhancement, will deem social actions as more important when they develop emotional connections with retailers. In the same vein, retailers may consider investing in joint social programs, with manufacturer brands positioned along the traits described in the study. According to the results of the study these targeted social efforts are more likely to be successful.

Consumers tend to prefer messages, offerings and providers that portray their own or a desired personality (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010). Having said that, retailers interested in developing emotional connections with their consumers through CSP, they should consider designing and communicating social initiatives incorporating relevant altruistic, lively/strenuous and esteem-enhancement appeals. In other words, CSR actions positioned as more altruistic, lively, activist and upscale are more likely to capture the attention of people high in these traits/needs. In turn these people are more likely to employ CSP cues when developing emotional attachments to retailers.

The central role of emotional attachment found in this research indicates that to assess the effectiveness of CSR actions, managers should routinely measure how much these actions create emotional attachment. Conversely, managers striving to build affectionate ties with their consumers should take into account that appropriately motivated CSR initiatives under specific conditions are more likely to build consumer-firm emotional attachment. The literature suggests that managers invest in social programs in order to create satisfaction (e.g., Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006), positive attitudes and re-purchase intentions (e.g., Sen *et al.*, 2006), consumer-firm character congruence (e.g., Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001), reputation, and

financial performance (e.g., Luo and Bhattacharya, 2009). The present study suggests that firms' social programs are likely to influence one more important managerial goal—the creation of affectionate ties with consumers. Although appropriately motivated social actions seem to involve humanistic values, self-actualization, empathy, compassion, and affection for consumers, research has not addressed emotion-laden constructs as CSP outcomes.

Sisodia *et al.*, (2007) state that firms possessing an economic dimension but lacking an emotive one face a doubtful future. In congruence with their writings, this study finds that managers on a quest for an emotive dimension should pursue appropriately motivated social programs.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of this study present opportunities for future research. First, although the CSP record scenarios in this study reflected real social practices, future studies employing field experiments or consumer surveys exploring the effects of actual CSR initiatives would be valuable to enhance the external validity of these results.

Furthermore, the focus of this study was on overall CSP, rather than on specific types of social activities and/or domains (e.g., cause-related marketing and/or corporate philanthropy activities focusing on societal and/or climate change issues). Though, this was deemed as being more realistic, given that retailers and manufacturing firms tend to communicate their involvement in a wide variety of causes, using different mechanisms, future research should also focus on single domain social activities. These studies should examine whether the role of the moderating factors identified in this study change when companies focus on single domain social activities and consumers' support for the specific domain likely

becomes an important issue. For example, in this study we find that negative attributions likely weaken the positive moderating effect of altruism on the CSP-emotional attachment link. Is this likely to be the case in the context of a specific social activity, where consumer support or affinity to the specific activity is low⁴?

Second, one context—grocery retailing—provided the empirical context for this study. Empirically generalizing the results is important, not only to other settings but specifically to industry contexts involving high contact, personalized services. However, since grocery retailing is a moderate contact, standardized service (Bowen, 1990), these results are likely to be generalizable to other industries involving these classification characteristics (e.g., fast food restaurant, copying/printing services, and the like). Furthermore, the results of the study should also be replicated in the manufacturing sector, where the pressure for firms to become greener and more socially responsible is higher due to their direct involvement with the natural environment and less developed countries⁵.

Another potential limitation of the study is probably the small sample size of the study. Though most of our results are significant and though formal retrospective and prospective power analyses conducted indicate our sample size as adequate in testing the direct and moderating effects hypothesized, we still believe that future relevant studies would benefit from a larger sample size. Importantly, future studies should try replicating our findings using randomly selected grocery-shoppers as sample respondents. Given the experimental nature of the study, our sample included undergraduate as well as post-graduate part-time student respondents. However it should be noted, that are sample, includes individuals who are older (i.e., mean age is

⁴ We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this

⁵ We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this

27) compared to traditional-early adult life college students. This is something that likely secures responses from people with more life experiences and more “finished” personalities”

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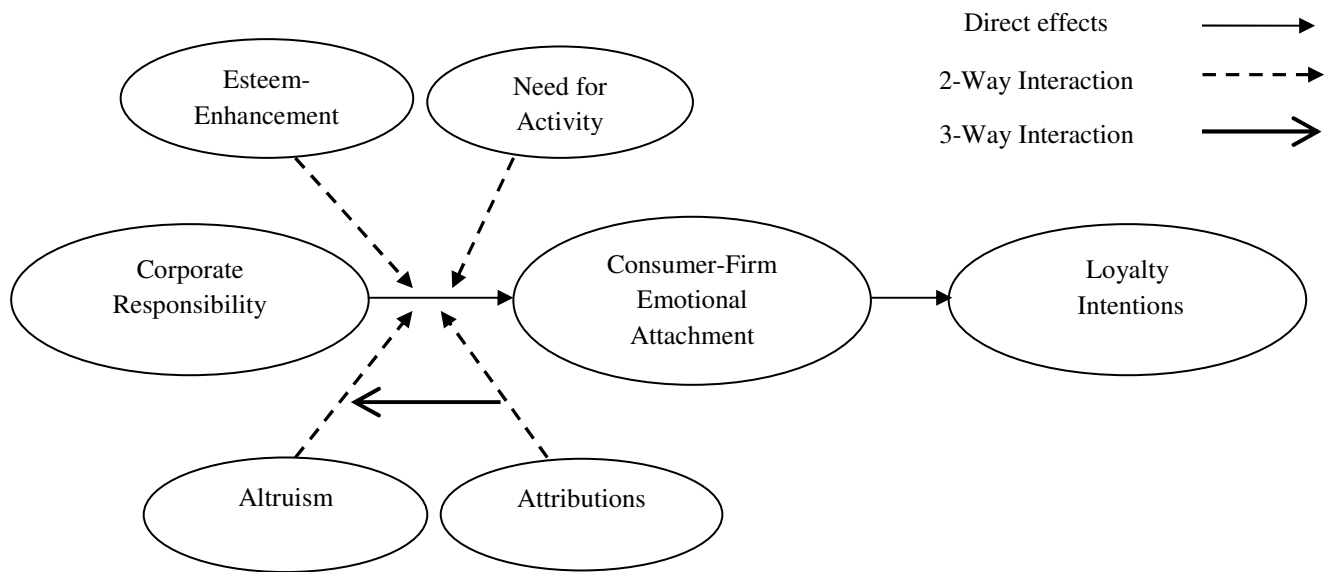
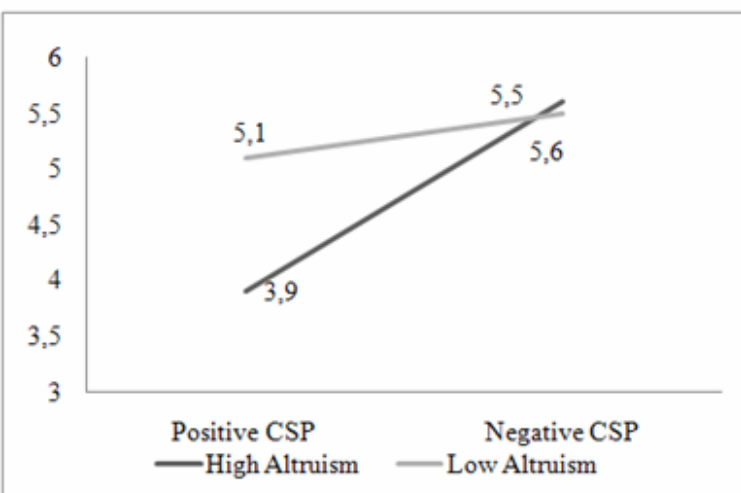
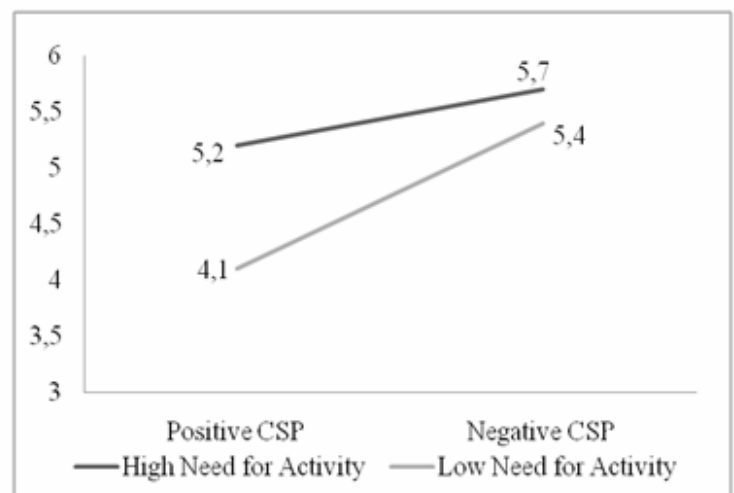


Fig. 1. The research model

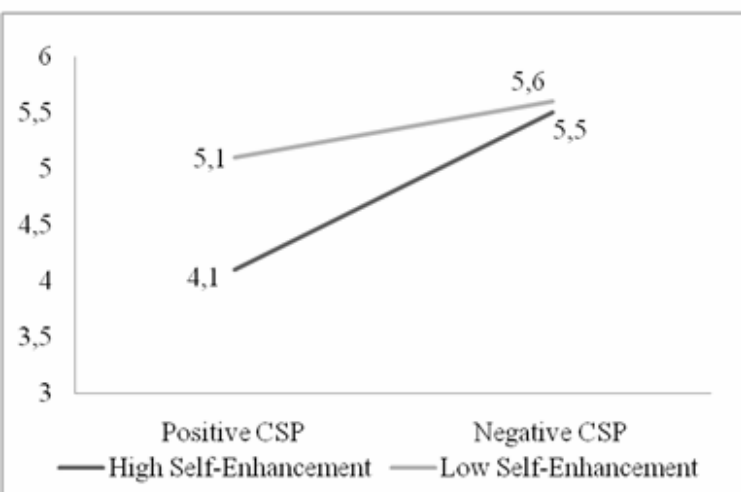
Panel A: The Moderating Effect of Altruism on the CSP-Emotional Attachment Link



Panel B: The Moderating Effect of Need for Activity on the CSP-Emotional Attachment Link



Panel C: The Moderating Effect of Self-Enhancement on the CSP-Emotional Attachment Link



Panel D: The Moderating Effect of Attributions on the CSP-Emotional Attachment Link

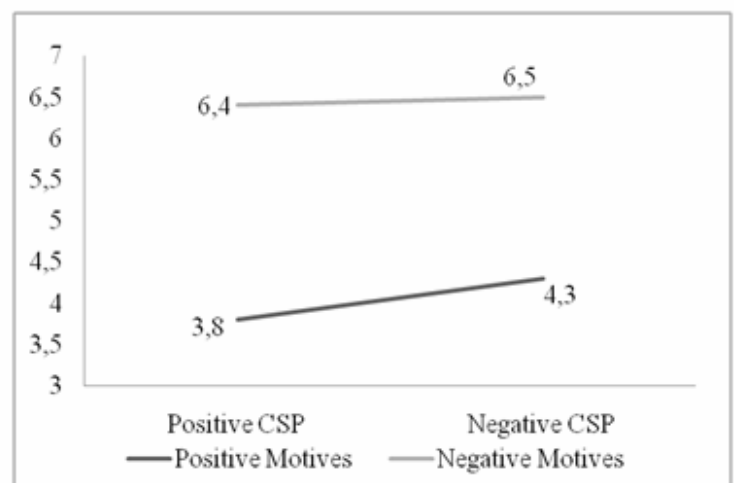


Fig. 2. Plots of significant moderating effects

Table 1. Construct Intercorrelations

Variables	C.R.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Emotional Attachment	.90	.84						
2. Altruism	.77	.26	.74					
3. Need for Activity	.86	.09	.15	.82				
4. Esteem Enhancement	.87	.22	.014	.13	.83			
5. Loyalty*	n/a	.81	.23	.20	.15	n/a		
6. CSP-induced Attributions*	n/a	.79	.17	.06	.10	.61	n/a	
7. CSP Manipulations	.93	.74	.13	.12	.01	.63	.84	.91

Notes: Values in the diagonal represent the square root of AVE. Lower diagonal values indicate factor correlations. C.R.: Composite Reliability.

*We follow Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and fix the regression coefficient and the error variance of the single item latent variable,

Table 2

The moderating effect of altruism

Independent variables	Emotional attachment			
	Mean	SE	n	F
CSP				
<i>Positive Record</i>	4.5	.18	62	15.32**
<i>Negative Record</i>	5.5	.19	56	
Altruism				
<i>High</i>	4.7	.19	55	4.05**
<i>Low</i>	5.3	.18	63	
CSP X Altruism				5.69*
<i>CSP low, Altruism low</i>	5.5	.28	30	
<i>CSP low, Altruism high</i>	5.6	.28	26	
<i>CSP high, Altruism low</i>	5.1	.25	33	
<i>CSP high, Altruism high</i>	3.9	.27	29	

*p<.01, **p<.00

Note: Lower values indicate higher emotional attachment levels, SE=Standard Error

Table 3

The moderating effect of need for activity

Independent variables	Emotional attachment			
	Mean	SE	n	F
CSP				9.46**
<i>Positive Record</i>	4.7	.20	50	
<i>Negative Record</i>	5.5	.20	52	
CSP X Need for Activity				3.80*
CSP low, Need for Activity low	5.7	.26	29	
CSP low, Need for Activity high	5.4	.29	23	
CSP high, Need for Activity low	5.2	.27	26	
CSP high, Need for Activity high	4.1	.29	24	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .00$

Notes: Lower values indicate higher emotional attachment levels, SE=Standard Error

Table 4

The moderating effect of esteem enhancement

Independent variables	Emotional attachment			
	Mean	SE	n	F
CSP				10.42**
Positive Record	4.6	.21	54	
Negative Record	5.1	.21	55	
CSP X Esteem Enhancement				2.78*
CSP low, Esteem Enhancement low	5.6	.28	29	
CSP low, Esteem Enhancement high	5.5	.30	26	
CSP high, Esteem Enhancement low	5.1	.27	32	
CSP high, Esteem Enhancement high	4.1	.33	22	

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .00$

Notes: Lower values indicate higher emotional attachment levels, SE=Standard Error

Table 5

The moderating effect of attributions

Independent variables	Emotional attachment			
	Mean	SE	n	F
CSP				1.80
Positive Record	5.1	.17	53	
Negative Record	5.4	.15	56	
Attributions				121.64**
Positive	4.1	.14	60	
Negative	6.5	.17	49	
CSP X Attributions				.62
CSP low, Attributions Negative	6.5	.18	35	
CSP low, Attributions Positive	4.3	.23	21	
CSP high, Attributions Negative	6.4	.28	14	
CSP high, Attributions Positive	3.8	.17	39	

**p<.00

Notes: Lower values indicate higher emotional attachment levels, SE=Standard Error

Appendix A: Factor Loadings

Constructs	Loadings
Emotional Attachment	
I love this brand!	.89
I am passionate about this brand.	.88
This brand makes me very happy.	.80
If it is about super-markets, XYZ would be my most favorite brand	.78
Altruism	
Usually I am selfless in giving time to others.	.86
In general I like giving to others.	.47
I am used to sacrificing my goals to help others.	.83
Need for Activity	
I keep really busy doing things.	.90
I am extremely active in my daily life.	.87
I always like to be doing something	.67
Esteem-Enhancement	
Participating in CSR programs makes me feel important.	.67
Participating in CSR programs increases my self-esteem.	.96
Participating in CSR programs makes me feel needed.	.83
CSP Manipulation Checks	
This company treats its employees well	.84
This is a socially responsible company	.96
This company supports children in need	.92
Attributions	
To what extent do you believe the company's genuine desire guided its	.95
Loyalty Intentions	
I would not consider shopping at another super market	.95