THE ROLE OF CONSUMER IDENTIFICATION ON THE EFFECTS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE SPANISH HOTEL INDUSTRY

EL PAPEL DE LA IDENTIFICACIÓN DEL CONSUMIDOR EN EL EFECTO DE LA RESPONSABILIDAD SOCIAL CORPORATIVA EN EL COMPORTAMIENTO DEL CONSUMIDOR EN LA INDUSTRIA HOTELERA ESPAÑOLA

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abstract

One of the most important aspects in the field of hospitality marketing is to investigate the path to customer loyalty. In addition, another line of research is the construct of corporate social responsibility (CSR) that has recently been incorporated in the customer loyalty model. Therefore, this paper examines the effects of CSR associations on hotel customer loyalty by including the mediation effects of customer-company identification (C-C identification) and customer satisfaction. To test the proposed model empirically, personal surveys of hotel customers were conducted in the Spanish region of Cantabria using a structured questionnaire. The study finds that CSR associations have a direct effect on both C-C identification and customer satisfaction as well as an indirect effect on hotel customer loyalty via these two constructs. Second, C-C identification has a direct effect on hotel customer loyalty. This study contributes to the literature by incorporating three different perspectives of hotel customer loyalty — CSR associations, C-C identification and customer satisfaction— into one general framework that highlights the central role played by C-C identification along the path from CSR associations to hotel customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility associations, customer identification with the company, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, hotel industry

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resumen

Uno de los aspectos más importantes en el campo del marketing del sector hotelero es investigar la lealtad de los consumidores. Igualmente, otra línea de investigación de gran interés se centra en el concepto de responsabilidad social corporativa (RSC) el cual ha sido incluido recientemente en modelos clásicos de lealtad en este sector. Así, este artículo examina el efecto de las asociaciones de responsabilidad social corporativa (RSC) en la lealtad del consumidor en el sector hotelero a través de los efectos mediadores de la identificación del consumidor con la empresa (identificación C-E) y la satisfacción de los consumidores. Para ello, se llevaron a cabo encuestas personales a clientes de establecimientos hoteleros en la comunidad autónoma de Cantabria (España). En primer lugar, los resultados demuestran que las asociaciones de RSC poseen un efecto directo sobre la identificación C-E y la satisfacción de los consumidores, así como un efecto indirecto sobre la lealtad de este colectivo. En segundo lugar, la identificación C-E posee un efecto directo sobre la lealtad de los consumidores. Este estudio contribuye a la literatura académica del sector hotelero al incorporar tres perspectivas diferenciadas a la lealtad de los consumidores –RSC, identificación C-E y satisfacción – en un único marco teórico que señala el papel central que desempeña la identificación C-E en la influencia que poseen las asociaciones de RSC en la satisfacción y lealtad de los consumidores en el sector hotelero.

Palabras clave: responsabilidad social corporativa, identificación del consumidor con la empresa, satisfacción, lealtad, sector hotelero

1. introduction

In recent years, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as an imperative item on the corporate agenda of tourism-related companies. Within the hospitality industry, an increasingly number of hotels is embracing the notion of CSR. Some examples of these activities include environmental protection, community involvement or employee relations, among others (Holcomb, J. L., Upchurch, R. S. and Okumus, F, 2007): One of the main reasons for this growing interest in the hotel industry is due to the fact that CSR associations influence consumer behavior at a time when hotel customers are demanding more out of firms that simply high quality services. Actually, hotel customers and a wide range of stakeholders are showing a progressive demand for hotel companies implementing CSR initiatives in an attempt to protect tourism destinations as well as their cultural identity and natural resources (Bigné, J. E., Font, X. and Andreu, L. 2000). Thus, hospitality academics and practitioners have become increasingly interested in analyzing how consumers react to CSR. In spite of the proliferation of studies, the empirical evidence about the relationship between CSR associations and consumer behavior is not consistent. The notion that a responsible behavior is a good market practice and that it generates positive consequences for hotel businesses is increasingly accepted (Inoue and Lee, 2011), but there is still a lack of research on the consequences of these initiatives on consumers´ cognitive and affective (identification, satisfaction), as well as behavioral (loyalty) outcomes within this context (Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013).

In this line of research, one of the most innovative proposals is to consider that responses to CSR initiatives highly depend on the degree of identification with the consumer that the firm generates through its socially responsible activities (He, H., Li, Y. and Harris, L., 2012; So, K.K.F, King, C., Sparks, B. and Wang, Y., 2013). The basis for research into identification lies on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, J.C., Hogg, M.A., Oakes, P.J., Reicher, S.D. and Wetherell, M.S., 1987). Particularly, the notion of consumer-company identification (C-C identification) is conceived as a cognitive state of connection and proximity of the consumer to a company generated through a (subjective) process of comparison between the individual´s own personal identity and that of the firm (Dutton, J.E., Dukerich, J.M. and Harquail, C.V., 1994; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).

Particularly, in the context of CSR associations this line of research is justified since identification with the company involves a significant relationship which motivates the consumer to maintain the union with the organization over time. The evolving research on CSR provides encouraging results regarding the construct´s relevance in enhancing customer loyalty. This is particularly relevant in a sector which has experienced drops in occupancy, average daily rate and revenue per available room due to the financial crisis (Alonso-Almeida and Bremser, 2013). On the other hand, customer loyalty has been recognized over several decades for its role in the creation of many successful businesses, including hospitality companies (Oliver, 1999; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Wilkins, H., Merrilees, B. and Herington, C., 2009). Fairly recently the construct of CSR has been used in studies investigating hotel customer loyalty (Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; So et al., 2013). To date, this research has predominantly focused on the link between CSR associations and subsequent loyalty intentions (He and Li, 2011; Pérez et al., 2012). Since C-C identification is considered to be a major predictor of customer loyalty (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Marin, L., Ruiz, S. and Rubio, A., 2009) we consider that is equally important to examine how this variable can be incorporated into the traditional path to hotel customer loyalty. So that, this study considers that CSR influence on hotel customer loyalty is explained better by including the role played by C-C identification and customer satisfaction. This study proposes and supports that (1) CSR associations have a significant and direct influence on both C-C identification and customer satisfaction as well as (2) an indirect effect on hotel customer loyalty via these two constructs, and (3) that C-C identification has a direct effect on hotel customer loyalty.

So, after a literature review about CSR aspects within the hotel context, the concepts of CSR associations and C-C identification, and the role of CSR as a mechanism for generating customer satisfaction and identification with the company, a theoretical model of causal relations is proposed to analyze the indirect effects of CSR on hotel customer loyalty. Further, it is described the methodology used in an empirical study of consumers in the hotel industry. Then the results are presented. Finally, main conclusions are presented along with managerial implications, limitations and possible further research.

2. conceptual framework and hypotheses development

2.1. CSR in hotel industry

The hotel industry is one of the world´s fastest growing sectors and plays an important role in tourism, as tourists are undertaking travel to

increasingly distant locations, in increasing number (De Grosbois, 2012). The International Hotel & Restaurant Association (IH&RA) estimates that this industry employs 60 million people worldwide, contributing 950 million dollars to the world economy each year. Focusing on the Spanish hotel sector, according to the most recent data available, the hotel industry represents a turnover of 14,200 million euros, with 16,564 companies linked to the sector and 253,340 total employees (INE, 2016).

Due to its size, the hotel sector significantly contributes to local economies by generating direct and indirect profits, and creating employment. However, consumers and other stakeholders are becoming increasingly demanding not only in terms of better quality hotel services and infrastructures but also in the area of additional initiatives undertaken by these companies to protect the cultural identity of tourism destinations as well as their natural, heritage and human resources (Bigné et al., 2000). An increasingly number of stakeholders requires that the profitability of this sector should be measured using sustainability criteria and taking into account not only economic but also environmental and social aspects. In this context, hotel companies greatly depend on the environmental, social and cultural resources of the destinations. Since this industry offers activities that constantly interact with these systems, hotel firms have a great capacity to initiate significant changes in the economic, natural, social and cultural areas. This sector is often viewed as a provider of social and economic benefits through its support of leisure and business travel, job creation and the sharing of knowledge and experiences. However, the hotel industry also imposes numerous impacts on the natural, social and economic environments, including contribution to climate change, air and noise pollution, biodiversity loss and waste generation (Prud´homme and Raymond, 2013).

Therefore, it´s is necessary a CSR orientation for hotel firms to minimize these negative impacts. In this sense, CSR refers as the activities making companies good citizens who contribute to society´s welfare beyond their own self interests (Kang, K.H., Lee, S. and Huh, C., 2010). The hotel industry is increasingly interested in learning about the efforts made by other industries seen as heavy polluters (e.g., chemical, mining, manufacturing) to mitigate these negative outcomes. Actually, a growing number of hotel firms have implemented a number of socially responsible practices to show their commitment towards this notion. For instance, Meliá Hotels International cooperates with TUI Travel –the leader travel group in Europe- in the distribution of a specific guide in which they educate travelers on souvenir purchasing. Similarly, NH hotels created the "Ecomeeting" concept, in which events are organized

based on environmental criteria ensuring a respectful use of energetic resources, using products with low environmental footprint.

Although a significant number of studies investigate the range of CSR practices implemented by hospitality companies (Holcomb et al., 2007; De Grosbois, 2012; Prud´homme and Raymond, 2013) little research has provided a conceptual framework to understand how CSR influences hotel customer loyalty formation process (Mason, D., Tideswell, C. and Roberts, E., 2006). Previous scholars have explored how CSR perceptions influence customers' attitudes and behaviors (Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). However, extant research presents varied and mixed findings about the effects of CSR on customer outcomes (Vlachos, P. A., Tsamakos, A., Vrechopoulos, A. P. and Avramadis, P. K., 2009). Such ambiguous findings may appear because extant studies neglect relevant mediator variables in CSR- customer outcome relationships (Walsh and Bartikowski, 2013). Therefore, this study expands classical consumer behavior paradigms considering CSR in hospitality businesses as a relevant element that contributes to influence customers´ behavior towards firms. Specifically, in the next section the authors analyze how CSR associations influence hotel customer loyalty by including the mediation effects of C-C identification and customer satisfaction.

2.2. CSR associations and C-C identification

CSR associations are a specific category of *corporate associations*. Brown and Dacin (1997) first use this concept for categorizing the different types of cognitive associations that consumers hold about a corporate brand. Brown and Dacin (1997, p. 69) use the term *corporate associations* as '*a generic label for all the information about a company that a person holds'*. Corporate associations may include perceptions, inferences, beliefs, a person´s knowledge of his/her prior behavior about the company, moods and emotions experienced by the person with respect to the company and overall and specific evaluations of the company and its perceived attributes (Brown and Dacin, 1997). In the academic literature several types of corporate associations have been described. However, two categories are considered of particular relevance to the company´s stakeholders, especially for consumers. First, *corporate ability associations* are those associations related to the company´s expertise in producing and delivering its outputs. On the other hand, *corporate social responsibility* associations reflect the organization´s status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations.

A number of studies have analyzed the effect of corporate associations on consumer behavior. An emergent line of research has proposed to examine the effects of CSR associations on consumer attitudes and behaviors emphasizing the identification of this collective with the company (Marin et al., 2009; He et al., 2012; Perez, A., García, M.M. and Rodríguez, I., 2012; Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; So et al., 2013). In this regard, several authors have identified a positive influence of CSR associations on consumer identification with the company (Marin et al., 2009; Pérez et al., 2012; Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque; 2013). So both, Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986) have been used to explain the reasons and motivations which encourage individuals to relate to companies. This occurs through a cognitive categorization process where an individual positions him/herself as a member of an organization by enhancing similarities with other members and differences with non-members (Turner, 1982). By the awareness of belonging and connection to an organization individuals can achieve a positive social identity (Brewer, 1991; Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004). As a result of this sense of connection, the organization is psychologically accepted as part of that personal identity (Scott and Lane, 2000).

In this regard, C-C identification is a cognitive state of self-categorization, connection and proximity of a consumer to the company (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), brought about by a (subjective) process of comparison between the organizational identity and the consumers´ own identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994). As Bhattacharya and Sen (2003, p. 76) highlight '*this concept is highly relevant since it is the primary psychological substrate for the kind of deep, committed and meaningfully relationships that marketers are increasingly seeking to build with their customers'*. In other words, this cognitive state of connection and proximity implies a perception of overlap between the organizational and the personal identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) where the existence of shared values plays an important role (Hunt, S. D., Wood, V. R. and Chonko, L. B., 1989; Scott and Lane, 2000). The organization identification literature has found that company´s CSR initiatives reveal a character and an identity that allows stakeholders to identify with the company on the basis of an assessment and evaluation of the overlap between their own identities and that of the company (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Maignan and Ferrell, 2004; Lichtenstein, D. R., Drumwright, M. E. and Braig, B. M., 2004). CSR initiatives associate the company with an image of responsiveness to the needs of the society it depends on for survival (Marin et al., 2009).

Recent studies about C-C identification (Pérez et al., 2012; Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; So et al., 2013) suggest that CSR initiatives are a key element of corporate identity that can induce customers to identify and develop a sense of connection with the company. In fact, Lichtenstein et al. (2004) state that 'the way that CSR initiatives create benefits for companies appears to be by increasing consumers' identification with the company'. Thus, it is no wonder that customers with higher levels of identification with the company are more likely to be satisfied (Bhattacharya, C.B., Rao, H. and Glynn, M.A., 1995); Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; He and Li, 2011). This way, individuals who are aware of the company's efforts to develop socially responsible activities, will develop higher stages of identification with the firm than those individuals who are not aware of these initiatives (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2003). Furthermore, the literature suggests that individuals are more likely to identify with those companies with higher levels of CSR in order to increase their self-esteem and express a more ethical and social image (Aquino and Reed II, 2002). Thus, we put forward the following research hypothesis:

H_1: CSR associations have a positive direct effect on C-C identification within the hotel industry.

2.3. CSR associations and customer satisfaction

Similarly, the academic literature in the field of marketing has suggested that CSR associations can influence customer satisfaction (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006; He and Li, 2011; Bigné et al., 2011). However, those works in which has been tested the relationship between CSR and consumer satisfaction have tended to base their analysis on economic criteria (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006) so, as recent studies suggest, the analysis of this relationship not basing the study on economic criteria is considered a contributing source to the marketing literature (Bigné, E., Alvarado, A., Aldás, J. and Currás, R., 2011). Associations regarding a responsible corporate behavior create a favourable context around the company and the brand that favors the emission of more favourable judgments about the service experience (Brown and Dacin, 1997) so that, customer are more understanding to failures in the service delivery improving customer satisfaction. In this sense, Klein and Dawar (2004) showed that a favourable perception of CSR associations helps the cause of a service failure to be perceived as unstable, external to the company and not controllable by the firm, minimizing the consumer possible negative responses to product failures.

So, CSR associations can influence customer satisfaction in the following ways (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). First, company´s customers can be potential stakeholders who cares about not only the economic performance of organizations but also to the overall standing (including social performance) of the company (Maignan et al., 2005). Thus, customers are likely to be more satisfied if services (or products) providers develop CSR initiatives and present a socially responsible behavior towards society (He and Li, 2011). Second, CSR associations can enhance the perceived utility and value, which in turns can increase customer satisfaction (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). Thereby, CSR associations can provide extra benefits to the consumers, such as an increment of self-esteem to the consumers so that these associations may be a determinant of the attractiveness of the company´s identity which in turns enhances the strength of customer identification to the company (Marin et al., 2009). And customers with higher C-C identification are more likely to be satisfied (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; He and Li, 2011).

Much of the research in the field of marketing, and more specifically in the consumer behavior area around customer satisfaction suggests a more complete explanation of its origin than basing the analysis on purely cognitive terms. In fact, several studies suggest that the origin of customer satisfaction comes not from the expectancy disconfirmation model (Oliver, 1977, 1980), but also from other processes with a cognitive and affective nature (Swan and Trawick, 1993; Oliver, 1997; Cronin, J.J., Brady, M.K. and Hult, G.T.M., 2000). Thus, several researchers support the definition and measurement of customer satisfaction as a result of a cognitive process (Oliver, 1977, 1980; Morgan, M.J., Attaway, J.S. and Griffin, M., 1996; Kristensen, K., Martensen, A. and Gronholdt, L., 1999), while on the other hand, others academics understand this construct as the result of an emotional process (Westbrook and Reilly, 1983; Wirtz and Bateson, 1999, Wirtz, J., Mattila, A.S. and Tan, R.L, 2000; Machleit and Mantel, 2001). With regard to this, several authors suggest that customer satisfaction measures could be improved by means of both experiential bases (Westbrook and Reilly, 1983; Bigné and Andreu, 2004). Recent authors in the field of marketing have based their studies on the aforementioned academics to express customer satisfaction in cognitive and affective terms (Bigné and Andreu, 2004; Bigné et al., 2011). Thus, in the present work we used this perspective since even authors who defended the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm as the explanatory axis of customer satisfaction, now insist on the need to consider new perspectives for the study (Westbrook and Oliver, 1991). Following this line of thought, this paper argues that CSR associations have an effect on both affective and cognitive dimensions of customer satisfaction. Thus, we hypothesize:

H2:   CSR associations have a positive direct effect on customer cognitive satisfaction within the hotel industry.

H3:   CSR associations have a positive direct effect on customer affective satisfaction within the hotel industry.

2.4. C-C Identification, customer satisfaction and loyalty

We further propose that the effect of C-C identification on customer loyalty passes through customer satisfaction for several motives. First, marketing theory has widely demonstrated the influence of satisfaction on customer loyalty (Biong, 1993; Anderson, E.W., Fornell, C. and Lehmann, D.R., 1994; Hallowell, 1996; Homburg and Giering, 2001; Bigné and Andreu, 2004). Second, expectation disconfirmation theory of customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1977, 1980) proposes that customers are more likely to be satisfied when the actual company performance exceeds or confirms prior expectations. C-C identification provides a more favourable context for customers to respond to company performance experience as against prior expectation (He and Li, 2011). Thus, when company performance expectations are confirmed (or exceed), customers with higher levels of identification with the company will be more satisfied, since it reassures customers of their psychological attachment with the company, which in turns helps the customers to preserve its self-esteem (Aquino and Reed II, 2002). However, when corporate performance expectations are not confirmed, customers with high levels of identification with the company will tend to be less dissatisfied due to their more affective attachment to the company (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Thus, customers with stronger identification are more prone to be satisfied with the company (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; He and Li, 2011). We expect that customer satisfaction will mediate the effect of C-C identification on customer loyalty. Therefore, it is more likely that customers with higher levels of identification with the company experience more severe states of satisfaction. So that, we propose:

H4:   C-C identification has a positive direct effect on the affective dimension of customer satisfaction within the hotel industry.

H5:   C-C identification has a positive direct effect on the cognitive dimension of customer satisfaction within the hotel industry.

Prior discussion has established that CSR associations have an influence on customer responses to a company and its services or products. In their study, Marin et al. (2009) find that CSR has an indirect impact on customer loyalty via C-C identification. However, no prior studies (to date) have proposed the mediation effect of customer satisfaction on the effects of CSR associations on customer loyalty. Based on the Social Identification Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986) consumers highly identified with the company are more prone to engage in pro-company activities, such as protecting corporate reputation, supporting the company goals, its products and services as well as brand loyalty (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Empirically, several studies have confirmed this effect (Ahearne, M., Bhattacharya, C.B. and Gruen, T., 2005); Marin et al., 2009; He and Li, 2011). Consumption is the key manifestation of the relationship between the company and its consumers.

Consumers identified with the company will consume its products as a way to increase their interaction with the firm (Marin et al., 2009; Currás, R., Bigné, E. and Alvarado, A., 2009). Consumers will also have the desire and commitment to contribute to the advancement and progress of the company they form part (Dutton et al., 1994). Consuming the company's products consumers feel they are contributing to the interests and objectives of the organization (Cornwell and Coote, 2005). According to Theory of Extended Self (Belk, 1988), product purchase becomes an act of expressing and projecting self, necessary for personal identification. Thus, once identified with the firm, consumers use consumption of its products as a way of expressing their own identity (Yoon, Y., Gürhan-Canli, Z. and Bozok, B., 2006). Therefore, a consumer identified with the company will be loyal to the company`s products through the act of purchase. Hence:

H₆: C-C identification has a positive direct effect on customer loyalty within the hotel industry.

Figure 1. Conceptual model
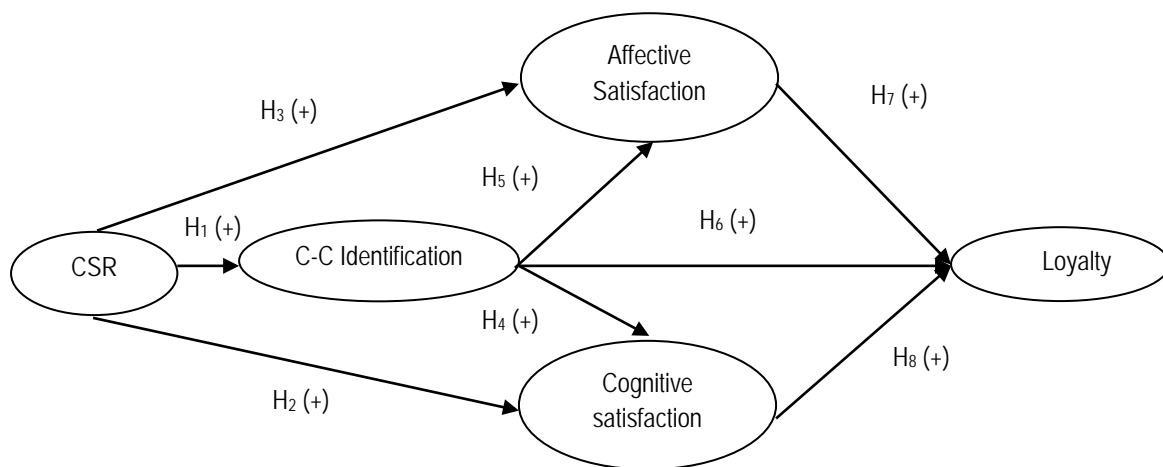
2.5. customer satisfaction and loyalty

Customer loyalty is one of the oldest concepts of interest to marketing academics. While considerable studies of customer loyalty have been conducted, its potential influence on the predictive relationship between customer satisfaction and future customer loyalty is restricted due to the ambiguous and contradictory findings that exist in literature (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Broyles, 2009). Oliver (1999) defines this construct as '*a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior*'. The academic literature has suggested that if customers are satisfied with their chosen brands, increasingly they will be inclined to re-purchase its products or services and finally become loyal customers exhibiting strong customer goodwill. However, it is necessary to consider that in order for customers to be satisfied it is not enough that past experiences exceed consumers´ expectations: customers should receive a service that conveys value (Carrilero, 2011). Research has shown that customer satisfaction has a significant positive impact on customer retention, service usage, and on share of customer purchases (Bolton, R.N, Kannan, P. K. and Bramlett, M. D., 2000); Verhoef, 2003) so customer satisfaction is the main antecedent of customer loyalty (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996; Hu, H.H., Kandampully, J. and Juwaheer, T. D., 2009). However, many researchers question the reliability of using customer satisfaction as a predictor of loyalty (Oliver, 1999; Reichheld, 2003; Story and Hess, 2006). It is not the purpose of the present study to address this major issue, but rather simply looks to determine if a relationship does indeed exist between loyalty and satisfaction in the specific research field of this study. Hence, and basing on the previous literature review regarding customer satisfaction we propose:

H_7: Affective customer satisfaction has a positive direct effect on customer loyalty within the hotel industry.

H_8: Cognitive customer satisfaction has a positive direct effect on customer loyalty within the hotel industry.

3. methodology

3.1. data collection and sample

In order to test the hypothesis personal surveys of hotel customers over 18 years of age were conducted in the Spanish region of Cantabria according to a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. Respondents were instructed to refer national hotels where they had spent their last holidays in the last year when answering questions regarding the variables, since we are interested in understanding their experience as customers. Potential respondents also were required to answer a screening question to verify that they had stayed in a hotel carrying out CSR initiatives. Questionnaires were completed in the respondents' homes to ensure their comfort and make sure that they took time to answer the questions calmly and thoughtfully. To design the research sample, a non-probability sampling procedure was chosen (Trespalacios, J. A., Vázquez, R. y Bello, L., 2005). Specifically, a convenience sample was used, as the researchers did not have access to a census of hotel clients over the age of 18 in the autonomous community of Cantabria (Spain), and it was not possible to determine the probability of any particular element of the population being chosen for the sample.

Thus, to ensure greater representation of the data, a multistage sampling by quotas was made by characterizing the population according to two criteria relevant to the investigation: the sex and the age of the respondent, which is included in the Census Bureau (2010). From the target sample of 400 questionnaires, 382 completed questionnaires were completed, 18 were discarded as incomplete. Hence, the final response rate was 95.5 %. Data was gathered during the month of April 2011 in the autonomous community of Cantabria (Spain). The final sample consist of 186 females (49%) and 196 males (51%); 38 under the age of 25 (10%); 74 at the ages of 25-34 (19.5%); 71 at the ages 35-44 (18.5%); 76 at the ages 45-54 (20%) and 123 over the age of 55 (32.1%). Finally, we decided to conduct our research in the Spanish tourism industry, more specifically in the hotel sector, for several reasons. First, it is a sector in which socially responsible initiatives are developed. Second, this research field helps us avoid the limitations of laboratory experiments, since data is obtained in real conditions of use. Table 1 displays the main characteristics of the research. Similarly, Table 2 displays the respondents' profile.

Table 1. Research technical record

Universe	Hotel clients over 18 years of age
Scope	The autonomous community of Cantabria (Spain)
Date of fieldwork	April 2011
Sample	382 valid questionnaires
Sampling procedure	Quota sampling according to the criteria of 1) sex and 2) age
Processing of data	PASW v. 18.0, EQS v. 6.1

Table 2. Respondents´ profile

	N	%		N	%
Gender:			**Age:**		
Male	190	49.8	From 18 to 24 years	38	10
Female	192	50.2	From 25 to 34 years	76	19.9
			From 35 to 44 years	72	18.8
			From 45 to 54 years	72	18.9
			From 55 to 64 years	53	13.8
			Over 65 Years	71	18.6
Occupation:			**Education:**		
Student	54	14.1	No education	31	8.1
Self-employed	52	13.7	Basic/Elementary/Secondary	87	22.9
Worker	151	39.4	Baccalaureate/FP/COU/BUP	114	29.8
Retired/Pensioner	67	17.5	Associate degree	78	20.3
Unemployed	21	5.6	Higher university	72	18.9
Housework	37	9.7			

Source: National Statistics Institute - INE (data from January 2011).

3.2. measures

Preliminary versions of the questionnaire were administered to a convenience sample of 18 consumers, and pretest results were used to improve measures and design and appropriate structure for the questionnaire. Existing well-established multiple-item 7-point Likert scales, ranging from 'strongly disagree with the statement' to 'total agreement with the statement', were adopted to measure our variables. CSR associations were measured following the model provided by Brown and Dacin (1997). C-C identification was measured using a four item scale from Mael and Ashforth (1992). The affective and cognitive dimensions of customer satisfaction were measured following a three items scale, respectively, provided by Cronin et al. (2000). Finally, we measured consumer loyalty with four items developed by Suárez, L., Vázquez, R. and

Díaz, A.M, 2007). The final measures are provided in the Appendix.

3.3. analyses and results

In order to fulfill the objectives of our research, authors followed Anderson and Gerbing´s (1988) two-stage procedure. First of all, the goodness of the measurement instrument´s psychometric properties was analyzed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and secondly, the structural relations among the theoretically proposed latent variables were analyzed through a Structural Equation Model (SEM). Both, the measurement model and the causal relations model were estimated using the Maximum Likelihood Method with robust estimators using EQS v.6 (Bentler, 1995).

3.4. psychometric properties of the measurement instrument

The psychometric properties (reliability and validity) of the measurement instruments were assessed by a confirmatory factor analysis containing all the multi-item constructs in our theoretical framework by using EQS v.6 (Bentler, 1995). Following Anderson and Gerbing (1998), the reliability of the measurement scales proposed was evaluated using the Cronbach´s alpha coefficient and by an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (Hair, J.F., Black, W.C., Babin, B.J. and Anderson, R.E., 2010). The values of these statistics exceed the minimum recommended values of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively (Hair et al. 2010), which confirm the internal reliability of the model. In addition, all the items are significant at a confident level of 95% and their standardized lambda coefficients exceed 0.5 (Steemkamp and Van Trijp, 1991), confirming the convergent validity of the model. In order to confirm the discriminant validity, we followed the procedure described by Anderson and Gerbing (1998), in which the confidence intervals for the correlation of the constructs are estimated and compared with the unit. In none of the cases did the intervals contain the value 1 (Table 3). Therefore, the measurement model proposed is correct. Finally, the goodness of fit of the analysis was verified with the Satorra-Bentler χ2 (S-B χ2) (p <0.05) and the comparative fit indices (Ullman, 1996) NFI and NNFI (Bentler and Bonnett, 1980), IFC (Bentler, 1988), and IFI (Bollen, 1989), which are the most common measures for confirmatory tests (Uriel and Aldás, 2005). All values were greater than 0.9 (Bentler, 1992), indicating that the model provides a good fit. Moreover, although the S-B χ2 statistic is significant for a significance level of p <0.05, it cannot be considered a reliable indicator of the goodness of fit of the confirmatory analysis because of its sensitivity in samples exceeding 200 units (Bollen,

1989). Table 4 shows the statistics calculated to verify these properties and the main goodness of fit indicators.

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	CSR	CCI	AFS	CGS	LOY
CSR	4.71(1.39)				
CCI	[0.754;0.879]	5.25(1.42)			
AFS	[0.448;0.570]	[0.483;0.635]	4.36(1.48)		
CGS	[0.483;0.622]	[0.384;0.611]	[0.735;0.861]	4.57(1.23)	
LOY	[0.624;0.724]	[0.478;0.663]	[0.584;0.697]	[0.532;0.647]	4.61(1.37)

Note: CSR=corporate social responsibility; CCI=C-C identification; AFS=Affective satisfaction; CGS=Cognitive satisfaction; LOY=Loyalty
Diagonal represents mean and SD (in parenthesis)

Table 4. Confirmatory factor analysis of the final model

Factor	Item	Std. lambda	Cronbach´s α	AVE	
CSR associations (CSR)	CSR1	0.878	0.872	0.688	
	CSR2	0.922			
	CSR3	0.826			
C-C Identification (CCI)	CCI1	0.836	0.921	0.746	S-Bχ2(106 df) 478.169 (p=0,000)
	CCI2	0.882			
	CCI3	0.874			
	CCI4	0.863			
Affective satisfaction (AFS)	AFS1	0.817	0.884	0.573	NFI=0.916 NNFI=0.922
	AFS2	0.841			
	AFS3	0.863			
Cognitive satisfaction (CGS)	CGS1	0.878	0.818	0.559	CFI=0.931 IFI=0.944 RMSEA=0.062
	CGS2	0.921			
	CGS3	0.761			
Loyalty (LOY)	LOY1	0.878	0.846	0.625	
	LOY2	0.873			
	LOY3	0.730			
	LOY4	0.797			

Note: AVE=Average Variance extracted
3

3.5. analysis of structural relations and hypothesis testing

Table 5 shows the standardized coefficients for the structural relations tested. As can be seen the goodness of fit indices for the structural model show a good fit and therefore it is feasible to test the proposed hypotheses. H$_1$ is supported (β=0.385*) as CSR associations has a significant effect on C-C identification. Therefore, it is confirmed that the perception of a socially responsible behavior is able to generate a state of closeness and connection for the consumer towards the company. H$_2$ and H$_3$ predict that CSR associations have a positive effect on both the cognitive and affective dimensions of satisfaction. H$_2$ (β=0.890*) and H3 (β=0.751*) are supported. These results confirm findings from previous studies which analyzed the relationship between CSR associations and customer satisfaction based on non-economic criteria addressing the affective and cognitive dimensions of satisfaction (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006; Bigné et al. 2011). We turn next to the consequences of C-C identification. H$_4$ and H$_5$ expect that C-C identification has a direct effect on both the cognitive and affective dimensions of satisfaction. With regard to this, H$_4$ (β=0.329*) and H$_5$ (β=0.240*) are supported. Furthermore, H6 predicts that C-C identification has a positive effect on customer loyalty. H$_6$ is supported (β=0.452*). In summary, the significant and positive effects in the model confirm that the influence of CSR on loyalty is mediated not only by C-C identification but also by customer satisfaction. Finally, H$_7$ and H$_8$ expect that the affective and cognitive dimension of satisfaction have a positive effect on customer loyalty. H$_7$

(β=0.735*) and H8 (β=0.347*) are supported. Therefore, the proposed model is totally supported by

the results.

Table 5. Structural equation model results

Hypotheses	Structural relationship		Std. coefficient (Robust t-value)	Contrast
H1	CSR →	C-C Identification	0.385 (3.262)*	Accepted
H2	CSR →	Cognitive satisfaction	0.890(11.935)*	Accepted
H3	CSR →	Affective satisfaction	0.751(10.926)*	Accepted
H4	C-C Identification →	Cognitive satisfaction	0.329 (3.303)*	Accepted
H5	C-C Identification →	Affective satisfaction	0.240 (2.895)*	Accepted
H6	C-C Identification →	Loyalty	0.452 (3.931)*	Accepted
H7	Affective satisfaction →	Loyalty	0.735 (2.874)*	Accepted
H8	Cognitive satisfaction →	Loyalty	0.347 (2.208)*	Accepted
	NFI=0.900 NNFI=0.917 CFI=0.925		IFI=0.939 RMSEA=0.058	
	S-Bχ2(111 gl) 466.366 (p=0,000)			

p<0.05*

Figure 2. Structural model estimation
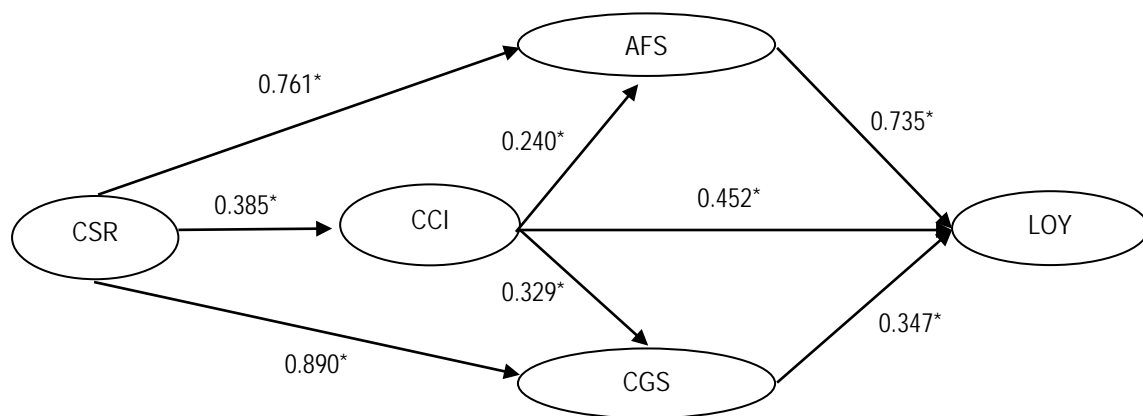
4. discussion and conclusion

This study analyzes the underlying mechanisms through which CSR influences hotel customer loyalty. The general objective of this paper is to examine the mediating role of C-C identification in the influence of CSR associations on consumer behavior within the hotel industry in the Spanish region of Cantabria. With this objective in mind, a causal model is proposed to explain the influence of CSR associations on both C-C identification and consumer (cognitive and affective) satisfaction, and the influence of C-C identification on hotel customer loyalty. First, the results of this research confirm that the perception of a socially responsible behavior is able to generate a state of closeness and connection for the consumer towards hotel companies as argued by recent studies in the hospitality industry (Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; So et al., 2013).

Additionally, this study tests and confirms that C-C identification plays a central role along the path

from CSR associations to hotel customer satisfaction and loyalty. This is particularly relevant in a sector which has experienced drops in occupancy, average daily rate and revenue per available room (Alonso-Almeida and Bremser, 2013). Specifically, our research expands the conventional vision of CSR influence on hotel consumer behavior and suggests that CSR associations not only affect product and brand evaluations, but also C-C identification, customer satisfaction and loyalty. This study adds additional empirical evidence to previous studies of the positive effect of CSR on C-C identification and customer satisfaction. In this regard, we extend Luo and Bhattacharya´s (2006) research by proposing, developing and confirming the mediation role of C-C identification on the relationship between CSR associations and customer satisfaction. Additionally, this study supports a more complete explanation of consumer satisfaction including not only cognitive aspects. In this sense, the analysis of the effects of CSR associations on both cognitive and affective components of customer satisfaction leads to the

conclusion that the perception of CSR is more related to cognitive than affective aspects of consumer satisfaction. This research allows us to note that consumer satisfaction can be conceptualized through their cognitive and affective dimensions as indicated by recent research (Cronin et al., 2000; Wirtz et al., 2000; Machleit and Mantel, 2001). Furthermore, consistent with Du et al. (2007), the demonstrated union between CSR associations and hotel customer loyalty suggests that CSR is less of a short-term, sales-generating mechanism as it is a tool that deepens consumer relationship over time creating hotel customer loyalty through C-C identification. This research also contributes to the literature on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985) by demonstrating the relevant role of C-C identification on the effect of CSR associations on customer satisfaction and loyalty within the hospitality industry. In summary, the effects included in our model —from CSR associations to hotel **consumer loyalty**— provide a new approach to hospitality managers´ comprehension regarding the possibilities of the company CSR investments.

These results have interesting implications for hospitality companies developing CSR initiatives since they will be able to develop a base of loyal customers, because CSR associations can enhance customer identification with the hotel and cognitive and affective aspects of satisfaction. First, this research provides evidence that developing and maintaining a state of connection and identification between the company and its customers it is possible to generate positive responses towards the company (Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; So et al., 2013). Therefore, hospitality managers should initiate and maintain any activity that improves the social character of the company. In this sense, the basis to improve the socially responsible initiatives of a company is to understand the implications of this philosophy. Thus, it will be important for hospitality companies to subscribe international codes of conducts and standards to formalize the policy to regard with this matter (e.g., the International Hotel Environmental Initiative, Green globe, etc…). For instance, Hilton hotels have adopted a new standard for businesses partners and suppliers which includes standards on child or forced labour, employee representation, health, safety and environmental management, discrimination, disciplinary practices and employee compensation and working hours.

Besides, it must be highlight that the responsible corporate behavior has to be perceived to get results. Consumers´ awareness of hotel businesses´ impacts on specific issues is a prerequisite to develop adequate levels of identification and satisfaction. Therefore, customer identification with the company and satisfaction depend on the extent to which the firm communicates about its CSR initiatives to different publics. With communicative tools such as public speeches, advertisements, promotions or newsletters, corporate communications can help spread the image of a good corporate citizen caring about important stakeholder issues. The authors recommend hospitality managers to introduce CSR issues in corporate communications, arousing the interest of customers through shared concerns towards a specific social or environmental cause or fostering customers´ interactions around socially responsible initiatives. However, some specific recommendations for effectively developing and communicating a company´s CSR program are presented in order to guide practitioners. First, the authors recommend to hospitality companies to collaborate with a broad number of stakeholders on the relevance of what CSR practices should be carried out and emphasized in corporate communications in order to increase awareness regarding stakeholders´ expectations. One of the major risks for managers is to publish the information that they consider important without realizing that customers and other stakeholders may not be interested in this information. Thus, hospitality practitioners should actively listen to and establish a relationship of collaboration with their various stakeholders to integrate this feedback into the CSR strategy. A good strategy of a proactive involvement of stakeholders is Meliá Hotels International. This company has developed a relationship and dialog model called Meliá CERCA (Martínez, P., Pérez, A. and Rodríguez, I., 2014) whose objective is to connect the interests of the company with the interests of its target audience, thus building a bridge of dialogue between the firma and its stakeholders regarding CSR issues.

Secondly, the present research shows how CSR associations enhance both customer satisfaction and loyalty, which suggests that hospitality practitioners should also invest in social initiatives. As our results demonstrate, consumers tend to reward companies that are more socially responsible by being more loyal to them. Customers wish for an enduring relationship with socially responsible companies due to the greatest levels of identification and satisfaction and the psychological connection with these ethical and responsible companies. So, when a hotel is perceived as socially responsible customers feel more identified and satisfied. Therefore, respect to investing in CSR, hospitality firms do not need to rely exclusively on C-C identification in their efforts to influence customer's outcomes positively. The CSR-satisfaction link demonstrates that customers value socially responsible firms. Hospitality firms engaging in CSR initiatives can increase customers´ psychological

attachment to the company, which translates into higher levels of satisfaction (Walsh and Bartikowski, 2013). To conclude, the significant role of C-C identification and customer satisfaction on customer loyalty suggests that hospitality managers should invest in the area of corporate identity management. The study of this concept is a renovated research topic since numerous studies demonstrate that the effective management of an organizations´ identity leads to the acquisition of a favorable corporate image, and over time, a favourable reputation, which in turn leads the organization´s stakeholders to be favorably disposed toward it (Barnett, M.L., Jermier, J.M. and Lafferty, B.A., 2006). Furthermore, strategically management of corporate identity can enhance the feeling of belonging and identification among various stakeholders (Balmer and Greyser, 2006; He and Balmer, 2007).With regard to this, in the hospitality context, the building of a favorable corporate image for hotel firms is a crucial aspect for practitioners due to the intangible nature of hospitality practices and the subjective perception of the quality of hotel services (Christou, 2003).

Despite the contribution of this article the generalization of these study´s findings is limited. This study tests the hypothesis in one research context (hotel sector). Thus, any generalization is limited to the specific circumstances of this industry. It would therefore be useful to replicate the study in other tourism sectors (e.g., restaurants, transportation...) to improve the generalization of our results. Furthermore, as CSR is very sensitive to the effects of the contextual characteristics it should be interesting to replicate this study in other countries with a greater CSR culture (e.g., Anglo-saxons regions). With regard to possible future research, it would be interesting to extend this study by introducing corporate ability associations since we believe that this fact may increase the understanding of how customer loyalty is generated. Future research might also consider including new constructs in the model. With regard to this, since there is no agreement on the consequences of effects following C-C identification, it would be interesting to analyze the influence of this construct on other affective and behavioral variables such as attitudes toward the company and its products, purchase intention or corporate identity and image, among others. If we take into account the scarcity of studies oriented toward hotel customer loyalty, the current study has attempted to provide new ideas about CSR associations and its consequences on consumer behavior within the hotel industry in the Spanish region of Cantabria. At the same time, these new ideas should stimulate new research about this topic enhancing our comprehension of the implications of hospitality firms´ investments in socially responsible initiatives.

5. appendix

Ident.	Item
CSR associations	
CSR1	This hotel company protects the environment
CSR2	This hotel company shows its commitment towards society by improving the welfare of the communities in which it operates
CSR3	This hotel company directs part of its budget to donations to social causes
C-C Identification	
CCI1	When someone criticizes X, it feels like a personal insult
CCI2	I am very interested in what others think about X
CCI3	When I talk about X, I usually say "we" rather than "they"
CCI4	When someone compliments X then it feels like a personal compliment
Affective satisfaction	
AFS1	It is nice to stay in a hotel belonging to (brand) X
AFS2	I like staying in a hotel belonging to (brand) X
AFS3	Staying in a hotel of this brand is great
Cognitive satisfaction	
CGS1	My choice to purchase this hotel service was a wise one
CGS2	I think that I did the right thing when I purchased this hotel service
CGS3	This facility is exactly what is needed for this hotel service
Loyalty	
LOY1	I usually use X as my first choice compared to other hotel companies
LOY2	It would be costly in terms of money, time and effort to end the relationship with this hotel company
LOY3	I would not switch to another hotel company the next time
LOY4	I would recommend X to others

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