



LUND UNIVERSITY

School of Economics and Management  
Department of Business Administration

FEKN90

Business Administration-

*Degree Project Master of Science in Business and Economics*

Spring term of 2012

# CSR & Disposable Goods

- A Qualitative Study Exploring the Role of CSR as a Purchase Criteria

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# Abstract

## **Title**

CSR & Disposable Goods – A Qualitative Study Exploring the Role of CSR as Purchase Criteria

## **Seminar Date**

29<sup>th</sup> of May 2012

## **Course**

FEKP90 Master Thesis in Business Administration, International Marketing and Brand Management/Consumer Behavior (Level D), 30 University Credit Points (30 ECTS)

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## **Key words**

Corporate social responsibility, consumer behavior, decision making process, attitude-behavior gap, disposable goods

## **Purpose**

This paper aims at contributing to the literature on consumer behavior in the retail industry by addressing the role CSR plays in the consumer decision making process and to understand the limited role of CSR in these choices. Our purpose is to explore consumer decision making and, in contrast to the main-stream literature within the field, address consumers' considerations concerning CSR as a purchase criterion when buying disposable goods.

## **Methodology**

We have chosen to work with qualitative methods where we take an interpretive approach. Furthermore, narrative transcripts based on semi structured interviews and observations have been issued in order to reach the purpose of this study.

## **Theoretical perspectives**

The theoretical perspective that has been applied in this study is consumer behavior, where decision making and attitudes have been explored. Furthermore, we draw on previous theories on ethical consumption, theories of neutralization, and CSR (specifically related to consumer reactions).

## **Empirical foundation**

The empirical material consists of 18 semi-structured interviews and field experiments conducted with in an urban and rural area in the south of Sweden.

## **Conclusions**

We found that CSR plays a minor role for consumers when purchasing disposable goods. The research has made it possible to observe a number of contextual and cognitive barriers experienced by the consumers. Lastly, we state that consumers cope with feelings of guilt by employing neutralizing techniques to justify their actions.

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# 1. Introduction

Through their consumption, consumers act as judges of corporation's actions. How consumers place their vote (e.g. purchasing or boycotting) is an indication of how consumers views a company (Klein et al. 2004). During the last two decades, it has been possible to observe a growing attention to how companies conduct business. Concerns about questionable corporate conduct have been raised by several consumer groups, public organizations, media and governmental bodies. Disreputable examples such as Nike's use of child-labor (Klein 1999) and Nestlé's Africa scandal (Post 1985) have made the greater public aware of the negative effects of consumerism, and companies of their reputable vulnerability. As consumers are becoming more aware of the consequences of modern days' consumption and production, their sensitivity to how corporations behave has increased noticeably. As a response, companies attentively tune in to new demands and pay great attention to consumers responses to their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Marin et al. 2009). Although there are those who are supportive for philanthropic reasons, a large number of companies are doing so in hope of financial rewards (Webb et al. 2008).

That CSR has been accepted as a business imperative is increasingly noticeable. Newspapers, magazines and consultancy reports glowingly describe possible benefits of CSR work including; increased financial performance (Guo et al. 2009), strengthened brand (Brown & Dacin 1997; Mohr & Webb 2005) and positive consumer responses (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001), whilst caution about the potential risk of not acting socially responsible is equally prescribed. Managers are informed that by acting responsibly, demonstrating and communicating their concern for the environment, human rights and the wellbeing of their employees, their companies will become more successful. In management literature, CSR has been described as providing companies with a competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer 2009) by appealing to the growing number of ethically conscious consumers, employees and investors and other stakeholders. The enthusiasm for CSR can be observed in the marketing literature as well. In particular, scholars have focused on CSR initiatives and consumer behavior and the subject has attired much attention, especially its effects on corporate success. If research a decade ago was focused on exploring the potential benefits of CSR, recent studies have been directed at understanding how companies should communicate their CSR work to the consumers, and their reactions to particular CSR initiatives. Although research has shown that CSR's impact on performance is not as easily described as; unethical

companies are punished and ethical companies are rewarded (Carrigan & Attalla 2001), a general consensus exists that CSR has a positive impact on companies' performance.

In the book *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility* (2005), Vogel questions this well recognized assumption by arguing that CSR does not pay. Vogel (2005) however, does not aim to miniscule the benefits of a greater corporate and public interest in acting more responsible, and neither is this the intension of this paper. Instead, Vogel insists that companies should not expect the market to reward them unquestioningly for doing so. Given the considerable amount of resources that is invested in CSR profiling and that most companies expect to see some reward from their initiatives, companies should be more interested in knowing how their money is best spent. For companies aiming to reap strategic benefits of CSR (McGee 1998) it is vital to have insight into how their target market value CSR (Sen & Bhattachaya 2001; Webb et al. 2008) in order to financially defend CSR initiatives (Webb et al. 2008). It is thus interesting to understand from a managerial point of view if and how CSR constitutes a purchase criterion for consumers in the decision making process.

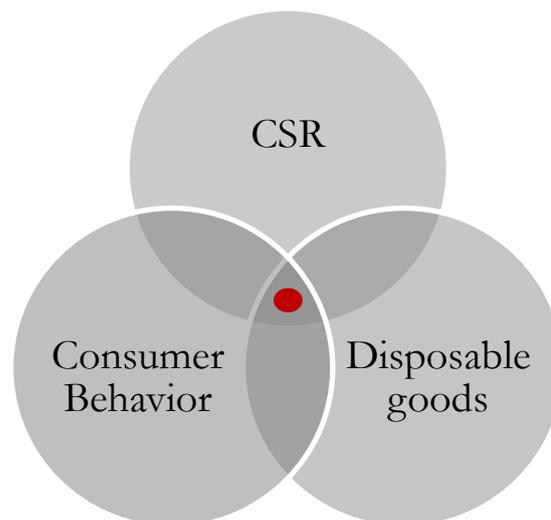
Moreover, while consumers are increasingly taking ethical factors into consideration in purchasing decisions and demanding corporations to act responsibly, recent research has documented a gap between consumers' initial positive attitudes towards CSR and their actual purchasing behavior (Beckmann 2007; Berger & Kanetkar 1995; Carrigan & Attalla 2001; Young et al. 2010). For example, in a research on ethical foods Young et al. (2010) observes that while 30 % indicate concerns towards environmental issues, merely 5 % translates this into actual green purchases. The phenomena, coined attitude-behavior gap, questions the use of attitudes in predicting consumer behavior. Strengthening this assumption, research has shown that CSR plays a minor role in purchase intentions (Carrigan & Attalla 2001) and only a small segment of consumers use it as a purchase criteria (Mohr et al. 2001). According to Beckmann et al. (2001), we consume for personal reasons rather than societal ones. That is, CSR does not constitute the most governing criteria for consumers decision making (Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000). In comparison to more traditional factors such as price, quality, convenience and brand, consumers attach less importance to CSR when making decisions (Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000; Carrigan & Attalla 2001; Mohr et al. 2001; Roberts 1996; Öberseder et al. 2011). This discrepancy also calls for a better understanding of the decision making process. This discrepancy will be the point of departure for this study.

## 1.1. Problem

Extant literature on CSR in general and ethical consumer decision making contains much discussion regarding how companies could deal with consumers' growing environmental and social interest through their CSR initiatives. Although this stream of research has contributed a great deal of insight, there is still a limited understanding of whether and how CSR affects purchasing behavior for disposable goods, generally characterized by low involvement. Per definition, CSR would not constitute a purchase criterion for products where the consumer put little time and effort into their choices. Previous research addresses decision making predominantly in situations where the consequences of consumption and production is relatively well documented, such as the clothing and food industry (e.g. Andersen 2009). This research does offer insight into CSR and how it is used by consumers. However, research does not offer any specific results or findings relating to the role CSR plays for consumer when purchasing disposable goods. Thus it becomes interesting to explore and to further understand what role CSR plays for consumer when buying disposable goods.

## 1.2. Aim & purpose

We aim at contributing to the literature on consumer behavior in the retail industry by addressing the role CSR plays in the consumer decision making process and to understand the limited role of CSR in these choices. Moreover, our purpose is to explore CSR in relation to consumer decision making and in contrast to the main-stream literature within the field, address consumers' considerations concerning CSR as a purchase criterion when buying disposable goods (*Figure 1*).



*Figure 1. Our theoretical contribution*

### **1.3 Disposition**

The next section review extant literature on CSR and consumer behavior and draws on prior research regarding the consumer decision making process to develop a conceptual framework that captures the contingent nature of CSR as purchasing criteria and possible impeding factors. The methodology and its limitations are subsequently discussed and findings are presented and used to draw out insights. Finally, the results are discussed and managerial implications and possible future research is suggested.

## 2. Consumer Responses to CSR – an Overview

*This chapter is a presentation of the theories and concept which are to aid us in the understanding, interpretation and analysis of our empirical material. The chapter is concluded with a model aimed to visually represent the theoretical framework.*

### 2.1. The company's role in society

Scholars have not found a generic agreement upon the definition of CSR (Dahlsrud 2008; Jones et al. 2007; Mohr et al. 2001). The concept has been under discussion since the 1950's where it was referred to as social responsibility rather than the modern term of CSR (Caroll 1999). This paper defines CSR, using a commonly applied definition accounted for by The European Commission (2011, p.3), as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis.” Disregarding the complexity of its definition, CSR is rooted in the recognition that businesses and society are interwoven entities (Wood 1991) and that businesses has the potential to make contributions to society's positive development.

According to Jones et al. (2007) there is a distinct line drawn to separate the two different ways companies can engage in CSR; as philanthropy or as a core business. For the former, companies make charitable donations to selected causes which are found to be worthy but make no greater attempt to conduct business for the greater good of society as their main concern. The latter, on the other hand sees CSR as a potential way to enhance their competitiveness whilst maximizing the total value of society. Nevertheless, this idea has been subject to a number of critics who argues that the solemn priority of companies is to be financially viable, Friedman (1970) being the most prominent critic. A, although there is disagreement on the inclusion of CSR as a company's core business most academics agree that companies must move beyond the economic gains (Russell & Russell 2010) and the narrow technical and legal requirements (Davis 1973) in effort to create shared value for all stakeholders involved and for society at large (Ellen et al. 2006). Porter and Kramer (2006) notes that CSR and society is often pitted against one another. They argue for a more liberal view in which companies and societies maximize a shared value and where one cannot fully function without the support of the other. Rather than using reactive CSR initiatives or so called ‘greenwashing’ the authors advise companies to see the benefits, not the constraints, of genuine sustainable business practice. A pharmaceutical company supporting the local university's biomedical institution, for example, will benefit from future skilled workforce within its field. Similarly, societies need prospering companies to continuously create work

opportunities to mitigate effects of economic downturns and transition to a sustainable economically system.

The managerial interest in CSR is relatively new, and the influx has been attributed to several reasons. Ernst and Young (2002, cited in Jones et al. 2007) propose five drivers to the augmented CSR focus of businesses: (1) greater stakeholder awareness of corporate ethical, social and environmental behavior; (2) direct stakeholder pressures; (3) investor pressure; (4) peer pressure; and (5) an increased sense of social responsibility. Globalization and the responsibilities which arise with vast supply chains in multinational environments are also fundamental changes in the business environment which has been suggested as possible reasons (The Commission of the European Communities 2002, cited in Jones et al. 2007), the former resulting in increasingly scrutiny from the public. National governments and supranational agreements have too been active in CSR's advancements (Jones et al. 2007). Sweden was for example the first government to have coordinated government functions for CSR and to introduce compulsory sustainability reports for state-owned companies (Swedish Institute 2011). As well as, CSR is at the heart of the European Union's 2020 goal of a "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (European Commission 2011, p. 3).

## **2.2. Inherent dilemma of CSR in the retail industry**

Compared to traditional companies, retailer face the problem that products are often sourced from less develop countries where conditions are often unfavorable (Jones & Comfort 2005). This provides a problem because consumers are aware of the unfavorable conditions in such countries. However, according to Girod (2003, p.4) "CSR is a vital element in the European retailers brand strategy". This suggests a strategic advantage for retailers engaging in CSR (Elg & Hultman 2011; Girod 2003). However, the retail sector builds on a rather complex and vast net of supply relationships (Elg & Hultman 2011). This in itself complicates companies CSR work (e.g. Elg & Hultman 2011). This sector typically experiences more problems consolidating some aspects of CSR with their international operations (Rahbek et al. 2006). This is because public pressure has increasingly been put on the retail industry and companies are being held accountable for the actions of their suppliers, which often for cost considerations are located in developing countries with looser restrictions (Ferne et al. 2010).

Research industry within the retail suggests that retailers can aid in their brand development through CSR work (Middlemiss 2003). This is because consumers evaluate CSR when they are evaluating the company brand (Fuchs & Kalfagianni 2009; Girod 2003). However, the complex network structures of retailers make it extremely challenging to work with CSR as there are many stakeholders retailers need to address (Elg & Hultman 2011). Retailers have to evaluate and make priorities concerning which stakeholder group they would like to satisfy and how. Although CSR might be perceived as a cost or as an inefficient strategic tool in the short run, in the long run CSR might offer a competitive advantage for companies (Girod 2003).

### **2.3. CSR as a business case**

It is accepted that companies do not engage in CSR activities out of philanthropic reasons, but because it will pay. Moral arguments that were initially used to defend CSR did not prove effective in convincing the critics, especially neo-classical economists like Friedman (1970). These critics argued that it is a breach of a company's financial responsibility towards their owners to engage in anything but profitability. Also, the moral arguments had difficulties providing for hard evidence of its advantages (Hopkins & Crowe 2003). While these attempts to justify CSR were open to critique, the economic argument, or the so called business case of CSR, has proven more effective in persuading the business world. The business case of CSR argues that companies will become more profitable by appealing to a large number of stakeholders (Valor 2008). Although profitability is not the solemn reason why companies will or should behave more responsible, it is the most influential argument according to Vogel (2005). While the recognized benefits of CSR differs (e.g. motivated employees, attraction and retention of human capital, increased license to operate, branding, attractive investment), the concept as a competitive advantage and its inclusion as a business philosophy was acknowledged by the marketplace once it was presented as a business case (Porter & Kramer 2006).

The business case of CSR has also been justified by consumers' positive reactions to CSR initiatives. Within the strategic literature, companies have been advised to recognize that competitive advantage can be attained if stakeholders (e.g. consumers) value their CSR effort (Fielding 2007). If CSR initiatives lead to consumers making positive inferences about a company, it indirectly generates, inter alia, increase profitability. Therefore, CSR efforts can be justified by economic reasoning. This argumentation holds if the consumers are willing and capable to include CSR in their decision making process (Valor 2008). The question remains if consumers are? Hence, it is crucial for companies to gain deeper understanding of consumer

responses to CSR initiatives by looking closer at what drives and hinders consumers to act responsibly.

## **2.4. Consumer responses to CSR**

### *2.4.1. Company and product evaluations*

For consumption in general, several studies have shown that consumers take CSR into consideration when evaluating companies and their products. Nonetheless, the benefits of doing good does not always measure up to the damage caused by unethical behavior (Folkes & Kamins 1999). That is, consumers' evaluation of companies is more sensitive towards negative CSR information about a company or a product than positive information is (Brown & Dacin 1997; Sen & Bhattacharya 2001). This has been attributed to the assumption consumers make about companies' ethical work. In other words, companies are thought to act ethically so the negative behavior diminishes evaluations of the company more than positive improves it (Creyer & Ross 1996; Sen & Bhattacharya 2001). Negative information has also been ascribed to be considered more informative (Folkes & Kamins 1999) and thus making the processing of negative and positive information askew. Products experience a similar evaluation pattern to that of the company. By using hypothetical and real companies, Brown and Dacin (1997) show that consumers' overall evaluation of a company's CSR record affect their preference for a product. This suggests that negative CSR associations can have damaging effect on the product evaluation, where positive associations may augment it. Further, the evaluation process is in turn affected by the source of information and the involvement with the product or brand. Even though all consumers will be affected by negative information, only those consumers supportive of a particular cause will notice the positive information.

Furthermore, personal concern has been identified through research to play a major role in the evolution process in decision making (Carrigan & Attalla 2001; Valor 2008; Öberseder et al. 2011). In order for CSR to be an evaluation criterion, consumers also have to value ethical features, which in turn will depend upon the consumers' self-identity (Valor 2008). This might seem straight forward but the process is further complicated by the consumers' identification with a company and their support for the company's chosen cause. If a consumer is highly involved with a product or brand they will resist negative information and have trouble remembering ethical attributes (Auger et al. 2003; Carrigan & Attalla 2001; Valor 2007). This Company-Consumer identification will have positive outcomes for the company evaluation

because the experienced congruence between the consumer's own characteristics and that of the company act as a source of self-identification (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001). Alternatively, the consumers are more sensitive towards information about a company's CSR efforts if they have a personal concern for that company's chosen cause (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001). If the consumer identifies themselves positively with the company's CSR initiatives, consumers will then behave more favorably towards the company. In other words, a person who has lost someone close to cancer will most likely evaluate companies doing considerable work for cancer research more positively than consumers who do not share the same personal support.

#### *2.4.2. Consumer awareness of CSR-initiatives*

Several studies have shown that consumer awareness of CSR is a key prerequisite to involve CSR in the decision making process. Needless to say, if consumers are unaware of CSR they will not use it as a criterion in their decision making process. Much of the academic research on CSR and its link to consumer behavior has either assumed awareness of CSR initiatives or had it artificially induced under experimental conditions (e.g. Brown & Dacin 1997; Creyer & Ross 1997; and Sen & Bhattacharya 2001). This provides a problem because actual consumer behavior might not be captured. Although recent studies show that awareness of a company's CSR initiatives among consumers is a precondition, the level of awareness of real consumers is relatively low (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004; Pomeroy & Dolnicar 2009; Sen et al. 2006). In fact, consumers find it difficult to recall ethical claims for products for which they quite confidently can explain the functional features of. For example, Auger et al. (2003) found that for bath soap and footwear, only 90 % and 5 % respectively recalled ethical attributes. Nevertheless, when the consumers are made aware of companies' CSR efforts and claims, the results generally include positive company related associations (Sen et al. 2006), loyal customers (Pirsch et al. 2007) and stronger behavioral intentions for purchasing products from the relevant company (Pomeroy & Dolnicar 2009). Highlighting the need for companies to communicate their CSR initiatives to their stakeholder in order to increase CSR awareness.

#### *2.4.3. Communication of CSR – overcoming stakeholder skepticism*

While consumers are claiming that they want to know more about how companies they buy from behave ethically, they also quickly become skeptical towards the same CSR efforts when they are too aggressively marketed (Du et al. 2010). Companies need to balance between increasing awareness of their CSR work and marketing it too much, in order to avoid not being perceived as

genuine in their work. Communication of CSR is however a walk on a fine line and a key challenge is to minimize skepticism that the consumer holds against ethical claims. A company's ability to generate positive consumer responses from their CSR communication hinges upon the fit between the company and the CSR issue or cause (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004). Namely, if there is a perceived relatedness between the core business or expertise of a company and their CSR initiatives, then consumers are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the company engaging in CSR. The higher the fit the more justified the CSR activity is among the public, and thus also less likely to generate counter-arguments. If the fit is perceived as low however, consumers may experience difficulty in accepting the CSR initiatives as genuine and instead generate less favorable CSR attributions (Becker-Olsen et al. 2006).

Attributions to companies' underlying motives are vital because when consumers suspect ulterior, self-serving motives they are more likely to desist from making positive inferences about that company (Fein & Hilton 1994). According to Du et al. (2010) the attributions of a company's CSR motives can be either extrinsic or intrinsic. Extrinsic is when the company's motives are seen to be predominantly profit-driven, and intrinsic is when a company's CSR initiatives are seen as genuine and with true devotion to the cause. Unquestionable, attributions of extrinsic motives lead to less positive consumer responses, whilst companies who convey intrinsic motives are more likely to be rewarded with favorable attitudes and behaviors (Forehand & Grier 2003). Forehand and Grier (2003) also notes that consumers react negatively to all communication perceived as deceiving, not towards extrinsic motives per se. Nevertheless, consumers have been found to be relatively forgiving of extrinsic motives. Findings in recent studies show that consumers tolerate extrinsic motives when they are paired with intrinsic motives (Ellen et al. 2006; Sen et al. 2006). To a certain extent, mixed attributions have been shown to generate more positive consumer responses than did solemnly extrinsic or intrinsic attributions (Ellen et al. 2006). These findings are consistent with other research showing that including both extrinsic and intrinsic motives in a company's CSR communication may reduce consumer skepticism, spawn goodwill and enhance the overall credibility of the ethical claim (Forehand & Grier 2003).

The source of information, namely how directly the information channels are controlled by a company, and the type of CSR program initiated play important roles in CSR communication (Öberseder et al. 2011). The later is said to consist of two kinds: institutionalized and promotional programs (Pirsch et al. 2007, cited in Öberseder et al. 2011). Institutionalized CSR programs offer “a comprehensive approach to CSR, attempting to fulfill a company's social obligations across all the stakeholder groups, and touching all aspects of the company” (Pirsch et

al. 2007, p. 126). The promotional programs lack this long-term relationship perspective, and instead are used as tools aimed at driving product sales (Pirsch et al. 2007). Not surprisingly, companies offering institutionalized CSR programs are seen to be more likely to generate increased customer loyalty and decreased consumer skepticism than do promotional programs (Pirsch et al. 2007).

#### *2.4.4. CSR and purchase intentions (attitude-behavior gap)*

There are several reasons why companies choose to engage in CSR activities. One of them is to have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001). However, the process is more complex than straightforward as put forth by Sen and Bhattacharya (2001). They argue that companies' CSR activities can have either a direct or indirect effect on consumers' purchase intentions. The effect is found to be indirect when consumers know the company and its CSR activities. On the other hand, when consumer support companies CSR initiatives and feel that the company is engaging in such activities for the right reason then the effect is direct on consumer purchase intentions. This suggests that companies engaging in CSR activities will be rewarded by consumers through increased purchased intentions. However, this is not the case in all circumstances because consumers' positive attitudes do not translate into actual behavior in the marketplace (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001). This could be due to that attitudes have generally been used when researching the effect companies CSR activities have on purchase intention. According to Network for Business Sustainability (2010), self-reported surveys have been the preferred method for research within the area of CSR accounting for 47 % of data collection where consumers are often asked to rank ethical claims. This provides a problem for respondents as consumers do not have to take into account the trade-off effect of ethical feature versus traditional features which in turns leads to an oversaturation of the importance of ethical features (Auger et al. 2003). This discrepancy has been given different names, but we will here by use the attitude-behavior gap (Beckmann 2007; Berger and Kanetkar 1995; Carrigan & Attalla 2001).

## **2.5. Obstacles when buying responsibly**

There are obstacles in the marketplace that hinder consumers from behaving ethically (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004; Bray et al. 2011; Carrigan & Attalla 2001; Valor 2008). These have

been identified as impeding factors and can be used for better understanding of circumstances where intention do not translate to actual behavior.

### *2.5.1. Consumer efficacy*

Consumer efficacy has been identified by research as an impending factor hindering ethical consumption (Bray et al. 2011; Carrigan & Attalla 2001; Valor 2008). Consumer efficacy addresses the effects of consumption. More specifically, it related towards the perception consumers have about making a change through their consumption. That is, if a consumer perceive their consumption to not to make a difference they will not try to incorporate any ethical features such as CSR as a purchase criteria. Thus consumers need to perceive their consumption to have a positive effect, as it otherwise may function as a barrier.

### *2.5.2. Information*

Another major obstacle identified is the role information plays in the evaluation process in decision making (Bray et al. 2011; Devinney et al. 2006; Öberseder et al. 2011). Consumers require information to make efficient purchasing choices (Sproles et al. 1978). However, the availability of information is minimal when it comes to ethical consumption (Beckmann 2007; Carrigan & Attalla 2001). Consumers find it challenging to purchase ethically because of cognitive ambivalence (Valor, 2008). That is, while consumers are aware that information exists, they find it demanding in terms of energy and time to find and process relevant information for each purchase. Contrasting findings are presented by Boulstride and Carrigan (2000) whom in their study claim lack of information not to be a relevant factor for ethical consumption.

### *2.5.3. Availability*

Furthermore, the limited availability of ethical products as well as the limited availability of ethical alternatives is also a hinder to ethical consumption (Nicholls & Lee 2006). If consumer cannot find a product that satisfies their ethical needs they will refrain from purchasing (Shawn & Clarke 1999). Thus it is essential that there are products on the marketplace satisfying consumer's ethical needs.

#### *2.5.4. Price sensitivity and perceived quality*

Price sensitivity is yet another impeding factor (Bray et al. 2011). Consumers seem to value financial aspects over ethical aspects (Carrigan & Attalla 2001). This suggests that it is easier for consumers to evaluate financial aspects over ethical aspects. This provides problems for ethical consumption since ethical trade-offs are harder to make compared to financial trade-offs. Additionally, as identified by Öberseder et al. (2011) consumer's monetary resource is yet another barrier hindering ethical consumption. If consumers do not possess the monetary resource to purchasing ethically they will not be able to do so. Furthermore, quality perception hinders ethical consumption since consumer might perceive the quality of an ethical product to be inferior to a traditional product when this might not be the case (Bray et al. 2011).

#### *2.5.5. Personal experience*

Personal experience is another barrier hindering ethical consumption. Consumers' need to recognize ethical consequence of their purchases and, failing to do so is a major obstacle (McDevitt et al. 2007). This suggests that consumers that are unable to recognize that their purchases have consequences will not incorporate ethical consequence into their. This provides problems for consumers looking to incorporating CSR as a purchase criterion as they might not perceive the ethical consequences of their purchases. Consumers seem only to be aware of issues relating to themselves and their personal concern (Bray et al. 2011).

#### *2.5.6. Guilt*

Guilt has been found to hinder consumers from purchasing ethically. Bray et al. (2011) found that consumers experience feelings of guilt after the point of purchase, which is in line with early marketing literature on post purchase dissonance. Steenhaut and Van Kehove (2006) also comment on consumers' reported feelings of guilt when purchasing unethically. However, they argue that the consumers' anticipated feelings of guilt could hinder them prior to making an ethical purchase. This hinders ethical consumption because since consumers think about the negative emotions associated with ethical consumption rather than the positive emotions, they refrain from acting ethically. Steenhaut and Van Kehove (2006) further claim that consumers that associate positive emotions to ethical consumption also tend to favor such behavior. This suggests that consumer that associated negative emotion to ethical consumption will deter such behavior in order to avoid negative emotions.

### 2.5.7. CSR as a purchase criteria

Another understanding for the gap between behavior and attitude is presented by Öberseder et al. (2011). Compared to traditional purchasing criteria such as price, quality and value, CSR plays a minor role in the decision making process (Carrigan & Attalla 2001; Mohr et al. 2001).

Öberseder et al. (2011, p.1) argue that the CSR evolution process as purchasing criteria is “a complex and hierarchically structured process during which consumers distinguish between core, central, and peripheral factors”. In comparison to the previous section addressing obstacles hindering ethical consumption Öberseder et al. (2011) suggest there are pre-requisite consumers need to satisfy in order to involve CSR as a purchase criteria.

Öberseder et al. (2011) present a hierarchical model as a suggestion to why CSR is of lower importance to consumers’ decision making. They suggest that consumers need to satisfy core, central and peripheral factors in order to involve CSR as a purchase criterion, where the core factor are considered pre-requisite and central and peripheral function as moderating effect on decision making and company evolution. The core factor is presented as the most complex step in the process. The core factor addresses information consumers require in order to make a decision based on a company’s CSR position. If consumers find the company’s CSR position to be favorable they will evaluate whether the individual behavior can be associated with their own person concern for CSR related issue. If core factors are satisfied consumers will then evaluate central factors which addresses consumers’ price perception, willingness to buy from social responsible companies as well as consumers’ monetary resources. They claim that once consumers have obtained relevant information consumers will consider if they possess enough financial resource in order to purchase from responsible companies. Finally, once core factors are satisfied and consumers find the central factor adequate then consumer will consider the image of the company, credibility of CSR activities and peer group influence which make up the peripheral factor. The peripheral factor alone will not trigger CSR to be part of the evaluation process. Instead it will aid positively or negatively the probability of considering CSR as purchase criteria. The company image refers to the perception consumers have about the credibility of companies CSR activities. If consumers perceive the company image to be positive they then associate that relationship to be that of a social responsible company. However, consumers also need to perceive a fit between companies CSR activities and their core business. Companies engaging in CSR activities outside their core business are perceived by consumers as if they are engaging in such activities as part of a marketing scheme. Furthermore, Öberseder et al. (2011) claim that peer groups can directly influence consumer assessment of CSR as purchase criteria. This is because peers influence consumer in their construction of the company image.

## **2.6. Neutralization - rationalizing techniques to reach equilibrium without attitude change**

According to Davies et al. (2002) social norms guides ethical behavior to a great extent. When the social norms are not internalized to guide behavior in all circumstances, people often experience dissonance and develop strategies to cope with them. These justification strategies are often a way for the person to maintain equilibrium without an attitude change. The Theory of Neutralization (Sykes & Matza 1957) has its origin within the field of sociology and aims to understand the psychological processes people use in order to justify and rationalize their norm-violating behavior. It has traditionally been used to understand criminal behavior but was introduced as a tool to be used in consumer contexts by Strutton et al. (1994). Chatzidakis et al. (2006; 2007) reuse four out of the five categories first labeled by Sykes and Matza (1957) in order to explain the different neutralization techniques consumers use in order to justify their norm-violating actions. The applicability of the categories include unethical consumer behavior such as shoplifting but also in situations where consumers are able to choose, or not, Fair Trade products. Below follows a list of the 4 techniques and generic examples as described for by Chatzidakis et al. (2007):

- (1) Denial of responsibility: contention that there are factors which are beyond one's control and are therefore not accountable for the norm-violating behavior; e.g. "It's not my fault. I had no choice".
- (2) Denial of injury (or denial of benefit): argument that that norm-violating behavior is not that bad because there is no one being directly harmed (or benefited) as a result of it; e.g. "What's the big deal in recycling, when nothing will happen anyway?".
- (3) Condemning the condemners: justifying norm-violating behavior by pointing out that the misconduct of the condemners is just as bad; e.g. "Too much pressure is being put on the consumers to act responsibly when it should be the other way around".
- (4) Appeal to higher loyalties: deflection of miss conductive behavior by arguing the action was a way to actualize other, more important, ideals and values; e.g. "You can't blame me for not buying Fair Trade all the time, the taste of it is so

disgusting”.

According to Chatzidakis et al. (2007), when these techniques are successfully internalized to become neutralizing devices they are able to precede unethical behavior. Instead of following an unethical behavior as a tool to rationalize post purchase dissonance, it allows the consumer to eliminate feelings of guilt before the norm-violating behavior has taken place. In this way the consumers can maintain their self-image as an ethical and environmental consumer, even during those circumstances where their behavior does not reflect these attitudes.

Consumers are often guided by social norms as mentioned by Davies et al. (2002) but their behavior is also guided by internalized individual judgments (Baron 1999, cited in Chatzidakis et al. 2006). Consumers might consider one purchase to be wrong for themselves but it does not mean it has to be wrong for others. It is important to understand that consumers are just as concerned in maintaining self-worth and self-interest as they are abiding social norms and values (Bray et al. 2011, Chatzidakis et al. 2006). Thus, consumers experience similar feelings and employ similar rationalizing techniques in order to deal with a conflicting self-image as they do for norm-violating behaviors.

## **2.7. Understanding consumer behavior from two perspectives**

Dating back to the 1980s, the consumer research field has developed two branches: the conventional and the postmodern<sup>1</sup> branch of consumer research. Simonson et al. (2001) have surveyed 30 years of research and articles published in leading consumer research journals and notes that the consumer research field has progressed substantially since its introduction in the 1950s and is today a fragmented discipline with fundamental differences separating the branches apart. To thematize consumers’ evaluation process of CSR perceptions as a purchase criterion in the best possible way we have positioned ourselves within the field of Behavioral Decision Theory (BDT). Although we mainly move around within this field, the boundaries of the two branches of consumer research are permeable and we consider the more traditionally coined BDT to be too narrow to serve the purpose of this study. Our theoretical framework will therefore include aspects of both the traditional and postmodern view of consumer behavior.

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<sup>1</sup>With *postmodern* we refer to the stream of research which arose in the years following the 1980s, and which today is a recognized institutional category that represents one of the major pillars of consumer research. For the purpose of this paper, we have collected a number of frameworks, such as Consumer Culture Theory and interpretivist, under the concept of postmodernity.

In accordance with the postmodern view, we do not consider consumer behavior as a “unified, grand theory” (Arnould & Thompson 2005, p.868) but rather a collection of different theoretical perspectives that together describe the dynamic interaction of consumer behavior, the marketplace and cultural meanings. This calls for a broader understanding of the consumer in which both rational and social explanations of behavior is considered. The combination of paradigms will later be visible in our choice of method. We embrace the benefits of combining different branches, as sought after by Simonson et al. (2001), and explore a traditionally BDT area through less structured, qualitative research, and not by a quantitative study as preferred by most BDT researchers.

The conventional and the postmodern field of consumer research views on decision making differ. BDT-advocates focus on the decision making process and the determinants of choice (Simonson et al. 2001). It has been the main tool in traditional consumer research for understanding the decision making process and builds on the idea of judgment and choice in a given context. According to the theory the process is initiated when a consumer recognizes a need triggered by stimuli; internal or external. In the process consumers are faced with alternatives which they need to base their decisions on where, each alternative has value or utility to the user (Swait & Adamowicz 2001). Hence, consumers make their decisions by integrating possible judgment of possible utility, or value, and the consequences attached to each possible outcome. The buying process, which focuses on decisions making, follows the following order: problem recognition → information search → evaluation of alternatives → purchase decision → post purchase evaluation (e.g. Kotler, 1996 p. 162), a process which in its nature is structured.

Contrary, postmodern research focuses on the experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption, not quantitatively measurable (Arnould & Thompson 2005). Because of its intricate complexity, the field cannot work with causality in the same way that BDT does. That is, consumer experience is directly linked to their behavior and the result can be generalized. Instead, the postmodern field often makes use of consumer stories to explore and understand consumer behavior, and attempts to find patterns and themes which could potentially be transferred from a specific case to the greater masses (Simonson et al. (2001).

To know how we buy, one must look to why we buy in the first place. The postmodern paradigm argues that consumption involves more than the means by which people meet their everyday needs (Belk 1988). Objects are no longer consumed for their material utilities they provide for but for the symbolic meanings they portray (Baudrillard 1981; Douglas & Ischerwood 1978), whether inwards toward constructing a self-identity or outwards toward constructing the

social context. Belk et al. (2003) argues that our desire for objects is rooted in our longing for what ownership can give us in terms of social status and social relationships, or desire for sociality. That is, each choice made is made in relation to a person's surrounding. Belk, et al. (2003) further describes that consumers' desire and acquire objects to create feelings of belonging to a group with which they identify, or wish to identify themselves with. This builds on Sartre's (1969) idea that we can only identify who we are by looking at what we have, and where being and having are two distinct but inseparable entities. If possessions are contributors and reflections of our identity (Belk 1988) and if identity is mirrored in our neighbor's view of us (Corrigan 1997) then consumption becomes a significant tool of communication. Belk (1988) argues that our possessions or brands can act as extensions of our self, becoming a part of our identity. Given the amount of products present today in comparison to traditional societies, each choice is of greater importance to the consumer, and opting right acquires a new meaning; social norms are exchanged for status seeking. This suggests that decision making process is much more collective than individualistic, and thus peer pressure and a consumer's social surrounding should impact ethical consumption.

## **2.8. Conceptual framework**

The present study examines the role CSR plays as purchasing criteria in consumers' decision making, and it's limited role. Based on our problem definition we have created a framework in order to address the purpose of this study. Moreover, we seek to explore how CSR is used as purchase criteria by consumers when buying disposable goods. We have accounted for obstacles previously identified by literature as hinders to ethical consumption. These are summarized in the diagram below under obstacles. Aside from price, quality, value and availability we have also identified factors which consumer require in order to incorporate CSR in their decision making. Furthermore, we have also addressed how consumers deal with not engaging with CSR through the use of neutralization techniques. *Figure 2* summarizes the contributions in the conceptual framework. The purpose of the model is to develop an understanding of how CSR is evaluated in the decision making and what factors influence such an evaluation. This is to gain deeper understanding to the attitude-behavior gap.

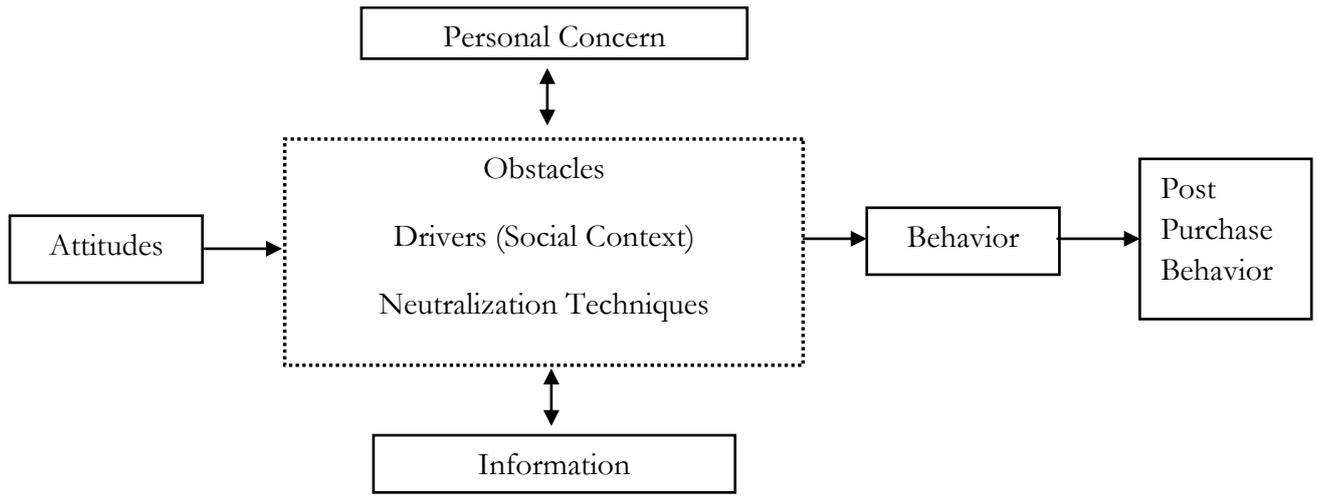


Figure 2. Conceptual framework of factors explaining the attitude-behavior gap

## 3. Accounting for Consumer Responses to CSR when Purchasing Disposable Goods

*In this chapter we present our chosen methodology. We motivate the choices made and the methods we consider to best serve the purpose of this study, i.e. to explore the role considerations of CSR plays in the decision making process. The research strategy is next discussed, in which the sample, data collection and design is presented in detail. Finally we cover data interpretation and methodological critique.*

### 3.1. Research strategy

Given that we aim to explore and develop consumer's evaluation process of CSR as a purchase criteria and the relatively unexplored nature of the subject, we choose to work with qualitative methods where we take an interpretive approach to understand the considerations of CSR in these choices. With this approach we emphasize that knowledge and understanding is created through people's construction of social objects and categories (Bryman & Bell 2005). A qualitative research method provides itself beneficial when looking at a complex phenomenon such as CSR. As mentioned previously there is extent literature within marketing that addresses CSR however the understanding of how CSR is used by consumer when purchasing disposable goods is limited. Consumer research on CSR and consumer behavior is profoundly US-dominated (Öberseder et al. 2011) and by researching Sweden we hope to add to the contrasting European stream of research. A qualitative approach means in our research strategy looking at and analyzing CSR from a consumer's. In order to do so we used an iterative process in which qualitative data is interpreted and re-interpreted in relation to a growing understanding of the whole. We position ourselves within the ontological position of constructivism where we accept that the study of social phenomena is continuously created and described by the respondent based on the individual's perception of reality (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Consistent with the interpretive approach we opted for narrative transcripts in our empirical data (Wallendorf and Belk 1989) and to generate these, we have conducted semi-structured interviews and observations. Observations have been used in the form of a field experiment to aid the interview process in order to contrast respondents' behavior against their attitude towards CSR. By contrasting respondents initial attitude towards their actual behavior we expect to be able to provide a foundation that will enable for better discussion during the interviews. Interview experiences have been interpreted with the respondent's perspective, with an attempt to avoid any previous expectations that may exist among us as researchers. Consistent with the ontological

approach of constructivism, we as research have expectations, perception and knowledge from the past that has shaped us to be the persons we are today. This means that our role as researchers and respondents' reflection cannot be unaffected by our intellectual backgrounds and theoretical interests (Thompson et al. 1994).

In our research method we applied an abductive approach. Our perception is that a strictly deductive research approach would hinder us as researchers. The complexity of CSR requires theories within different fields such as BDT and postmodern paradigm. On the other hand, a strictly inductive approach would limit us as researchers as well because relevant theories exist within social sciences and we perceive it would be inefficient to see past these theories. The abductive research approach intertwines deductive and inductive research. This means that the abductive approach is based on the empirical data gathered while it does not disapprove theoretical concepts. This provides itself more beneficial for our research purpose. Additionally, the abductive approach suits itself appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study. Abductive reasoning allows us to take a stand point in theory that will draw our attention to ask particular questions (Råholm 2010).

### **3.2. Research design**

With the aim to uncover the individuals' mental world, we used in-depth interviews, which offers a potential glimpse of how the individuals see the world and hence a powerful method of qualitative approach (McCracken 1988). Interviews provide an opportunity to create an understanding of individuals' behavior by seeing and understanding experience through the individuals' eyes. Specifically, the method enables the interviewee to answer what they think is important to them rather than responding to what we expect to be important (Webb & Mohr 1998). Furthermore, interviews provide itself useful because it weaves behaviors in the social and cultural context (McCracken 1988). In order to reduce bias responses which could mean respondents are less likely to guess the true reason behind a study as put forth by Mohr et al. (2001) we applied a field experiment in combination with the interview in order to contrast actual behavior towards what was being said by the respondents.

When studying CSR-related topics, the problem of social desirability – answering what is socially correct or in accordance with what is assumed the researcher wants – often arises (Chung & Monroe 2003; Mohr et al. 2001) and it is therefore important to take actions in order to minimize its effects. To do this, we employed a number of measures employed by researchers studying

similar situations. The interviews were conducted face-to-face rather than in focus groups, and in situations where the respondents could feel comfortable and safe. By reducing the possible people surrounding the respondent and providing a trustworthy environment, the impact of social desirability was kept to a minimum. There is of course no way of saying that we completely eliminated social desirability in the result. Interpretive results are always subject to a certain degree of subjectivity (Thompson et al. 1994) and one could expect even more so when the questions are colored by ethics. Through the measures taken, however, we argue that we have done our foremost to produce reliable and trustworthy results.

### *3.2.1. The field experiment*

A field experiment was used to test consumers' initial attitude towards ethically produced goods and their actual behavior. In the field experiments respondents were asked to purchase a light bulb. We choose the light bulb given the variety of alternatives there are and the ethical trade off attached to different types of light bulbs (e.g. fluorescent, LED). The purpose behind the field experiment was to be able to contrast actual behavior towards what was being said during the interview. Furthermore, the field experiment provided a more realistic situation for the consumers, allowing them to more easily remember what they thought of during their purchase. In this way we could prompt the consumer respondents in trying to understand deciding factors. Although the purpose of the field experiment was not to detect or confirm the causal relationships between attitude and behavior, instead we wanted to explore the phenomenon of CSR.

### *3.2.2. The interview*

The length of the interviews varied from 20 minutes to 60 minutes and with the aim to make the respondents at ease the interviews were opened by asking the respondents to fill in a questionnaire constituted of biographical questions (McCracken 1988). These also explain that the interviews were conducted anonymously and of free will, and that they were free to end the interview at any time. By making it clear to the respondents at the start that there were no right or wrong answer, we hoped to establish an informal conversation where the respondent would feel comfortable and safe and thus answer as open, relaxed and honest as possible (Öberseder et al. 2011). Subsequent to filling in the questionnaire consumers respondents were asked to write

words explaining their thoughts through their purchase decision, why they selected that particular light bulb.

By the nature of semi-structured interviews, our interview guide was loosely structured. Although, we did formulate a number of concepts and important questions in the form of an interview guide which we wanted to touch upon, and formulated the interview in accordance with this. We asked the respondents to tell us about their experiences of consumption of retail products and feelings and thoughts linked to the field experiment conducted. In situations where we wanted the respondent to elaborate on an answer, we would make use of floating prompts (McCracken 1988) and simply raise an eyebrow and look as if we did not understand completely, or repeat inquiringly the specific concept of interest.

### **3.3. Data collection**

The data of collection was completed in the south of Sweden during the spring of 2012. Our empirical material is made up of two separate sets of data collection; (1) semi-structured interviews and (2) a complementing field experiment, during which participants were asked to buy a light bulb from Clas Ohlson. The interviews were conducted after the field experiment and a total of 18 interviews were conducted. Both of us were present for all interviews and we had our supervisor present during three of the 18 interviews. After every interview, we continuously modified the questions on the basis of how well they worked. This was also done for the field experiment. The first sets of interviews were conducted in Malmö, Sweden's third largest city. The second sets of interviews were conducted in a smaller city, Kristianstad, where many of the respondents lived in rural areas. An interview guide was produced for this specific research.



*Figure 3. Point of approach at the light section*

Consumers were approached when they were standing next to the light bulb section of the retailer (see *Figure 3*). This was done in order to create a natural shopping experience for the consumers. The field experiment was conducted prior to the interview. In the field experiment consumers were asked to purchase a light bulb. Once the respondents had selected a light bulb from the retailer they were referred to a separated room where the interview was going to take place. We choose to conduct the interviews in one of the office rooms of Clas Ohlson in order to provide respondents with a comfortable and relaxing environment (Bryman & Bell 2005; McCracken 1988). This was our intention as well with the questionnaire the respondents had to fill out.

Once respondents were in the room, they were asked to fill in a biographical questionnaire (see *Appendix 2*). The biographical questioner was also intended to serves as base for our analysis however we quickly realized that building our analysis on demographical factor would not work since we could not generalize any results based on such division. Prior to the interviews, respondents were asked to write words explaining their thoughts relating towards their purchase decision, why the selected that particular light bulb (see *Figure 4*). This was done to be able to identify the most common purchase criteria amongst our respondents. This method provided itself beneficial as an interactive tool that aided in the interviews discussion. We perceived that by allowing the consumers to write down words explaining their process forced them to reflect

upon their purchase. After respondents were done with writing down words, they were asked, to explain what they meant with those words, what thoughts evolved around those words and why they choose to use a particular word. Consequently, the respondents were pinned with five additional cards: price, quality, function (illumination capability), availability and CSR (in the form of: taking responsibility for nature, humans and animals) and they were asked how these relate towards their purchasing of the light bulb and disposable goods in general. This was done in order to force the respondents to reflect upon certain criteria's. Respondents were then asked to rank the words that themselves had written in order to be able to find the most relevant purchase criteria when purchasing the light bulb and disposable goods in general. Respondents seemed to favor this approach as it helped them explain their thoughts and ideas through the interview.

The interview guide was produced based on our conceptual framework (see *Figure 2*). To make the consumers at ease, the first questions were designed to establish their shopping habits and which purchase criteria were important when buying light bulbs. In this way we were able to establish which type of consumer they were and touch upon their attitudes. In order to address consumer's attitudes towards CSR and their personal concern we encouraged the consumers to talk about companies they liked and companies they disliked. Often these discussions would lead us into questions regarding unethical business practices, and what the consumers thought about boycotts. We asked them to talk about their consumption in relation to their surroundings to address the topic of identity and social context. Additionally, to gain understanding about their view on information and communication, questions regarding current campaigns proved helpful. Later in the interview guide we would contrast the consumers' behavior to their expressed attitudes in order to be able to identify obstacles hindering ethical consumption. Before finishing the interview we would reveal the purpose of the study and allowed for a small discussion on what they thought of the topic. The aim of the interview guide was to make sure that specific topics were covered during the interview such as the obstacles hindering ethical consumption, drivers and neutralization techniques.

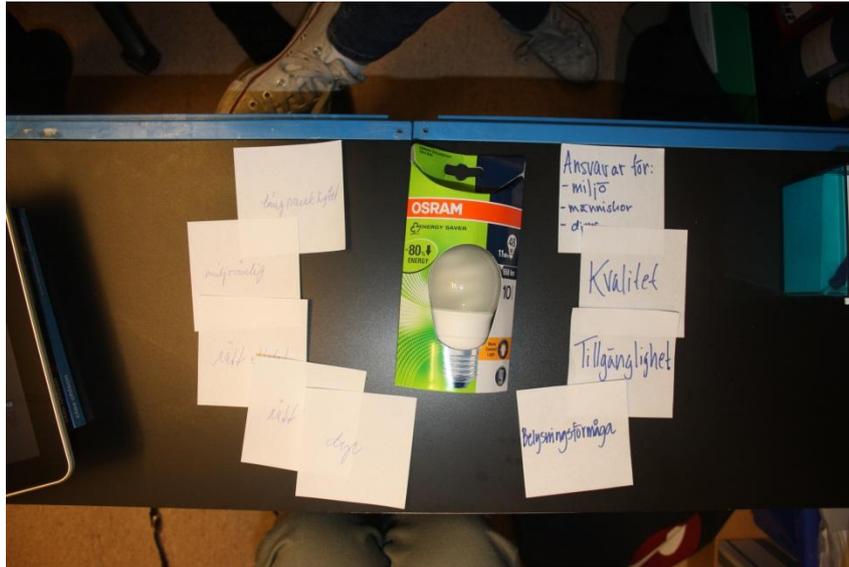


Figure 4. Example showing the use of the five pinned cards

Subsequently to the pinned cards the interview was initiated. The interviews were recorded with the approval of the respondents. With the aid of the interview guide discussion followed a general to a more specific and CSR related discussion. By following this structure we hoped that respondents were not going to decipher the true purpose of the study. This structure was also applied in order to decrease social desirability amongst respondents. When consumers were asked sensitive questions prone to social desirability projective techniques were used. The interview started out with a discussion concerning respondents overall consumption and consumers perceptions of companies. Thereafter, the discussion addressed questions specific to the retailer Clas Ohlson and retailers in general followed by discussion concerning identity. Then, the respondents were asked to discuss CSR and finally respondents were presented with the purpose of the study and were allowed to discuss around that. Upon finalization of the interviews respondents were asked if they had any further questions or enquire relating towards the study and were handed a 200 SEK gift card from the retailer Clas Ohlson.

### 3.4. Sample

Below follows a table (Table 1) describing the 18 consumer respondents chosen for this study. For confidentiality reasons the respondents have been given pseudonyms. The most important criteria for our sample were that the respondents were buyers of disposable goods. Since 84 % of the Swedish population between 18 and 69 has visited Clas Ohlson during the last year (Öhman 2009) we believed such sample could be found there. The retailer carries mostly disposable goods with products ranging from construction accessories, multimedia, home appliances, spare parts and tools. When choosing which respondents would participate in the study we applied

convenience sampling (Bryman & Bell 2005). This meant asking consumers to participate in the study out of convenience. By that we mean that consumers were approached once they were standing next to the light section at the retailers and if we received a negative answer then the next consumer would be approached in the same way until a ‘yes’ was obtained (see *Figure 3*). Instead of having a sample strategy driven by representativeness such as diverse demographic backgrounds: gender, age and income which in the past has provided conflicting and confusing findings (Bray et al. 2011) we choose to base our sample strategy on convenience.

In total 58 consumers were approached through the entire study out of those 18 choose to participate in the study. McCracken (1988) recommends using at least 8 participants, by doubling this amount, we perceived that we could provide with a better analysis based on rich empirical data. The 18<sup>th</sup> respondents did not provide for any new insight into the concept of CSR as a purchase criteria hence we assumed information saturation had been reached. This sampling method could be criticized but since we were interested in creating a natural context for the consumers we perceived this method to be most suitable and realistic. However, one could claim that the high response rate could be a result of our seriousness and trustworthiness as researchers when addressing consumers.

We obtained a slightly skewed sample with the majority of the respondents being of older age and retired or fulltime employed. This could be because we choose to conduct the research study during weekdays between 10:00 am and 16:00 pm. We obtained a total of 11 male respondents and 7 female respondents. Respondents had an income between 150 000 to 2 500 000 SEK with majority of the respondents ranging between 150 000 to 250 000 SEK. Having a sample with the majority of respondents in the with lower income range could provide a problem because ethical products are priced higher than ordinary products.

Table 1. Consumer characteristics description

Psydonym	Consumer characteristics
Lars (64)	This man is retired and lives in an apartment in a urban city. He shows interest in CSR but does not know much about it and does not included CSR in his decision making. He is a member of UNICEF donating money on a monthyl basis. His limited income make him a price concious consumer.
Sebastian (26)	The business student lives together wthih his girlfriend in an urban area and owns a growing plot in the outskirts of the city. He is well educated in CSR as a business case and wish it had more impact on his purchase decisions. He is price-conscious for some products in order to spend more money on things he finds more desirable.
Erik (22)	He lives in a rural area and works full time. He appears to show no particular interest in CSR and is not a big spender. He shops very rarely and only products he needs. Therefore, he knows when he goes into the shop what he wants.
Bengt (68)	This interviewee lives in a rural area and is retired. He shows no interest in CSR and is ofended that companies think this is a competitive advantage. He sees price to be this. He claims to be a handyman working mainly with his caravan. Service is very important to him.
Jan-Olof (66)	This man shows no interest in CSR and he has no awariness of CSR. He claims to be a very price concious consumer.
Marie (61)	This retired market reserachers has worked as a stuartes for Israelian Airlines. She shows interest in CSR and is not affraid to boycott companies shw feels violate her personal concern. Because she is not working fulltime, price becomes an important factor.
Anita (66)	This respondents a retired and lives in an urban area. She shows interest in CSR and claims its a subject that she discujsses with friends. She has two children and enjoys windowshopping.
Lilly (78)	This interviewee is retaired and she claims no particular interest in CSR but she tries to buy national food products.
Margareta (68)	This retired respondent lives together with a man who is in charge of all the shopping, from groceries to durable goods. She finds CSR to be a complex subject but does occasionally buy locally produced food. She sees her friends as more concerned for the environment, and acknowledge she is a bit lazy when it comes to this.
Jon (54)	This man is a fulltime employee and lives in a rural area. Because he lives outside a city and has stressful lifestyle and is thus very metodious in his shopping. Although CSR is not a purchase criteria for most consumer contexts, he does think about it sometimes.
Kristina (56)	This woman works in a meat packing factory fulltime. She is not aware of CSR at all and shows no interest in it. Price is to her the most important purchse criteria.
Per (55)	This UK based interviewee is married and has three children. He posits a high position at a pharmaceutical company and is well educated in CSR as a business case. His wife is described to be a responsible consumer but he himself rarely purchase organic products. Quality and brand are important purchsing criteria.
Vera (70)	This woman is an artist and is very involved in her purchases of art materials. She cares a lot for brands and describe herself as a snob when it comes to purchasing. But she would never admit this to her surroundings. In other consumer contexts, CSR consistutes a mediocre factor.
Anna (23)	This female student lives, studies and works extra in an urban area. She is critical towards consumption in general and has tried to avoid purchasing for three years now, although she sometimes fail in doing so. Since she does not buy things often, recognizability is an important purchase criteria for her.
Filip (24)	Our next interviewee is unemployed and lives in an urban area. He show very high interest in CSR and he has currently moved in with his girlfriend in a new apartment.
Rikard (28)	This man is a fulltime employee and lives in an urban area but grew up in northern Sweden. He has a strong christian belief that guides his purchase decisions. He feels strongly about CSR and tries to limit his consumption at all times. He is a vegan and many of his friends are environmental activists.
Theodor (26)	Recently graduated from University, Theodor lives in central Malmö and he has a few vegeterian friends. He has a strong interest in CSR and tries to limit his consumption as much as possible.
Hans (47)	This interviewee lives in a urban area and is unemployed but involved in a training program in forestry. He is very passionate about the environmental issues he sees documentaries about on TV. Although high interest in CSR he does not purchase organic or ethical products. He thinks service is of utter importance and is not affraid to boycott a company after a bad experience with the personel.

### **3.5. Data analysis and interpretation**

After the interviews, the material was transcribed based on recordings from our iPad. The transcribing occurred soon after the interview to fully grasp what was being said, but also in the way it was said and how it was said. The analysis developed gradually throughout the process of data collection; the interview material was continuously transcribed and analyzed to allow us to refine our questions for upcoming interviews (Bryman & Bell 2005). Our empirical foundation used for interpretation of the consumers' descriptions constituted of recordings, transcriptions, descriptions and photographs of pinned cards and choice of light bulb.

In line with theories of qualitative data analysis, we included the basic steps of combining codes into categories and themes, and then interpreting the results (Creswell 2007). The analysis was an iterative process where the material was gone through several times in order to identify relevant patterns and themes (Bryman & Bell 2005). Once a pattern seemed to emerge we would reread the interviews to see if this could constitute a theme. These themes constituted the basis of our analysis. The data analysis was initiated by going through the material thoroughly, marking out sections which could be of interest. The material would then be reread to see if these patterns could constitute larger themes, general for all of the consumer respondents. More specifically, quotes were extracted from the transcriptions and coded in order to generate concepts (Bryman & Bell 2005). These concepts, or themes, were then developed with the help of our conceptual framework (see *Figure 2*) as well as our own interpretations. A final analysis was conducted once all the data was collected to help us avoid overlooking deeper interpretations.

### **3.6. Methodological critique**

#### *3.6.1. Qualitative methodology*

Qualitative research may be perceived as being too subjective when beliefs and viewpoints are permitted to influence the research process (Bryman & Bell 2005). Although, the qualitative methodology has proven itself beneficial for our research from a number of aspects, it has also been criticized. Critique has been put forth towards qualitative research method because of problem of reconstruction and not being able to replicate the same method in the exact environment (Bryman & Bell 2005). This provides problems because this affects the validity of the results. To address critique towards qualitative methods we have used Jacobsen (2002) whom presents additional critique towards qualitative methods where they suggest that the small number of respondents in the empirical data affects the generalizability of the results.

Furthermore, they claim that qualitative research is a resource intensive process since the data gathered is highly complexity with a lot of variation. Also, Jacobsen (2002) suggests that the closeness that arises in the relationship between the research and respondents could be seen as problematic as it inhibits the critical ability of the researcher. Finally, another criticism that has been put forth by the authors towards qualitative methods is the complexity which the research is treated. It is not always the case that the researcher will assess the situation correctly.

A certain imbalance was obtained in our sample where the number of women and men interviewrd was not the same. However, the analysis is shown not to offer significant difference in our opinion, consistent with previous research (Bray et al. 2011). The age range of our sample extends between 22 and 78; a range which we feel is acceptable for an appropriate age distribution. Although our age distribution is acceptable one could criticize our sample since we did obtain several respondents in the higher age range.

When studying CSR-related topics, the problem of social desirability – answering what is socially correct or in accordance with what the respondent thinks the researcher wants – often arises (Mohr et al. 2001) and it is therefore important to take actions in order to minimize this effects. To do this, we employed a number of measures employed by researchers studying similar situations. For example, we opted for respondents outside our immediate network of friends with the notion they might provide for more social desirable answers.

Environment, body language and attire are just some of the parameters that can influence the direction of the interview as results of how we as researches are perceived by the respondents, and vice versa (McCracken 1988). Given that we are using semi structured interviews we realize that no interview will be exactly the same. To counteract this, we rely on an interview guide in order to touch upon specific subject that we see relevant. When and if the respondents have been aware that the interviews have been conducted for research purposes, they may choose to adapt or answer dishonestly according to how they wish to be perceived.

### *3.6.2. Validity*

In order to achieve credible results research often relies on reliability, validity and generizability. There has been a discussion within research claiming that these three criteria do not serve as a proper tool for judging qualitative research (Bryman & Bell 2005). In order to address the issue of credibility within our research we have chosen to address credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability instead and how they relate towards our study.

We have chosen to use Lincoln and Guba (1985) concepts of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide four criteria for determining credibility of the results within an interpretative line of research. This is suitable since these four criteria build on the same notion we as research have about reality, that there is not one absolute notion of reality. The four criteria offer a number of measurements which have been conducted in order to increase the credibility of our research.

According to Merriam (cited in Shenton 2004, p. 64) credibility addresses the issue “How congruent are the findings with reality?”. Since we accept that there is no absolute reality we have taken measure to ensure that the respondents interpretation have been subjected to a minimum degree of subjectivity. For example, by selecting respondents within our immediate network of friends we have distance ourselves from the respondents hence decreasing possible subjectivity.

Since qualitative research build on the findings of a small group of people within a specific social context it is impossible to transfer and apply such findings to other people and other contexts (Shenton 2004). Instead of focusing on the degree of transferability of our results we have stressed the need to clearly show the condition and method chosen (Bryman & Bell 2005). By provide a clear method we hope to increase the transferability to other related research context.

Dependability addresses the issue of a complete and reliable description of all phases of the research process (Bryman & Bell). By being aware of the notion that the research process is subjected to a social construct one can increase dependability. To address the issue of dependability we have used an external supervisor whom has supervised and verified our work through the research process.

Conformability according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) concerns the proofing of the results. This refers to the degree which research results can be discussed and/or confirmed by others. This provides a problem for qualitative research as it is subjected to a certain degree of subjectivity. In order to address the issue of conformability we have tried our utter most to interpret respondents’ results of ideas, thoughts and experiences rather than our own subjective preferences (Shenton 2004).

## 4. Intepretating Consumer Responses to CSR

Our empirical findings indicate that when the consumer respondents purchase disposable goods they value criteria such as price, broad assortment, quality, value and service over CSR. This goes in line with previous research which states that the traditional purchasing criteria play a more important role in the decision making process. Consumers have been found to “pay little heed to ethical considerations” (Carrigan & Attalla 2001, p. 574) and price remains as the most prominent purchase criteria (Bray et al. 2011).

There are obstacles which contributes to the low integration of CSR in the decision making process of purchasing in general, and disposable goods specifically. At the moment, there are physical, contextual and cognitive obstacles present to the consumers respondents. Physical and contextual obstacles are barriers which the consumer respondents clearly defined as hindering them from incorporating CSR in the decision making process. These include; their price sensitivity, time and energy, and availability for information and ethical alternatives. Additionally, cognitive barriers were observed such as low awareness of CSR, product involvement, and cynicism. To navigate in the attitude-behavior gap the consumer respondents portray different feelings of guilt and righteousness. Guilt manifests itself through post purchase dissonance and feelings of identity crisis, while righteousness tends to be manifested in excuses and justifications. Finally, in the case of disposable goods, the consumer respondents showed no, or little, evidence to support the modern consumer behavior theories on self-identity and all goods as images.

### 4.1. Personal concern

Surprisingly, consumer respondents that show high interest in CSR in general expressed no greater importance of CSR as purchase criteria. It did for other parts of their consumption but not for disposable goods. This contradicts previous research to a certain extent which highlights personal concern as a core factor in order to involve CSR as purchase criteria in the decision making process (Öberseder et al. 2011). When purchasing disposable goods the role of CSR does not seem to depend only on personal concern for ethical issues. The situational context, such as which product category is being bought, also influence how much a consumer consider CSR to be purchase criteria.

(Margareta 68) Yes, there is a little bit of a difference between what you ingest and other things maybe one is a bit more cautious than with everything else.<sup>2</sup>

(Marie 61) Ah that... disposable goods...then I think...that one [Responsibility for; nature, humans and animals] has to give a little.

(Interviewer) When do you not [think about the environment]?

(Sebastian, 26) Especially concerning these [disposable goods] ... where there is not a major difference [between the products].

Ehm... Toiletpapper for example. Classic.

However, personal concern is still a prerequisite to incorporate CSR in the decision making. For example, although consumers with high interest in CSR seem to disregard ethical features for disposable goods, they sometimes showed willingness to refrain from buying completely. They did so in order to not infringe on their moral views. Rather than settling for an unethical alternative respondents report that they would not purchase if the product did not satisfy their ethical need.

(Richard 28) Had it not involved something concerning the workforce and such, then I would have probably bought them. That is if it's not damaging to the environment. Then I would refrain from buying it. Because I don't want toxic waste, or that there should be toxic substance in this coating, or whatever it may be.

## **4.2. Consumers do not care about CSR when purchasing disposable goods**

Consumers find it hard to incorporate CSR in their decision making process due to different types of obstacles: physical, contextual, and cognitive. These are barriers which hinder consumers from translating positive attitudes towards ethical consumption into actual behavior, as well as they aid in the understanding of the attitude-behavior gap.

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<sup>2</sup> For original quotes see *Appendix 1*

#### 4.2.1. *Physical and contextual barriers*

##### 4.2.1.1. **Price sensitivity**

Consumers respondents expressed price as the major hinder to ethical consumption. Similar findings are presented by Bray et al. (2011) whom in their study found price to be major hinder to ethical consumption when purchasing food or other frequently purchased products. This suggests financial values weigh more than ethical values when purchasing disposable goods. The following statement illustrates this:

(Jon 54) I actually think it is too expensive. That's how it is with anything you buy that is organic, it usually differs a lot.

(Per 55) I think it is absolutely critical to what you have in your wallet.

The consumer respondents perceive ethical products to be priced higher in general, and they expressed that they were not willing to sacrifice price in order to consume more ethically. Chatzidakis et al. (2007) would call this behavior an appeal to higher loyalties as the consumer is disregarding CSR due to price. Comparable results are presented by Öberseder et al. (2011) whom in their study identified hinders to ethical consumption in terms of consumers monetary resources, consumer price willingness and price sensitivity to purchasing. This provides a problem for ethical consumption since the price perception of ethical goods is higher. As said by of the interviewees:

(Bengt 68) Everything that is, let's call it, has less environment impact then the price goes up. Automatically.

Consumers are said to be willing to pay a premium price for ethical and environmental products (Castaldo et al. 2008). However, we found little evidence of this when purchasing disposable goods compared to other categories. This could be because the availability of ethical disposable goods is limited. This is discussed later on in detail.

#### 4.2.1.2. Time and energy

Consumers perceive purchasing ethically to be a time consuming process that requires energy on their behalf. The amount of energy consumer's places on their decision is dependent on the "context and complexity of the decision" (Swait & Adamowicz 2001, p. 136). This can be described by the number of attributes which significantly influence decisions: "correlation between attributes, number of alternatives, time pressure, and various other factors" (Swait & Adamowicz 2001, p.136). That is, consumer will place different levels of energy and time depending upon the context and complexity of the decision. Disposable goods by nature are products of low involvement thus consumer will not place any extra effort in acquiring such a good. This suggests that consumer will only place little effort on purchasing disposable goods. Consumers respondents felt that consuming ethically would require more time and effort on their behalf. This suggests that consumers are not willing to place any extra energy in order to consume ethically. The following statement illustrates this reluctance:

(Lilly 78) I don't stand around turning things over and think "What impact does this have on the environment and the people who produce it?" I don't do that. I'm a bit lazy there.

(Theodor 26) But that is something I don't do as often as I should [review production circumstances]...no, I do it out of pure laziness...no... I can find out where the product is coming from...but I choose not to involve it...I do.

(Filip 24) I don't look... I do not examine every little food thing I buy I don't compare it how it relates towards manufacturing circumstances or under what circumstance the product is produced. One can't be bothered it becomes too overwhelming to do that every day.

Although consumer respondents reported laziness as their main reason for not purchasing ethically it became apparent through the discussion that consumer respondents experienced time

pressure which limited them in their consumption. These findings are in accordance with Newman (1977) whom claims that time pressure decrease consumers search activity. This suggests that time pressure affect consumer negatively in their ability to find satisfactory ethical alternatives.

#### **4.2.1.3. Availability**

The consumer respondents experienced difficulties in finding available ethical products. They particularly experienced difficulties in finding ethical available disposables goods. This hinders consumer from purchasing ethically as they cannot find any ethical alternatives to satisfy their needs. This is in line with previous research which supports these findings that the limited availability of ethical products is an obstacle to ethical consumption (Nicholls & Lee 2006). During the interviews the consumer respondents expressed that the availability of light bulbs was not limited, but as the discussion progressed, it was clear that the availability of other disposable goods, for example tape, was limited. Chatzidakis et al. (2007) would call this an attempt to deny responsibility, where the consumer is using excuses in order to rid themselves of responsibility. Overall, all consumers respondents reported that they would like to see more ethical products on the market.

(Anna 23) [Availability] is also a factor... These are products that are not easily available. You have to know where to go [in order to purchase]. It's not something available in regular convenience stores so the availability is definitely a big problem for it all.

(Richard 28) But that little bit that I value the most I sometimes have to sacrifice of course because there are no environmentally friendly alternatives.

The availability of information in the store environment, such as shelves, knowledgeable employees and packaging, is another impeding factor. Consumer respondents reported that they would like to see CSR information related towards the product at the point of purchase. They also indicated that when purchasing disposable goods in this particular store, they often made additional purchases to the initial intended. This provides a problem for consumers as they

cannot value ethical trade-off without information. Companies tend to disclose environmental information in the form of a CSR report which is not brand specific, making it an inefficient tool for consumers in their decision making (Valor 2008). It is not mandatory for companies to disclose environmental information or social issues connected to the production of the goods, and for most cases the information is not made available voluntarily (Stö et al. 2005).

(Filip 24[...] feels like very poor availability of [information] because not many companies disclose such information especially inside the shop or something or the media. In my opinion.

(Bengt 68) You don't know really. It does not really say on the package that the goods you buy are made by children.

(Marie 61) I want to know how it is produced and whom has sacrificed themselves for no money at all to produce it.

#### 4.2.2. *Cognitive barriers*

##### 4.2.2.1. **Information**

In order for consumers to incorporate CSR as purchase criteria they have to be aware of it. Amongst our consumers respondents there seemed to be a difference between the awareness and knowledge of companies' CSR activities. While some of the consumer respondents were aware of companies engaging in CSR activities, others were more knowledgeable about specific companies and their CSR activities. That is, there was a difference between the knowledge consumer respondents possessed. Although one of the companies asked about in the interview had been in the negative media spotlight a few years earlier, none of the consumer respondents seemed to remember or had a bad perception of the company. Similar findings are presented by Carrigan and Attalla (2004, p. 568) who in their findings also noted that poor ethical record "has no effect on purchase intention." However, several consumer respondents reported that they did not want to be aware of such activities at all. This suggest that CSR is not top of the mind of the consumers as also put forth by Öberseder et al. (2011) and that some consumers deliberately try to filter out CSR related knowledge.

(Erik 22) The less you know the better it is for you since then you don't think much about it.

The consumer respondents that deliberately tried to filter out CSR related knowledge did so because they perceived that CSR knowledge would affect them negatively. This suggests consumers deal with CSR in a complex manner. This was also an apparent finding in the study of Öberseder et al. (2011).

In order to make efficient choices consumers require information (Sproles et al. 1978). If a consumer is unaware of the company's CSR activities that they will not use it as a criterion when purchasing (Bhattacharaya & Sen 2004). This suggests that consumers possessing information about company's CSR activities will use that information in their purchasing. However, the relationship does not appear to be linear. The consumer respondents that were aware of company's CSR activities claimed that they lacked information on product level which hindered them from ethical consumption. Similar responses were presented by those consumer respondents with little information on company's CSR activities. This suggests that consumer require CSR information on a company level as well on a product level in order to ethically consume. Contrasting findings are presented by Boulstridge and Carrigan (2000) whom in their study did not perceive lack of information to be a barrier. One of the consumer respondents puts it like this:

(Theodor 24) [...] all consumer goods, I have no idea about them really...which in turn affects me very negatively on the stuff I buy [...].

Although consumers felt they lacked information in the store and on the packaging in order to make informed decisions, as described earlier, it was also eminent after the interviews that there was an overload of available information on how to be an ethical consumer in all aspects. Consumers that reported that there was too much information perceived this as stressful and complex to deal with. Parallels can be drawn to the growing awareness of ethical consumption in society as a whole. Instead of engaging with the information they looked the other way.

(Anita 66) It might be that you have focused on a certain thing [an

issue]and then try to stick to that [issue]...the information flow that we talked about before is so large that it becomes difficult to handle and then you stick to something [a particular issues]and you rely on your common sense whatever that is.

(Erik 22) The less you know the better it is for you since you don't think much about it. Instead, then you just grab what you need. But I guess it's always good to know [...] It's hard when you start thinking about it, but that's probably why many people do not think about it. I don't think about it so often, I think

(Anita 66) [...] it's a squirrel wheel [a confusing never ending process] with all the information that is available.

Contrasting, consumers who perceived information to be lacking mainly desired more information available, especially, on the product or close to the point of purchase in order to make an ethical choice.

(Anna 23) I almost think it might seem as if there is too much information [...] I had wished there was more information in the shop because that's where I often make my choices....and that you can absorb all the information as well. When it comes to the Internet it's hard to find the right information but that's a thing in itself.

In line with previous research on the attitude-behavior gap, our interviews indicated that CSR is unlikely to function as purchase criteria if consumers have no or little information about a company's CSR activities. Moreover, those consumer respondents with a vague idea of the company's CSR activities assumed the company behavior to be ethically and environmentally correct. The consumer respondents tend to overlook any inherent feelings they have about the retail industry in general, if there is an incomplete picture of the company's CSR practices. To further explain this, we can draw on the theories of Sen and Bhattacharya (2001), who states that

consumers with a positive image of a company tend to overlook conflicting information about that company. The following statement illustrates how consumers with a positive view of retail company with no information on, assumes the company to still behave ethically and environmentally sustainable.

(Richard 28) I do know about their position [CSR position] in that way. I hope that their position is to put the environment first [...].

#### 4.2.2.2. Involvement

According to Bray et al. (2011) one of the impeding factors to ethical consumption is that consumers are more likely to change habitual behavior if they are personally affected. This concept is built on the findings of McDevitt et al. (2007), who notes that consumers rarely think about their ethical consequences of their purchase choices. Thus, the consumers distance themselves from the unethical behavior by only paying attention to what affects them personally. Research in the food industry, for example, has shown that consumers react most strongly to information about toxins and contamination in the food (Anselmsson & Johansson 2007). Sherif and Cantril (1947) describes this as ego-involvement, meaning that there is only involvement when the consumer can identify with the decision. As also noted by Bray et al. (2011), the consumer respondents in this study seemed to be most willing to change their consumer habits when they felt personal attachment and when they were forced to think about an issue through media coverage:

(Sven 64) Then [if I found out that there was child labor involved] I would actually consider that before I shop there...I don't like those kind of things at all...that's what I would have done...actually I don't think I would shop there at all I think.

When asked about what could potentially make them boycott a company, the consumer respondents were more likely to give an example of a store in which they had seen the employees been treated badly, or they had strong personal interest in the issue. Having worked for a

company, religion and love of nature were examples of personal interest that created stronger feelings of involvement among the consumer respondents. During the interviews, concern for unethical behavior was raised by the participants, and they also had strong assumptions of the bad work environments in other countries. However, the geographical distance created an obstacle for the consumer respondents to feel as attached as they did with Swedish employees' welfare. This is in line with extant literature on egocentric bias which suggests that the CSR activities performed locally are seen to increase patronage more than those activities abroad (Russell & Russell 2010). One respondent explained it like this:

(Bengt 68) There are those who boycott because they [companies] purchase their good in the wrong places and things like that. Then they talk of course, I do not know who they are, but some clothing companies use child labor and stuff. But it has been done in all times [...] Not here in Sweden but in those other countries... Bangladesh amongst others.

### **4.3. Navigation in the attitude-behavior gap**

Hall (2007, cited in Bray et al. 2011) notes in his editorial that consumers are past feeling guilt in ethical consumption, but this was not eminent in the interviews. Guilt recurred and was manifested in two ways: retrospective feelings of guilt and self-identity. The later is produced by violating individual judgments, and thus, causing the consumer respondents to feel uneasy with their actions. They also surpassed the feelings of guilt by, what we chose to call righteousness. As a mean of coping, the consumer respondents employed neutralizing, or justification strategies, such as: compensation and condemning others. Thus, softening the negative impact their norm-violating behavior might have on social relationships and self-identity. Finally, cynicism was also used to justify reluctance for involving CSR in the decision making process. Cynicism was directed towards the company and their communication, but also towards the consequences of behaving ethically. The consumer respondents therefore viewed the benefits of ethical and green products with skepticism. In this way, they could restore equilibrium without an attitude change.

#### 4.3.1. *Guilt*

Guilt was evident throughout the discussions about ethical consumption but, in agreement with the findings of Bray et al. (2011), it was not incorporated as a purchasing decision as first suggested by Steenhaut and van Kenhove (2006). It did not impede the consumer respondents from acting unethically by thinking about the negative consequences associated with violating internalized norm and values. Instead, it was manifested as retrospective feelings of guilt which only occurred after the purchase had been made or it had been pointed out to them. One of the participants stated:

(Anna 23) I think that first these thought come to mind: I should not. But there is a moment of excitement and that's where you fall for the temptation and it's really nice for a while, but then;. "Why the hell did I do that? It [purchase nail polish from H&M] was unnecessary.

An important observation made during the interviews was that those consumer respondents who paid little attention to CSR issues whilst consuming in general did not show any signs of guilt. They felt no need to or were incapable of understanding why they should have feelings of guilt in the first place. Only those consumer respondents who had given the impression of having ethical and environmental concerns did so. They felt guilty for having other non-ethical factors to decide from, not prioritizing differently, not looking things up, not knowing enough and their consumption in general. In some cases they even felt the need to apologize and explain to us as researchers why they could not or had not thought more about it. There is not an absolute norm that says "one ought to purchase ethically and ecologically friendly products" which would explain this behavior. Nevertheless, the consumer may still feel that they are violating norms within their close surrounding or society at large by not behaving more ethically (Chatzidakis et al. 2006). Failure to live by these norms at all times may translate into retrospective feelings of guilt.

Unlike Baumeister et al. (1994) who argues that guilt is a social phenomenon that only arise in interpersonal interactions, guilt was also manifested as feelings of internal conflicts. For example, the interviews with the consumer respondents indicated that what was wrong for themselves was

not necessarily what was considered to be wrong for others. When these internal judgments were violated, such as in the case with disposable goods, the consumer respondents would feel their self-identity was being violated as well. It was evident through the interviews that the consumers respondents who had indicated that they did purchase ethically at all times, struggled with maintaining self-esteem and self-worth when they realized that they did not do so in all circumstances. However, the consumer respondents did not give rise to these feelings until they were put in front of having to rank different criteria in relation to their choice of disposable goods. This can be understood better by looking what Chatzidakis et al. (2006) theorize about neutralization. According to them, less deliberate decision making where consumers employ cognitive heuristics to maintain self-image and still behave unethically is most likely to occur in low-involvement situations. Everyday purchases being one of them. Thus, it is easier for the consumer to downplay the importance of behaving in line with internalized norms in the context of disposable goods. Moreover, disposable goods have been relatively guarded from scrutiny. Little interest has been shown in branding the products or the company as ethically and environmentally friendly. It is thus for the moment easier for the consumer respondents to rationalize their actions in this consumer context, compared to more scrutinized consumer context.

#### 4.3.2. *Righteousness*

In line with the Theory of Neutralization (Chatzidakis et al. 2006; Chatzidakis et al. 2007), the consumer respondents used different types of neutralizing techniques in order to cope with these feelings of guilt and self-identity misalignment experienced from not behaving ethically. Although the techniques used by the consumer respondents differed from those suggested, there was an overall resemblance. One of these techniques used was compensation. The negative feelings of not incorporating CSR in their decision making of disposable goods were overridden by positive feelings associated with other ethical engagement. This included buying other eco-friendly products, donating to charities, and recycling:

(Anita 66) I'm a member of Greenpeace... that's my contribution  
[...].

(Sven 64) I'm actually with UNICEF, I donate money there every  
month, even though I don't have that much of a good salary...I

still donate money...even to the homeless people I give money.

Another way for the consumer respondents to mitigate guilt was to condemn others. This could be manifested by either blaming people with more money, or leaving it up to the people who are more affected by the issue. As mentioned earlier, several consumer respondents stated that one needs to have a minimum financial capability in order to feel a moral duty to purchase ethical and environmentally friendly products. In other word, if consumers feel that they are less able to afford these products, then this relieves them from feeling guilty. The same is experienced with the involvement of a consumer with a certain issue. The less affected a consumer feel they are to the issue, then the less obliged to action they feel. The following statements illustrate these two ways of mitigating feelings of guilt:

(Sebastian 26) [...] when you earn more money in some way you're expected to also buy more responsibly...with higher income comes more responsibility too.

(Margareta 68) Well the people who work within the industry have to deal with it one thinks. If they have some union and they have to act themselves. I do not know if we as outsiders can do so much about it, it's up to those within the industry to act.

#### 4.3.3. *Cynicism*

Consumer respondents expressed cynicism about retailer's engagements in CSR activities to justify their reluctance to purchase more ethically. There was a feeling that retailers only did so in order to sell more products or take a premium price. This is similar to the findings of Bray et al. (2011) who found consumers to be skeptical of retailer's ethical claims. Retailers' CSR activities were viewed as marketing-ploys through which the companies took advantage of good consumer goodwill. This skepticism is illustrated in the following statement:

(Marie 61) "What does the company want? What do they expect

out of advertising?” They want to sell. It's the only thing that is of interest. They are not looking to engage in some philanthropic activity.

(Sven 64) I think they don't care as long as they are making money [...] They do it because they do not want to lose customers, of course. They just do it for the sake of doing it. But I do not think it is responsibility [...] I think it's a lie if I were to be honest [...] I do not think they care.

(Bengt 68) It does not help if I care. They [companies] do whatever they want anyways. In one way or another they fool the consumers and tell us that there is no child labor involved but when in fact there is.

#### **4.3.3.1. Cynicism towards the idea of a sincere profit-driven company**

Unlike Bray et al. (2011) the consumer respondents did not mention that their cynicism stemmed from disbelief in where the money was going. Instead, they found it hard to reconcile the idea of a market driven company and engagement in ethical and environmental concerns. These concerns and commerce creates an inherent conflict where the consumers struggle to make sense of the sincerity of the CSR practices. If the claims made by the retailers are not incongruence with the rest of their business the company is not seen as sincere. This can better be understood with what Bhattacharaya and Sen (2004) notes as the fit between the company and its cause. That is, consumers are skeptical towards companies whose reputation does not match their ethical claims. The following three statements illustrate this conflict:

(Anna 23) There is the difficulty when the business idea does not work for me. That it cannot be combined with an environmental conscience. But I think it is that you show that you have been working, to show it through actions rather than [...] “We are environmental or we think of the environment” it's sort of a little... it does not match, and they still have the cheap plastic things from

China.

(Sebastian 26) When I try to explain to my dad, who I actually think is an intelligent man, he doesn't understand the connection. That you should spend money in charity and he understands that it might look good but that it would somehow benefit the firm is to him totally incomprehensible.

(Lilly 78) It's a little like buying yourself free from the bad conscience a little. Besides Rädda Barnen need all the help they can get- But a little strange conflict it is of course, if one uses child labor and then sends money to save the children.

However, we saw that the consumer respondents with experience in studying or working with CSR had a much greater understanding to why market driven companies could engage in these activities. Although less cynical, they too accounted for skepticism to how these companies communicate their CSR work.

(Per 55) I cannot imagine that a company says, or is sitting here and find something to lie about. But I do think sometimes it's a vision. And not an act. Vision is perhaps a couple of years. Maybe ten years. But it's played out as it happens today. So one has to be fairly clear if it happens today or if it is a vision. There is nothing wrong to have a vision. But it's just that you may have to show that you have an action plan and how to get there.

#### **4.3.3.2. Cynicism towards sincere marketing and communication**

Marketing and communication of CSR creates its own dilemma. Just as the consumer respondents found it hard to reconcile the idea of a profit-driven company with ethical and environmental concerns, they regarded advertising of these claims with strong and conflicting feelings of suspicion. The consumer respondents also experienced difficulties deciphering what

information is trustworthy and what is not. From whom the information was coming from is of great importance when the consumer respondents decided what products were ethically and environmentally friendly. Although they often thought the cause to be good, they questioned the retailer's motives for doing so. Unless the marketing was understood to be underpinned by sincere underlying values, the consumer respondents would regard the advertisement as greenwashing. This can be understood by what Chatzidakis et al. (2007) denotes as condemning the condemners. One consumer respondent stated:

(Anna 24) It's a good in a way [that companies communicate CSR activities] but somehow it becomes a PR ploy to me. One wonders how much is actually...when you brag so much it suspicious in some way. [...] When one is really thinking: "What are they here various slogans? They say they do one thing or another, what does it mean in practice?"

#### **4.3.3.3. Cynicism towards environmental benefits**

In some cases the consumer respondents also used cynicism of the actual benefits of ethical and environmentally friendly products to justify their reluctance for involving CSR in the decision making process. Chatzidakis et al. (2007) would label this denial of injury (or denial of benefits) as the consumer excuses their behavior by expressing cynicism towards the benefits of consuming more ethically. The consumer respondents expressed reluctance based on that there needs to be a fit between the ethical benefits and the ethical product. This means that environmental benefits (e.g. less environmental impact) have to match the ethical product in terms of environmental impact if that is the chosen criteria. For example, consumer respondents were reluctant to purchasing energy saving light bulbs claiming the ethical benefits that this product offered did not outweigh the environment impact of the packaging of the product. The following statement illustrates this:

(Anita 66) Packaging, that certain cost a lot to produce and what about the energy required and the environment. No...I think...I question those ordinary ones [energy saving light bulbs].

This suggests a very complex way of dealing with ethical benefits of ethical products. Because the evaluation process is influenced by so many attributes. This provides a problem for consumers looking to incorporate CSR initiatives when purchasing disposable goods. Since consumers are forced to think in a complex and demanding way requiring higher involvement thus requiring more time and energy on their behalf. Or consumers simply avoid engaging in such behavior because of its complexity and thus ethical benefits are not evaluated at all.

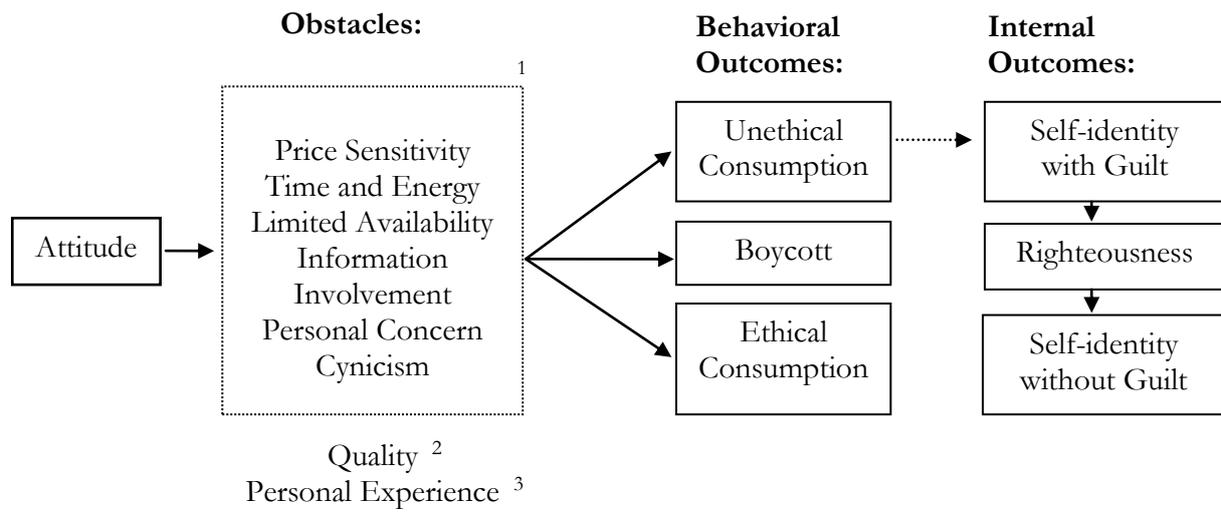
(Anna 24) It's very hard question because there are so many elements of it... and just because it is environmentally friendly in this way, it can mean many other things disappear. It's the same with organic bananas from South America it lose its purpose if you make take them travel so long. It is an extremely difficult issue and I do not really know how to solve it [...].

#### **4.4. Self-identity**

Unlike what previous research within the postmodern paradigm states, our findings give no indication of our desire for objects being rooted in what ownership can give us in terms of social status and social relationships. According to Belk et al. (2006), consumers desire and acquire objects in hope of identifying themselves with a group they belong to or wish they belonged to. However, the consumer respondents put little effort and thought into their purchases of disposable goods beyond traditional purchase criteria. Although, the consumer respondents gave light to conflicting sense of self when not being able to fulfill their ethical obligation, our findings is not in accordance with theories on objects as an extension of our self (Belk 1988). Neither did they constitute symbols, or indicate that the objects constituted anything but their utilitarian purpose. This is indicative that postmodern paradigm might not be the most optimal theoretical approach to use when studying CSR and disposable goods.

#### 4.5. Summation of findings

CSR does not play a major role in the decision making process for consumers when purchasing disposable goods. Factors such as price, broad assortment, quality, value and service were identified to be of main concern for consumers in this consumer context. In some cases, consumers even thought of CSR as unnecessary or unwanted for this product category. Our research identifies obstacles consumers experience with incorporating CSR in their decision making process and outline different outcomes from these hinders. These obstacles and outcomes are summarized in *Figure 5*. The range of obstacles is not conclusive but factors identified in other literature are accounted for in the model for acknowledgement. The model illustrate possible outcomes of the decision making process, including those reflecting behavioral outcomes in the middle and those representing internal outcomes in the form of self-identity to the right. Ethical obligation (described as ‘personal concern’ in the model) was described by many consumer respondents to be influential in their ethical purchase situations, as was possible avoidance of companies shown to engage in unethical practices such as child labor (described as ‘boycott’). However in the case of disposable goods, the majority of the consumer respondents were unaffected by personal concerns or information about corporate malpractice. Instead, they would go about purchasing as usual. As a result, many of the consumer respondents would experience retrospective feelings of guilt associated with the unethical behavior. This is depicted as a dashed line as it is not guaranteed that all consumers at all circumstances will experience feelings of guilt when refraining from incorporating CSR in the decision making process. Some consumer respondents showed no signs of these feelings at all. Nevertheless, those consumers with a personal concern for CSR in other purchase situations did for most of the time show signs of this. In this research guilt was identified as retrospective feelings experienced after the purchase situation, caused by either violating internalized norms or conflicting self-image (described as ‘self-identity’). The consumer respondents would employ a number of neutralizing techniques in order to justify their behavior or as a way of self-maintenance. In this way, they were able to maintain self-identity and to avoid overwhelming guilt. Although self-identity maintenance was found to be important among the consumers, the postmodern paradigm-concepts of desirability of sociality and symbols of meanings are not incorporated as we saw no indication that disposable goods were purchased for anything but to satisfy a need.



1 Identified in the present study

2 Identified by Bray et al. (2011) but not present in this study

3 Identified by McDevitt et al. (2007) but not present in this study

Figure 5. Summary of findings (inspired by model by Bray et al. 2011)

## 5. CSR and the Road Ahead

The aim of this study was to investigate the role CSR plays in the decision making process for disposable goods and to understand the limited role of CSR in these choices. Our main contribution to previous research lies in investigating a relatively unexplored sector where the products are characterized by low involvement or limited CSR awareness and interest. In the case of disposable goods, the consumer's awareness about the consequences of production and consumption is considerably more limited than for sectors more investigated, such as cloths and food, and therefore constitutes an interesting addition to literature on ethical decision making. Our research provides for an early focused study on this product category. Also, this research offer additional understanding to the documented attitude-behavior gap: Consumers' positive attitudes towards ethically and environmentally friendly products and companies do not translate into actual purchasing of these types of products. This study is an addition to the literature aiming to understand this discrepancy. Our findings include strengthening a number of obstacles present in previous research as well as broadening the understanding by including product category as an important factor. Moreover, by identifying a number of different neutralizing techniques employed by the consumers experiencing retrospective feelings of guilt, our research provides valuable findings not only on a individual level (as the postmodern consumer research literature does) but it is also aimed to help companies, primarily offering disposable goods, in their strategic CSR work. Furthermore, through our study we applied traditional consumer behavior and postmodern consumer behavior in order to understand what theoretical field is best applicable when looking at CSR and disposable goods. Surprisingly, postmodern literature provided a limited role in our analysis mainly because consumers do not see disposable goods as symbols of meanings. We therefore add to the literature on consumer behavior by stating that in our study more traditional consumer behavior literature appeared more applicable towards the understanding of the role CSR plays for consumer when purchasing disposable good compared to modern consumer behavior theories.

### 5.1. Managerial implications

This research also offers several managerial implications. We have concluded based on our findings that in this sector CSR does not play a major role in the decision making process for consumers. This suggests that companies have the opportunity not to involve CSR in their

marketing mix. Although CSR is not top of mind for consumers we believe that it should not be disregarded since CSR is not just about the consumers it is about other stakeholders as well. For example, CSR has been shown to have positive effects on investment and employees (Porter & Kramer 2009).

Companies that choose not to involve CSR in their marketing activities should be aware of the growing interest in society concerning CSR issues. More and more companies are starting to communicate their CSR effort and it is important that managers are aware of this. Although this sector has not experienced scrutiny from the public to the same extent other sectors has, there is nothing that says this will last forever. If a company decides not to involve CSR they risk falling behind competition once public and corporate interest increases in this sector. Companies who chose not to communicate their CSR work should instead focus on alleviating an overall positive company image. For one, consumers with a positive attitude towards CSR will be positively affected by positive associations of an overall company image, making it advantageous to the company when consumers evaluate that company.

In our study respondents expressed that they often required assistance when purchasing disposable goods. They often required help in findings products that would satisfy their needs as well as they claimed that they often use company employees to gather information relating towards their purchase. Based on these findings we suggest that managers focus on training their personnel accordingly so that they are capable, through customer interactions, aid in the building of an overall positive company image. Compared to traditional communication it seems as if, managers can, through training decrease consumer skepticism towards CSR related communication. If managers choose this course of action it important that employees are capable of answering questions relating towards CSR. Managers should be aware of the risk that if employees are not capable of answer consumer questions relating towards CSR that this might affect the overall company image negativity. Disregarding these risks, it seems as if this is an efficient way of communicating CSR towards consumers since skepticism is reduced. As well as it seems that consumer that do not posses any CSR related knowledge about a company's CSR position will derive satisfactory service to a positive overall CSR image.

For companies that chose to involve CSR in their communication and positioning, we recommend that companies focus on their CSR image on a company level rather than on product level. This is because of the low involvement nature of disposable goods. Based on our findings it seems as if consumers do not spend a lot of time and energy purchasing disposable goods and they often rely on heuristics when purchasing disposable goods. This provides a problem for

companies looking to benefit from CSR since consumers will not use CSR as criteria, even consumers with positive attitude towards CSR. At most, consumers appear to be aware of the company's CSR image rather than the individual products. We thus recommend manager to work on their CSR position rather than individual products since ethical consumers will use the company's CSR image as a purchase criterion. It seems as if consumers that are interested in CSR derive CSR association from the company's overall CSR position (Öberseder et al. 2011). This is another argument for the recommended course of action.

On the other hand, companies that choose to communicate CSR on a product level should know that this might encourage feelings of guilt on the consumer. This is applicable towards consumer with a high and low interest in CSR. Companies choosing to communicate on a product level should be aware of the effects of branding their products as green or ethical. Since CSR communication affects consumers evaluation of company CSR image. If the product is communicated as ethical manager should be aware that there needs be a fit between CSR communication on a product level and company level. In other words, manager choosing to communicate an ethical product should be conscious that there needs to be a fit between the communication on a product level and the overall CSR communication. Failing to address this might results in negative consumer evolution of such products which in turn will affect the company's overall CSR image negatively.

However, there is another risk of communicating CSR on a product level and that is consumer might feel forced to purchasing ethically. There is a risk that consumer choose another retailer because of they feel forced to ethical consumption because of CSR communication. If the communications aims at increasing ethical consumption manager should be responsive that this might infringe on consumer ethical obligation. There might be a conflict between what consumer want to do and ought to do which might result in consumers avoidance in order to evade negative feelings. If a consumer feels obligate to ethical consumption which is not in line with their ethical obligation this might affect consumer negatively since there is a conflict between what consumers wants to do and what a consumer ought to do.

Moreover, the choice of communicating CSR through a particular channel also appears to have an effect on consumers. Our findings indicate that consumers are skeptical towards CSR communication when this communication is proceeding from the company. To avoid skepticism we suggest that managers use different channels of communication for CSR activities. Since consumers will evaluate the source of communication and base their perception on the source of communication rather than what is being communicated.

Communicating CSR towards the consumer is neither straightforward nor easy. It is very complex and manager should be conscious of this. The general problem that managers face with CSR communication CSR is that they need to evaluate whether they want to reach several consumer with their CSR communication or make their CSR communication seem credible. Manger choosing the first course of action, reaching a mass, should be conscious that consumers are cynical of company's CSR communication and are skeptical towards it. Consumers are not easily fooled and they appear to be able to see passed when companies are engaging in CSR for other reason than profit. We argue that manager that fail to address the complexity of CSR communication could aid in creating a negative company's CSR position, potentially resulting in decreased purchase or worse lead to consumer boycotts.

Further, a company in this sector that is to venture into the CSR arena should foremost focus on minimizing consumer skepticism and to help them overcome the identified obstacles. More specifically, companies should aim to gain deeper understanding to each of the identified obstacles in order to directly assess their affect on the actual purchase behavior of a consumer.

Manager must make CSR information more available and easier accessible for consumers. It is essential that the CSR information is specific, relevant, transparent and that companies only communicate CSR information relating to their core business. It cannot be stressed enough that there needs to be a fit between the business core, CSR information and CSR communication. Since the fit between company core and CSR information affects credibility of that information.

Also, in our findings we saw difference in consumer respondents and their interest towards CSR. While some consumers' respondents reported a strong interest in CSR, others report a very low interest and a few did not want any CSR information at all. This suggests that consumers will require more or less CSR information based on their CSR interest. Since there are such differences regarding CSR interest, we recommend managers to make CSR information easy available and easy accessible on a voluntary basis. Preferably at the point of purchase because that is where the consumer indicated they would want CSR information. Then, consumer with high interest in CSR will find CSR information they require.

Furthermore, our findings suggest that there is a relationship between disposable goods and CSR awareness. We claim that there is a relationship because in our study consumers state a very low interest in disposable goods which seems to be related to low CSR awareness. Our findings indicate that when consumers are more involved with the products (e.g. cloths and food)

consumer appear to be more aware of CSR. It is therefore essential that companies looking to benefit from CSR through increased purchase intention that they focus on creating CSR awareness especially if the company is operating within disposable goods industry.

Lastly, price appears to have a major effect on consumers considering to incorporating CSR as a purchase criterion. In our study consumer respondent reported price as the major hinder to ethical consumption. It seems as if price hinders ethical consumption as consumers take it for granted that ethical products are priced higher. This suggests a relationship between the price perception that consumer have about ethical goods and ethical products. This provides a problem for companies offering ethical products that are not priced higher than traditional products. To decrease consumers overall price perception, manager should focus on decreasing consumers price perception of ethical products. This could be achieved through communication on the product or close to the point of purchase for example. It is essential that managers aid consumers across the price perception barrier since it seems to be an overall agreement amongst our consumer respondents that ethical products are priced higher than traditional products.

On the other hand, if a company offers ethical products that are priced higher manager should be aware that consumers evaluate the ethical features and the proportion price difference of such products. That is, if a consumer has to decide upon purchasing an ethical product or a non ethical product then consumers needs to perceive that the price proportionality to be acceptable in order for them to purchase ethically. In this case manager should focus on communicating the ethical benefits of their products.

Finally, from our study we have observed that consumer do not perceive there to be any green or CSR leading retailer within the Swedish market. This suggests that there is room for retailer to position themselves as green or engaged in CSR and use this in their positioning.

## **5.2. Limitations and further research**

Along with the previously discussed theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and further research needs to be addressed. First, all qualitative studies are faced with the inherent limitation of generalizability. Rather than being quantifiably measurable, qualitative results are characterized by their exploratory design and small sample. Although one can argue that it is thus impossible to draw generalizations from the result, the study has proven to be beneficiary for the purpose of exploration and conceptualization (McCracken 1988). Therefore, future research

might examine the role of CSR in the decision making process by use of quantitative methods. More precisely, the obstacles and neutralizing techniques could be tested in a survey on a much larger scale. This could measure how each obstacle influence the purchase intention and company evaluations.

In addition, the generalizability of this study's findings is substantially limited by its examination of a single company. For instance, the effects of CSR on decision making process might differ considerably in circumstances in which consumers prior hold negative company associations. As previously stated, the representativeness of the sample is a considerable limitation for this study. Thus, the present research sample could be expanded by including participants in more spread ages and income brackets. Especially income since a large portion of the consumer respondents stated price as their main concern when purchasing disposable goods. The narrow scope and sample also makes it hard to claim we have provided for a comprehensive description, but it does support key obstacles presented by previous research and provides for insights into the role CSR plays for purchase of disposable goods.

Lastly, the awareness of CSR is general low (Pomeroy & Dolnicar 2009; Sen et al. 2006). For disposable goods the awareness and interest for CSR is considerably lower. Öberseder et al. (2011) for example recommends managers who chose to ignore consumer's potential CSR interest to sell products in the lower price categories, such as disposable goods. This suggest another interesting avenue for further research to examine why awareness and interest for CSR in this industry is much lower compared to other industries, who has experienced substantially more scrutiny from stakeholder and the public. Furthermore, the type of CSR communication program used will have different effects on consumers. For example, Pirsch et al. (2007) found that consumers respond more positively towards institutionalized programs than towards promotional programs. Proactive and reactive programs have also shown to have different effects on consumer evaluations. Therefore, another interesting avenue for further research would be to examine how consumers of disposable goods behave in reaction to different kinds of CSR programs. Furthermore, as guilt has been acknowledged to have an impact on post purchase behavior, further research could focus on potential CSR programs (e.g. in-store information) and their impact on retrospective feelings of guilt, and more importantly how this affect consumer attitudes and behaviors prior to purchase. More specifically, it would be interesting to explore if presented with information in store the consumer will be positively or negatively affected by it.

These limitations notwithstanding, we hope that our research will spur further investigations of consumer reactions to CSR initiatives by companies producing and selling disposable goods.

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## 7. Appendix

### 7.1. Translation of quotes

(Margareta 68) *Ja det är lite skillnad mellan vad man stoppar i sig man kanske är lite mer noggrann än allt annat runt omkring.*

(Margareta, 68) Yes, there is a little bit of a difference between what you ingest and other things maybe one is a bit more cautious than with everything else.

(Marie 61) *Asså det... Förbrukningsvaror... Där tror jag att det... den där [Ansvar för djur, människor och natur] får stryka lite på foten.*

(Marie 61) Ah that... disposable goods...then I think...that one [Responsibility for; nature, humans and animals] has to give a little.

(Interviewer) *När är gör du det inte [tänker på miljön]? (Sebastian 26) Speciellt när det är såna här standardprodukter ... där det inte är någon större skillnad. Ehm...toalettpapper till exempel. Klassiska.*

(Interviewer) When do you not do it [think about the environment]? (Sebastian, 26) Especially concerning these standard products ... where there is not a major difference. Ehm...Toiletpaper for example. Classic.

(Richard 28) *Hade det inte varit något inblandat med arbetskraft och sånt va så hade jag nog köpt de. Om det nu inte är skada för miljö. Då hade jag ju avstått från att handla den. För jag vill inte att den ska vara förekomma giftigt avfall, eller att det ska vara något giftigt ämne i den här beläggningen eller vad det nu kan vara va.*

(Richard 28) Had it not involved something concerning the workforce and such, I would have probably bought them. That is if it's not damaging to the environment. Then I would refrain from buying it. Because I don't want toxic waste, or that there should be toxic substance in this coating, or whatever it may be.

(Jon 54) *Jag tycker faktiskt att det är för dyrt. Så är det med allt du köper som är ekologiskt, det brukar skilja mycket.*

(Jon 54) I actually think it is too expensive. That how it is with anything you buy that is organic, it usually differs a lot.

(Per 55) *Jag tror att det är helt avgörande vad du har i din plånbok.*

(Per 55) I think it is absolutely critical to what you have in your wallet.

(Bengt 68) *Allting som är, vi kallar det mindre miljöpåverkan så stiger priset. Automatiskt.*

(Bengt 68) Everything that is, let's call it, has less environment impact then the price goes up. Automatically.

*(Lilly 78) Jag står inte och vänder på en sak och tänker "vad har det här nu för en betydelse för miljön och för människorna som har tillverkat den?" det gör jag inte. Jag är lite slö där.*

(Lilly 78) I don't stand around turning things over and think "What impact does this have on the environment and the people who produce it?" I don't do that. I'm a bit lazy there.

*(Theodor 26) Men det är något jag inte gör så mycket som jag borde göra [se över tillverknings förhållande ]och det...nej det har bara göra med ren lat het och...nej...asså det finns att man kan ta reda på vad varorna kommer ifrån...men det har inte jag sådär väljer bort lite själv...det gör jag.*

(Theodor 26) But that is something I don't do as often as I should [review production circumstances]...no, I do it out of pure laziness...no... I can find out where the product is coming from...but I choose not to involve it...I do.

*(Filip 24) Jag tittar inte...jag undersöker inte varenda lite mat grej jag ska köpa det kollar jag inte direkt hur bra det är i förhållande till vart det har tillverkat eller i vilka förhållandes det har tillverkats sånt. Man orkar inte det blir för många saker det blir för mycket grejer att göra varje dag.*

(Filip 24) I don't look... I do not examine every little food thing I buy I don't compare it how it relates towards manufacturing circumstances or under what circumstance the product is produced. One can't be bothered it becomes too overwhelming to do that every day.

*(Anna 23) Det [tillgänglighet] är också en faktor. Att det är inga produkter som är lättillgängliga. Man måste veta vart man ska gå [för att handla]. Det är inget som finns i vanliga närbutiker så att tillgängligheten är absolut en stor brist i det hela.*

(Anna 23) [Availability] is also a factor...These are products that are not easily available. You have to know where to go [in order to purchase].It's not something available in regular convenience stores so the availability is definitely a big problem for it all.

*(Richard 28) Men den lilla biten som jag sätter högst måste jag ju offra ibland såklart för att det finns inget miljövänligt alternativ.*

(Richard 28) But that little bit that I value the most I sometimes have to sacrifice of course because there are no environmentally friendly alternatives.

*(Filip 24)[...] känns som väldigt dåligt tillgänglighet på det för det är inte många företag som skyltar om den här informationen beller speciellt inne i affärer eller någonting eller media. Tycker jag.*

(Filip 24) [...] feels like very poor availability of that [information] because not many companies disclose such information especially inside the shop or something or the media. In my opinion.

*(Bengt 68) Man vet ju inte. Det står ju inte på produkten man köper om det är barn som har gjort den.*

(Bengt 68) You don't know really. It does not really say on the package that the goods you buy are made by children.

*(Marie 61) Jag vill veta hur den har tillverkats och vem som har slits ut sig för inga pengar alls för att producera den.*

(Marie 61) I want to know how it is produced [the product] and whom has sacrificed themselves for no money at all to produce it.

*(Erik 22) Det mindre man vet desto bättre det är för då tänker man inte mycket på det.*

(Erik 22) The less you know the better it is for you since then you don't think much about it.

*(Theodor 24) [...] alla konsumentvaror har jag ingen koll på riktigt... vilket gör så att det påverkar väldigt dåligt på vilka grejer jag köper[...]*

(Theodor 24)[...] all consumer goods, I have no idea about them really...which in turn affects me very negatively on the stuff I buy [...]

*(Anita 66) Man kanske har snöat in på en viss grej och så försöker man hålla det för att hålla sig till något...för att informations flödet som vi pratade om innan är så stort att det blir svårt att hantera och då får man hålla sig till något och sitt sunda förnuft vad det nu är för någonting.*

(Anita 66) It might be that you have focused on a certain thing [an issue]and then try to stick to that [issue]...the information flow that we talked about before is so large that it becomes difficult to handle and then you stick to something [a particular issues]and you relay on your common sense whatever that is.

*(Anita 66) [...]det är ett ekorrehjul med all den informationen som finns tillgänglig.*

(Anita 66) [...] it's a squirrel wheel [a confusing never ending process] with all the information that is available.

*(Erik 22) Det mindre man vet desto bättre det är för då tänker man inte mycket på det. Utan då tar man det man behöver. Men det är ju alltid bra att veta. [...] Det är svårt när man börjar tänka på det, men det är nog därför många inte tänker på det. Jag tänker inte på det så ofta tycker jag.*

(Erik 22) The less you know the better it is for you since you don't think much about it. Instead, then you just grab what you need. But I guess it's always good to know [...] It's hard when you start thinking about it, but that's probably why many people do not think about it. I don't think about it so often, I think.

*(Anna 23) Jag tror nästan att det kanske blir nästan för mycket information [...] Jag hade önskat att det fanns mera info i butiken för att det är på plats man gör, eller ofta jag gör valen och att det blir... att man kan få in all info i huvudet liksom också. Sen är internet rätt svårt att hitta rätta information men det är ju en grej i sig.*

(Anna 23) I almost think it might seem as if there is too much information [...] I had wished there was more information in the shop because that's where I often make my choices...and that you can absorb all the information as well. When it comes to the Internet it's hard to find the right information but that's a thing in itself.

*(Richard 28) Jag vet inte så mycket om deras ståndpunkter på det sättet. Jag hoppas att deras ståndpunkter är att sätta miljön först [...]*

(Richard 28) I do know about their position [CSR position] in that way. I hope that their position is to put the environment first [...]

*(Sven 64) Då [om jag fick reda på att det hade barnarbete] skulle jag faktiskt tänka för mig innan jag handlar där... sånt gillar jag inte alls i huvudet... det hade jag faktiskt gjort... jag tror inte att jag hade handlat där i huvudet det tror jag inte.*

(Sven 64) Then [if I found out that there was child labor involved] I would actually consider that before I shop there...I don't like those kind of things [child labor] at all...that's what I would have done...actually I don't think I would shop there at all I think.

*(Bengt 68) "Det finns ju vissa som boycottar för att de kanske köper sina varor på fel ställen och så där va. Sen pratar de ju, jag vet inte vilka det är va, men en del såna där klädfirmor som har barnarbete och sånt. Men det har det ju gjorts i alla tider ju [...] Inte här i Sverige va men i såna länder där det är... Bangladesh och dylikt."*

(Bengt 68) There are those who boycott because they [companies] purchase their good in the wrong places and things like that. Then they talk of course, I do not know who they are, but some clothing companies use child labor and stuff. But it has been done in all times [...] Not here in Sweden but in those other countries... Bangladesh amongst others.

*(Anna 23) Jag tror nog att först kommer dem här tankarna: Jag borde inte. Men det blir någonstans ett spänningsmoment och då faller man lite för den frestelsen det är jätte mysigt där ett tag sen - Vafan gjorde jag det, det va ju onödigt.*

(Anna 23) I think that first these thoughts come to mind: I should not. But there is a moment of excitement and that's where you fall for the temptation and it's really nice for a while, but then; "Why the hell did I do that? It [purchased nail polish from H&M] was unnecessary.

*(Anita 66) Jag är med i Greenpeace... det är mitt bidrag...*

(Anita 66) I'm a member of Greenpeace... that's my contribution...

*(Sven 64) Jag är själv faktiskt med UNICEF, jag skänker pengar där varje månad fast jag ändå inte har så pass bra lön... jag skänker ändå pengar... även till hemlösa skänker jag pengar.*

(Sven 64) I'm actually with UNICEF, I donate money there every month, even though I don't have that much of a good salary...I still donate money...even the homeless people I give money.

*(Sebastian 26) [...]att när man tjänar mer pengar så på något sätt förväntas man också handla schystare grejer någonstans... med högre inkomst kommer ett visst ansvar också.*

(Sebastian 26) [...] when you earn more money in some way you're expected to also buy more responsibly...with higher income comes more responsibility too.

*(Margareta 68 ) Jo dom som jobbar inom den branschen får ju ta tag i det tycker man. Om dom har nån fackförening och dom få ju själva agera. Jag vet inte om vi utomstående kan göra så mycket utan det är väl dom som är inom den branschen som får agera.*

(Margareta, 68) Well the people who work within the industry have to deal with one thinks. If they have some union and they have to act themselves. I do not know if we as outsiders can do so much about it, it's up to those within the industry to act.

*(Marie 61) "Vad vill företaget? Vad vill den som slänger ut reklamen?" Dom vill sälja. Det är det enda som är intressant. Dom är inte ute och idkar någon filantropisk verksamhet.*

(Marie 61) "What does the company want? What do they expect out of advertising?" They want to sell. It's the only thing that is of interest. They are not looking to engage in some philanthropic activity.

*(Sven 64) Jag tror det skiter i vilket bara det tjänar pengar [...] Dom gör det för att det inte ska tappa kunder givetvis. Det är för saken skull det gör det. Men jag tror inte att det är ansvarstagande [...] Jag tror det är lögn om jag ska vara ärligt [...] Jag tror inte dem bryr sig.*

(Sven, 64) I think they don't care as long as they are making money [...] They do it because they do not want to lose customers, of course. They just do it for the sake of doing it. But I do not think it is responsibility [...] I think it's a lie if I were to be honest [...] I do not think they care.

*(Bengt 68) Det hjälper inte om jag bryr mig. De gör ju som dom vill ändå ju. På ett eller annat sätt så lurar de ju oss konsumenter och talar om att det inte är barnarbete så när det kommer till kritan så är det ju det i alla fall.*

(Bengt 68) It does not help if I care. They [companies] do whatever they want anyways. In one way or another they fool the consumers and tell us that there is no child labor involved but when in fact there is.

*(Anna 23) Där är svårigheten att själva affärsidena inte funkar för mig. Att det går inte att kombinera ett miljötänk med. Men jag tror just där att visa att man arbetat, att visa det genom sina handlingar istället för att [...] "Vi är miljömässiga eller vi tänker på miljön" det blir liksom lite... det passar inte ihop och ändå har det billiga plastsaker från Kina.*

(Anna 23) There is the difficulty when the business idea does not work for me. That it cannot be combined with an environmental conscience. But I think it is that you show that you have been

working, to show it through actions rather than [...] “We are environmental or we think of the environment” it's sort of a little... it does not match, and they still have the cheap plastic things from China.

*(Richard 26) När jag försöker förklara för min pappa som jag ändå tycker är en intelligent människa så förstår han liksom inte sammanhanget med det. Att man ska lägga pengar på välgörenhet och han förstår att det kanske kan se bra ut men att det på något sätt skulle gynna firman är för honom helt oförståeligt.*

(Richard 26) When I try to explain to my dad, who I actually think is an intelligent man, he doesn't understand the connection. That you should spend money in charity and he understands that it might look good but that it would somehow benefit the firm is to him totally incomprehensible.

*(Lilly 78) Det är väl lite som att köpa sig fri från det dåliga samvetet litegrann. Åt sidan så behöver Räddar Barnen all hjälp dem kan få. Men lite konstig konflikt blir det ju, om man nu använder barnarbete och sen skänker pengar till rädda barnen.*

(Lilly 78) It's a little like buying yourself free from the bad conscience a little. Besides Rädda Barnen need all the help they can get- But a little strange conflict it is of course, if one uses child labor and then sends money to save the children.

*(Per 55) Jag kan inte tänka mig att företag säger, sitter och och hittar på någonting och ljuger om någonting. Däremot kan jag tänka mig ibland så är det en vision. Och inte en handling. Vision kanske ligger ett par år framåt. Kanske tio år framåt. Men det utspelar sig som att det händer idag. Så man måste ju vara rätt klar om det sker idag eller i en vision. Det är inget fel att ha en vision. Men det är bara att man måste kanske visa att man har en handlingsplan och hur man kommer dit.*

(Per 55) I cannot imagine that a company says, or is sitting here and find something to lie about. But I do think sometimes it's a vision. And not an act. Vision is perhaps a couple of years. Maybe ten years. But it's played out as it happens today. So one has to be fairly clear if it happens today or if it is a vision. There is nothing wrong to have a vision. But it's just that you may have to show that you have an action plan and how to get there.

*(Anna 24) Det är ju på ett sätt bra [att företag annonserar sitt ansvar] men på något sätt blir det för mig att det blir bara PR. Man undrar hur mycket som faktiskt... när man skryter med så mycket blir det misstänket samt på något sätt. [...] Nu sitter man egentligen: ”Vad innebär dom här olika slagorden? Att det gör det ena och det andra, vad innebär det i praktiken?”*

(Anna 24) It's a good in a way [that companies communicate CSR activities] but somehow it becomes a PR ploy to me. One wonders how much is actually...when you brag so much it suspicious in some way. [...] When one is really thinking: “What are they here various slogans? They say they do one thing or another, what does it mean in practice?”

*(Anita 66) [...]emballage, det kostar säkert massor att producera och vad tar det inte av energi och miljö. Nej..det tycker... jag ifrågasätter dem vanliga... asså dem andra lamporna [energispärande]...*

(Anita 66) Packaging, that certain cost a lot to produce and what about the energy required and the environment. No...I think...I question those ordinary ones [energy saving light bulbs].

*(Anna 24) Det är väldigt svårt fråga för att det finns så många element av den... och bara för att man är miljövänlig på det här sättet kan det betyder att många andra saker försvinner. Det är samma med ekologiska bananer från Syd America. det förlora sitt syfte om man transporterera dem så lång. Det är en extremt svår fråga och jag vet inte riktigt hur man skulle lösa det [...]*

(Anna 24) It's very hard question because there are so many elements of it... and just because it is environmentally friendly in this way, it can mean many other things disappear. It's the same with organic bananas from South America it lose its purpose if you make take them travel so long. It is an extremely difficult issue and I do not really know how to solve it [...].

## 7.2. Biographical questioner

# Demografiskt frågeformulär

---

Dagens datum:

Plats:

Tid:

Intervjuares namn:

Respondents namn:

### 1. Kön

Kvinna

Man

### 2. Födelseår

\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Bostadsort

\_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Sysselsättning

Arbetssökande:

Deltidsanställd:

Egenföretagare:

Heltidsanställd:

Student

Pensionär

### 5. Inkomst (år)

\_\_\_\_\_

## MARKET



Foto: UN Photo/Martine Perret

**Svensk produktion i Asien.** Arbetsförhållanden och miljöpåverkan av förbrukningsvaror är något konsumenter inte tänker på särskilt mycket. Även dem konsumenter med högt intresse för dessa frågor vid andra produkter.

# Få konsumenter bryr sig

-Att kommunicera CSR i hobbyfixarbranschen

**Minska konsumenters skepticism mot detaljhandelns hållbarhetsarbete.**

**Det rådet ger mastersstudenterna Alexander Blacker och My Hansson vid Lunds Universitet.**

**– En välinriktad kommunikation istället för kvantitet betyder mer välplacerade CSR investeringar, säger My Hansson.**

Företags ska tjäna pengar. Punkt. Så har länge tongångarna gått i frågan om CSR och företags sociala och miljömässigt ansvar. Det yttersta ansvaret står den offentliga och den ideella sektorn för, inte företaget. Numera ses denna idé som allt mer absurd – att näringslivet inte är delaktig i det ansvar som tas för att utveckla och upprätthålla samhället.

Det konsumtionssamhälle vi lever i strävar efter att företag tar hänsyn till omvärlden och det samhällen man verkar i.

En växande andel företagsledare har insett att man inte bara måste, men också borde, agera för fler aktörer än den egna vinsten för att kunna upprätthålla och stärka sin position och den egna konkurrenskraften. För kloka ledare är frågan inte längre om de ska inkorporera CSR i de vardagliga processerna, utan på vilket sätt.

Hemmafixarbranschen har dock inte riktigt hängt med. Produkter och företag som kommuniceras som ansvarsfulla lyser med sin frånvaro och branschen är inte i närheten av den mediala uppmärksamhet som andra sektorer i detaljhandeln upplevt. Även om företagen har gjort drastiska förändringar i sina uppförandekoder, har konsumenternas intresse för dessa förändringar inte varit stort.

**” Dessutom är vi hejare på att rättfärdiga det vi gör! ”**

**Hur tar man sig an det faktum att konsumenter inte bryr sig? Kan det helt enkelt vara så att de störs av detaljföretagens uppmaningar (eller uppmuntran) till ett mer etiskt köp?**

I ett försök att ge en fingervisning om svaret har två mastersstudenter vid Lunds Universitet gjort en undersökning bland Clas Olsons kunder. I den färskva studien undersöker de varför hemmafixarkonsumenters positiva inställning till hållbarhet inte översätts i praktiken.

## MARKET

Resultatet? Till skillnad till vad konsumenterna säger i attitydundersökningar visar det sig att konsumenterna till en viss mån inte bryr sig.

– För ett företag som Clas Ohlson, Biltema och Jula till exempel – där intresset har varit relativt lågt för CSR bland konsumenterna, ser vi också ett antal hinder. T.ex. är begränsad tillgängligheten på etiska alternativ, priskänslighet, samt skepticism exempel på hinder som försvårar för konsumenten. Dessutom är vi hejare på att rättfärdiga det vi gör! säger My Hansson.

### Svårigheter med CSR

Vad som särpräglar denna bransch från andra inom detaljhandeln är produktens natur samt det låga intresset konsumenterna har gentemot produktionsförhållanden och miljöaspekter. Förbrukningsvaror är produkter som förenklar vår vardag men som vi inte engagerar oss i särskilt mycket vid köptillfället. Ofta är det produkter så som tejp, plastpåsar eller glödlampor som konsumenten inte vill eller kan lägga tid och energi på. Pris blir då oftast det ledande köpkriteriet och inte en tanke läggs på hållbarhetsfrågor.

Utöver konsumenters låga intresse för förbrukningsvaror, hyser många konsumenter skepticism mot företagen som kommunicerar sitt ansvarstagande allt för aggressivt. Konsumenterna upplever det som osannolikt att företag engagerar sig i CSR för andra anledningar än att tjäna pengar. De finner en konflikt i att vinstdrivande företag påstår sig ta ett socialt och miljömässigt ansvar.

Alexander Blacker och My Hansson menar på att detta skapar problem speciellt för hemmaföretagsbranschen som präglas av billiga produkter samt att en växande andel av tillverkningen återfinns i Asien. Länder vars ofta dåliga miljölagar och arbetsförhållande är väl kända för konsumenten.

### Vad kan man göra?

Resultatet blir att företag lägger pengar på ett verktyg som konsumenterna inte värdesätter. Konsumenterna ser snarare cyniskt på att företagen engagerar sig i hållbarhetsfrågor. Det företag som väljer att kommunicera sitt hållbarhetsarbete bemöts av skepticism från konsumenten. Frågan kvarstår – kastar hemmaföretagsbranschen pengar i sjön genom sitt CSR arbete?

”Pris blir då oftast det ledande köpkriteriet och inte en tanke läggs på hållbarhetsfrågor.”

Nej, menar Alexander Blacker och My Hansson.

– Det finns många fler aspekter av CSR att tänka på än konsumenten. Det finns andra intressenter så som investerare och medarbetare som påverkas positivt av en ansvarsgull företagsbild. Även de konsumenter som har en positiv inställning till hållbarhet i andra branscher, så som mat och kläder, blir positivt inställda till företag som har en grön image. Trots att de har visat sig att de inte bryr sig på produktnivå, säger Alexander Blacker.

Företag har möjligheten att kommunicera sitt hållbarhetsarbete på produkt- och företagsnivå. Oavsett hur man väljer att utforma sin CSR kommunicera är det ytterst viktigt enligt Alexander och My att konsumenten uppfattar företagets hållbarhetsarbete som genuint. Det måste finnas en passning mellan företagets affärsidé, hållbarhetsarbete och val av kommunikationskanal för att konsumenten ska skapa sig en positiv uppfattning av företagets image som ansvarsfull.

Risken med att kommunicera på produktnivå blir att företag uppmanar konsumenten till etisk konsumtion som kanske inte stämmer överens med konsumentens etiska konsumtionsvilja. Istället skrämmer man bort kunder som upplever sådan kommunikation som jobbig. Alternativt kan kommunikationen upplysa konsumenterna om ett problem som de tidigare inte varit medvetna om. Dock beror företagets övergripliga image på huruvida produkterna är hållbara. Det blir således upp till företagen att balansera informationen utan att skuldbelägga konsumenterna samtidigt som kommunikationen syftar till att förbättra företagets hållbarhets image.

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... för att  
**motverka  
 skepticism.**

1. Förbättra  
 förståelsen för var  
 enskilt hinder.

2. Tillgängliggöra  
 information.

3. Kommunicera  
 endast CSR  
 arbete som är en  
 bra 'fit' med  
 kärnverksamheten.

4. Välj  
 kommunikationskanaler  
 med omsorg.

5. Skapa ett  
 intresse.