

# Profile of the consumer who values responsible and smart tourism in the hotel industry

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## Abstract

■ **Purpose:** Developing CSR is one of the most important aspects of so-called Smart Tourism, just as an in-depth knowledge of consumer characteristics and behavior is a key element of smart tourism management.

Tourism and hotel companies' understanding of the importance of CSR, as well as the value the consumer places on it, may result in increased quality of the travel experience and, therefore, in improving the destination's competitive advantage. This work aims to analyze the influence of certain sociodemographic characteristics of hotel consumers on their views of CSR and whether said views affect their purchasing behavior.

**Approach:** A review of the literature is carried out, followed by a descriptive study with a sample of 4685 consumers from different nationalities.

**Findings:** The results show that age, education level, and nationality are characteristics that influence hotel product consumers' views of CSR.

**Practical Implications:** Smart tourism involves offering products that are increasingly adapted to the specific needs of each client and, therefore, knowing which consumer profile places the most importance on CSR may guide the actions of tourism companies.

**Originality:** In the literature there are several studies on the

## Resumen

■ **Propósito:** El desarrollo de la RSE es uno de los aspectos más importantes del llamado Turismo Inteligente, así como el conocimiento profundo de las características y del comportamiento de los consumidores es un elemento clave de la gestión del turismo inteligente. La comprensión por parte de las empresas turísticas y hoteleras de la importancia de la RSE, así como del valor que el consumidor le otorga, puede significar una mayor calidad de la experiencia de viaje y, por lo tanto, una mejora en la ventaja competitiva del destino. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar la influencia de ciertas características sociodemográficas de los consumidores hoteleros en la valoración de la RSE que éstos realizan, y si dichas valoraciones afectan en su comportamiento de compra.

**Enfoque:** Se realiza una revisión de la literatura, seguida de un estudio descriptivo con una muestra de 4685 consumidores de diferentes nacionalidades.

**Resultados:** Los resultados muestran que la edad, el nivel educativo y la nacionalidad son características que influyen en las valoraciones que los consumidores de productos hoteleros realizan sobre la RSE.

**Implicaciones prácticas:** El turismo inteligente requiere ofrecer productos cada vez más adaptados a las necesidades específicas de cada cliente y, por lo tanto, conocer el perfil del consumidor que otorga mayor importancia a la RSE puede guiar las acciones de las empresas turísticas.

impact of CSR views in different interest groups, especially managers and employees. However, there are fewer studies on hotel consumers' views on CSR and the importance they place upon it. This study aims to offer an initial understanding of a sociodemographic profile of the client in relation to their views on CSR.

*Key Words:*

CSR, Hotel Sector, Consumer.

**Originalidad:** En la literatura hay varios estudios sobre las valoraciones de la RSE de diferentes grupos de interés, especialmente directivos y empleados. Sin embargo, hay menos estudios sobre las valoraciones de los consumidores hoteleros sobre la RSE y la importancia que éstos asignan a sus desarrollo. Este estudio ofrece una comprensión inicial del perfil sociodemográfico del cliente que valora la RSE.

*Palabras clave:*

RSE, Sector Hotelero, Consumidor.

## Introduction

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■ The Spanish tourism market is undergoing constant changes, and the appearance of new requirements in the environment means that companies must review how they maintain their competitiveness and sustainable development. There is greater competition among destinations and businesses to capture market shares, and those destinations that hope to be competitive and attract tourists will be those that are capable of offering greater added value.

Furthermore, client needs and expectations evolve quickly, forcing the sector to adapt in order to respond to them. Along these lines, a featured trend is the development of a strong conservationist spirit among tourists, under the concept of sustainability, as well as the growth of consumer demands surrounding companies' fulfillment of their obligations to their interest groups and, therefore, for responsible behavior.

Thus, implementing CSR in the tourism sector appears to be an opportunity and requirement that could help sector companies focus, articulate, and launch policies and objectives related to improving tourism competitiveness and which are closely related to social responsibility.

However, it can be seen that the research carried out on the development and assessment of CSR is still scarce. This is especially true for research performed from the perspective of demand, which is in a much earlier phase of development than research carried out on the supply, especially in the hotel sector.

Knowing the characteristics of consumers who are sensitive to CSR is of vital importance, as is identifying its impact on their purchase behavior. The purpose of this work is to analyze whether certain sociodemographic characteristics define responsible consumers in the case of hotels. The results could encourage and guide tourism organizations and companies to develop more sustainable and responsible business models, prioritizing the most effective actions that offer the most added value for all interest groups involved.

## CSR and responsible consumers

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### CSR

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■ The definition of CSR is closely related to the creation of value for companies, given that it promotes responsible behavior with all interest groups (Clarkson, 1995). CSR entails the development of ethical business practices, and involves offering safe, quality products, respecting employee rights, taking care of the environment, and getting involved in social causes.

Thus, companies not only have economic obligations related to being productive, obtaining profits, and improving efficiency, but they also must respond to obligations related to the needs of their interest groups, sustainability, and society in general (Carroll, 1979).

These introductory concepts make up the foundations of the philosophy of corporate social responsibility, which are increasingly permeating the design of corporate strategies to generate value and guarantee sustainability.

### Responsible Consumers

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■ Socially responsible consumers are defined as consumer citizens who are not only interested in satisfying their needs, but whose purchase decisions also include concern for the environment and social causes (Arredondo et al., 2011).

In the academic literature, there are different studies that attempt to shed light on consumers' purchase behavior, and which establish different consumer profiles, considering both explanatory variables and demographic and social variables, among others. However, in the tourism and hospitality sector, these studies are practically non-existent.

The consumer's purchase decision is influenced by different variables that comprise a complex process. These variables include the consumer's personal characteristics (age, lifestyle, gender, stage in life cycle), the social in-

fluences of their environment (culture, beliefs, reference groups, opinion leaders), as well as their own psychological characteristics (motives, perception, learning, personality). Finally, the literature on consumer behavior also includes the influence of the individual's moral conduct on their purchase behavior (Szechter, 2007). Sensitivity for ethics and people's real ethical practices are closely related (Vitell et al., 2003). This study focuses on certain consumer sociodemographic characteristics, such as age, nationality, and level of education.

With regard to age, according to Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development, people evolve throughout their lives from a stage focused on the "me" (pre-conventional stage) to another stage focused on other people in their environment (conventional stage), to then move on to a final third stage (post-conventional stage) in which they care about the universal dimension of human beings. According to this theory, it can be assumed that as consumers get older and become more mature they will be more likely to purchase responsible products, as they are motivated not only by the satisfaction of their group interests, but also by group interests on a social and environmental level.

Furthermore, in the last decade the study of the consumer's geographical context in evaluating CSR has gained importance (Lee, 2008; Lee & Shin, 2010). From a consumer approach, Maignan and Ferrel (2000) compared the different perceptions of consumers in the U.S., France, and Germany on the four types of responsibilities of the Carroll (1979) model, finding that they had different behavior patterns. Along these same lines, Francois-Lecompte and Roberts (2006) carried out a study on French and American consumers' views of CSR, and identified notable differences between the two nationalities.

The results obtained in the aforementioned studies demonstrate the importance of the geographic context of the consumers' origin and support the need to contemplate multi-dimensional constructs in analyzing CSR's influence on consumers, including a consideration of their specific geographical contexts (Akehurst et al., 2012).

In terms of education level, there are some prior studies that associate this variable with a positive view of CSR. The studies carried out by Gough et al. (1952) and Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968) associated CSR views with sociodemographic variables (age, gender, social class, education level, type of environment, and political affiliation), identifying a profile of socially responsible American consumers.

### **Impact of CSR on Consumers' Purchase Behavior**

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■ While some authors indicate there is a direct, positive link between companies' CSR actions and consumers'

reaction to these companies and their products (Dopico, 2014; Öberserder et al., 2011; Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Carvalho, Sen, Mota, & Carneiro, 2010), other authors state just the opposite; they say that this relationship is not always clear and direct, and that the effects of companies' CSR activities, as well as the purchase intentions of their consumers, are influenced by many other factors (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Maignan & Ferrel, 2004).

The literature indicates that CSR is a strategic variable for the company that has a direct, positive effect on its reputation, corporate image, and value of the brand (Alvarado, 2008, Brown & Dacin, 1997, García de los Salmones, Herrero & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2005, Varadarajan & Menon, 1988); furthermore, it also has a positive impact on consumers' attitudes towards said companies (Alvarado, 2008, Bigné, Andreu, Chumpitaz, & Swaen, 2005, Brown & Dacin, 1997, Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Finally, CSR reinforces consumers' future purchase intentions (Dopico, 2014; Öberserder et al., 2011; Alvarado, 2008; David, Kline & Dai; 2005, Varadarajan & Menon, 1988).

In recent studies on this topic, Dopico et al. (2014) reinforce the results of earlier research and indicate that those companies who focus their CSR activities towards the consumer are able to achieve various positive effects. Initially, they are able to improve the customer's attitude towards the company, which translates into a better consumer predisposition towards the organization.

Along the same lines, studies by Arteaga-Moreno et al. (2013) show the positive impact of CSR in increasing customer trust and commitment to the company, as well as the influence of these variables on customer satisfaction and loyalty. By including CSR in the value proposition offered to consumers, it is more likely that there will be a perception of fairness in the exchange and relationship between the organization and society, leading to greater consumer loyalty (Brown & Dacin 1997).

Thus, several studies conclude that the effects of implementing CSR are mainly positive in terms of the routine purchase behavior exhibited by consumers, overcoming other more rational considerations, such as those of an economic nature or those linked to the attributes of the product or service itself. Some authors also analyze the importance of providing information on CSR practices and consumer behavior, and conclude that there is a positive relationship (Vahdati et al. 2015; Alniacik et al., 2011; Brown & Dacin, 1997). Along the same lines, some research indicates that there is a relationship between the development of CSR and consumers choosing the company and product, as well as their recommending the company and product (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Vitell, 2003).

However, there are also studies that conclude that this influence does not exist (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Bigné

et al., 2005), while others argue that these relationships are indirect (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), given that other variables such as prior satisfaction or consumers' evaluation of the service may also have an influence. Furthermore, other researchers also indicate that factors such as price and quality have a greater impact on consumer behavior than CSR (Beckmann et al., 2001), and Boulstridge and Carrigan (2000) even conclude that CSR is far from the main motivating element in consumer purchase decisions.

Therefore, there is no consensus among the authors on the relationship between CSR and the establishment of relationships or ties between the consumer and company.

This study will analyze the influence of certain socio-demographic characteristics on hotel consumers' attitudes towards CSR and on their responsible purchasing behavior.

## Research methodology

■ This study consists of a descriptive analysis of the relationship between certain characteristics of hotel consumers and their views on CSR, specifically in the purchase decision process and when choosing an

establishment. It also analyzes the impact of CSR on improving the company's image and on consumers' willingness to accept an increase in price. Specifically, the study analyzes if these views vary according to age, education level, and nationality.

To do so, a questionnaire was administered to hotel consumers. The survey was carried out in-person on foreign tourists at the main tourism attractions in the city of Barcelona, one of the most important tourist cities in Spain. Additionally, an online survey aimed at Spanish consumers was administered on the websites of partner entities.

The field work was carried out from July to December 2015, and the sample was selected by simple random sampling; a total of 4685 valid surveys were obtained. The final sample consists of Spanish tourists (3585 individuals) and foreign tourists (1100 individuals). Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample by age, education level, and nationality.

## Analysis and results

■ Below are the results regarding the influence of these characteristics on the different variables related to consumers' predisposition for responsible consumption of hotel products. The results are not discussed when there was no difference between the demographic characteristics for one of the variables studied.

### Level of importance of CSR in the purchase decision and establishment selection process

■ In terms of the criteria that influence purchase decisions (see table 2), the factors quality and price are the most important, with a weight of 94.4% and 92.7%, respectively, considering the combined percentage of assessments of "Fairly important" and "Very important." The hotel's location is also relevant, and is important to 88% of those surveyed. The CSR factor has considerable importance, reaching an importance level of 60.4%, which is a significant aspect in this study.

Considering the "very important" answers separately, it is interesting to see that the quality factor is "very important" to 42.6% of tourists, above price, which is "very important" to 36.4% of the sample. CSR maintains a considerable weight, although much lower, with 13.4% saying it is "very important," and reaching the relevant percentage of 47% as a "fairly important" factor.

When consumers are asked what criteria they use to select an establishment, CSR is a factor used by 25% of the sample. Quality reaches a value of 75%, price is at 72.3%, and location 66.2%.

**Table 1 Sample profile (%)**

Age	%
Under 30	30.8
From 30 to 39	24.7
From 40 to 49	28.0
From 50 to 59	12.4
60 or over	4.2
Education level	%
No education	0.4
Primary and secondary education	12.5
Vocational training	23.8
University education	63.3
Nationality	%
Spanish	75.1
English	5.8
Italian	5.7
French	6.1
German	5.5
Other	1.9

Source: Own elaboration

**Table 2 Level of importance of the following factors to the purchase decision**

	Quality	Price	Location	CSR
Not important at all	0.4	0.7	0.6	3.1
Somewhat important	1.2	2.4	2.1	7.4
Indifferent	4.0	4.3	9.3	29.2
Fairly important	51.8	56.3	56.6	47.0
Very important	42.6	36.4	31.4	13.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Own elaboration

**Table 3 Importance of CSR in selecting an establishment and education level**

	No education	Primary and secondary	Vocational training	University education	Total
Not important at all	15.8%	3.6%	3.9%	3.0%	3.4%
Somewhat important	15.8%	9.4%	7.4%	7.9%	8.0%
Indifferent	15.8%	20.8%	20.2%	22.4%	21.7%
Important	36.8%	47.7%	49.7%	49.4%	49.2%
Very important	15.8%	18.4%	18.8%	17.3%	17.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Source: Own elaboration

This all provides an initial indication that the CSR factor has a certain level of importance, but is always below other factors.

Considering sociodemographic variables, the 50 to 59 age range is where CSR has the greatest importance (24.5%). On the opposite end of the spectrum, the below 30 age range is where we see the highest percentages who report that CSR is not important at all (4.2%) with regard to all other ages.

In terms of education level (see table 3), the percentages are fairly similar at different education levels. A difference can be seen with people with no type of education. This group has a higher percentage than the other education levels that report CSR is “not important at all,” “somewhat important,” and “indifferent” (Table 3).

With regard to nationality (see table 4), considering both the “very important” and “important” levels, the Spanish survey participants place the most importance on CSR, with a significant difference compared to the other nationalities analyzed. The French place the least importance on CSR.

### Impact of CSR on improving company image and future purchase intention

■ For tourists, the impact of CSR on improving the company's image and its reputation has an important influence for 80.6% and 80.8%, respectively. Finally, for 68.6% of those surveyed, CSR increases their future intention to purchase services from responsible hotels (see table 5).

In terms of differences among age ranges, CSR has an important impact on the company's image for those under 30 years old. However, adding together “large influence” and “fair influence,” the 40-49 age range also shows a large influence of CSR on improving image (82.6%), very close the impact shown among young people (83.4%).

With regard to the impact of CSR on the company's reputation, the 40-49 age range shows the greatest relationship (84.1%).

In terms of the impact of CSR on future purchase intention, this influence is greatest for those over 60 years old (77%) and for those aged 50-59 (75.5%). For the youngest group this percentage is 66.4%.

**Table 4 Importance of CSR in selecting an establishment and nationality**

	Spanish	French	English	Italian	German	Other	Total
Not important at all	1.1%	11.3%	10.8%	7.8%	15.3%	4.7%	3.5%
Somewhat important	5.4%	13.5%	17.8%	21.4%	12.1%	21.2%	8.2%
Indifferent	19.2%	34.5%	29.7%	28.4%	22.2%	34.1%	21.7%
Important	53.8%	34.5%	31.7%	35.0%	40.3%	25.9%	49.0%
Very important	20.6%	6.2%	10.0%	7.4%	10.1%	14.1%	17.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 %</b>						

Source: Own elaboration

**Table 5 Influence of CSR on future purchase intention and nationality**

	Spanish	French	English	Italian	German	Other	Total
No influence	2.0%	1.5%	2.3%	2.3%	5.2%		2.1%
Little influence	4.4%	6.9%	8.5%	5.8%	6.5%	10.6%	5.1%
Indifferent	23.3%	27.4%	24.4%	33.3%	23.0%	29.4%	24.3%
Fair influence	51.4%	44.9%	45.0%	36.8%	44.8%	44.7%	49.3%
Large influence	18.9%	19.3%	19.8%	21.7%	20.6%	15.3%	19.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 %</b>						

Source: Own elaboration

Spaniards once again show themselves to be very sensitive to CSR (Table 5) compared to other nationalities; Spaniards showed a high percentage in the increase of future purchase intentions for those establishments implementing CSR actions (70.3%, combining “fair influence” and “large influence”).

### Willingness to accept an increase in price

■ Combining the positive opinions with regard to being willing to pay more compared to the negative, the significant difference between these two positions is notable: 48.2% of tourists would pay more, compared to 23.6% who would not (see table 6).

Of the group that would “definitely” accept an increase in price, the most acceptable increase would be between 5% and 9% (34.3%), followed by an increase between 10% and 15% (32%).

Among the group that states they would “probably” accept a price increase, the most acceptable increase is of 5% to 9% (49.9%).

The most accepted price increase interval is between 5% and 9%, as 31.2% of tourists would accept this increase. Additionally, 26.4% would accept a price increase below 5%, and 13.8% would accept a higher increase of between 10% and 15%.

As people get older, there is a greater willingness to pay a higher price, shifting from 6.4% in the youngest group to 10.4% of those over 60 who said they would definitely pay more for the services of a responsible establishment (Table 6). The same phenomenon occurs in these age ranges with regard to the likelihood of paying a higher price for services from a responsible hotel, which shifts from 40.9% of the youngest group to 44.1% of respondents from 50 to 59 years old, and to 43.7% of those over 60 who said they would “probably” make this purchase.

The willingness to pay more for the services of a responsible hotel is greater among people with an education (see table 7); people without an education are the group that most frequently answer “definitely not,” with 26.3%.

With regard to the assessment of this item by nationalities (see table 8), Germans state that they are the most willing

**Table 6 Willingness to pay more for services from a responsible hotel, in comparison to a hotel of the same characteristics**

	Under 30	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	Over 60	Total
Definitely	6.4%	7.5%	6.9%	8.2%	10.4%	7.2%
Probably	40.9%	39.3%	41.9%	44.1%	43.7%	41.3%
I don't know	27.1%	30.7%	29.8%	27.4%	25.7%	28.7%
Probably not	21.2%	19.3%	18.3%	16.1%	13.7%	19.0%
Definitely not	4.5%	3.3%	3.2%	4.2%	6.6%	3.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 %</b>					

Source: Own elaboration

**Table 7 Willingness to pay more and education level**

	No education	Primary and secondary	Vocational training	University education	Total
Definitely	10.5%	7.5%	8.9%	7.0%	7.5%
Probably	15.8%	39.9%	41.3%	40.7%	40.6%
I don't know	26.3%	30.5%	28.1%	28.1%	28.4%
Probably not	21.1%	16.6%	17.5%	20.1%	19.1%
Definitely not	26.3%	5.5%	4.2%	4.1%	4.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Source: Own elaboration

**Table 8 Willingness to pay more and nationality**

	Spanish	French	English	Italian	German	Other	Total
Definitely	6.5%	7.6%	10.3%	6.2%	13.7%	10.6%	7.3%
Probably	44.1%	30.9%	26.3%	35.1%	25.8%	23.5%	40.4%
I don't know	29.6%	26.9%	22.5%	22.8%	26.6%	27.1%	28.5%
Probably not	17.2%	24.0%	26.7%	27.4%	25.0%	24.7%	19.3%
Definitely not	2.5%	10.5%	14.1%	8.1%	8.9%	14.1%	4.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 %</b>						

Source: Own elaboration

to pay more for a service offered by an establishment with CSR practices (13.7%); however, Spaniards have the highest percentage of respondents who would “probably” do so (44.1%), significantly higher than other nationalities (Table 8).

## Final conclusions

■ Today the tourism demand is constantly evolving due to different changes taking place in the environment. Tourism companies are making an effort to offer tourists products that are adapted to their expectations and needs,

increasing the perception of personalized products and unique tourism experiences. Smart tourism involves offering products that are increasingly adapted to the specific needs of each client and, therefore, knowing the consumer profile that places the most importance on CSR may guide the actions of tourism companies.

This study has reviewed the literature, concluding that there is still no clear characterization of responsible consumers, and even less so in the case of hotel establishments. The literature does propose and study several different sociodemographic variables that influence this characterization and purchase intention. Specifically, this study offers a first approach to the analysis of age, educational level, and nationality from a large sample of hotel product consumers.

The descriptive results show that, in the process of choosing an establishment, consumers between 50 and 59 years old place a good deal of importance on CSR; having some type of education also has a positive influence, as does nationality, as Spaniards show a greater predisposition to choose establishments with CSR practices. In terms of the different criteria that influence purchase decision, respondents over 60 place the most importance on CSR, while quality and price are the main factors for all consumers. The overall image of the company improves with its inclusion of CSR criteria, and this aspect has a greater influence on future purchase intention the older the consumer is. Spaniards are the nationality that is most sensitive to this aspect. With regard to the willingness to accept a price increase for services from a responsible hotel, a high percentage would be willing to do so (48.2% of those surveyed) for a price increase of between 5% and 9%. The above 60 age range is where consumers are most willing to accept a price increase, as are people with some level of education.

Therefore, age, nationality, and, to a lesser extent, education level, are factors that affect the importance of CSR when choosing a hotel establishment and in terms of future purchase behavior. These data are relevant for hotels when launching communication campaigns on their CSR policies, so that they can keep in mind to whom they should be directed in terms of age, nationality, and education level. Additionally, the data also show that the hotel sector must clearly implicate itself in its commitment to CSR actions in its business strategy, for the social and environmental benefits of these actions themselves, but also because it would have a very positive effect on the business' reputation and on increasing its competitiveness. Therefore, the implementation of CSR actions is shown to be a significant factor in generating competitive advantages in the hotel industry.

However, future research should carry out a more detailed study of these variables, statistically analyzing whether the differences found are significant, and including other sociodemographic characteristics.

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