

THE RESEARCH OF SOCIAL VALUES INFLUENCE ON CONSUMPTION DECISION MAKING IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract

Nowadays, consumers are more interested in the conditions under which products have been manufactured in developing countries. Ethical and socially responsible consumption are emphasized. In this context, socially responsible consumption is more concerned with the ethics of care, ethical and moral principles and social factors influence on consumer choice. In scientific literature, there has been increased interest on socially responsible consumption issue and how ethical principles can influence consumer decision making. It must be emphasized, that only potential consumer response to particular areas of CSR was analyzed. The opportunity for companies to identify and act upon complex consumer buying choices that balance personal and ethical consumerism circumstances has almost not been investigated. Socially responsible consumption and social values influence on the consumer's decision making has not been analyzed in Lithuania.

The link between corporate social responsibility and consumer social responsibility is defined in this research paper. According to the quantitative survey, there are identified key factors influencing purchasing decision. The results show that organizations need to consider the influence of consumer social responsibility associated with their products and services in the development of CSR strategies. There are also identified which factors determine discrepancy between consumer attitudes and actual behaviour in consumption decision - making.

The type of the article: Research paper.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, social values, consumer social responsibility.

JEL Classification: A13, D12, P36.

1. Introduction

Through globalization consumer-oriented lead firms have become both more alert to reputational risk, and also more responsive to changing awareness and social values of consumers. Barrientos (2013) emphasizes, that women (particularly in developed countries) have greater independent spending power, and they can bring a more “caring” perspective to consumption decisions. Moreover, consumers in developed countries are more aware of social issues and are more concerned on ethical and moral issues.

Today consumers can choose from a wide variety of products and manufacturers. An active and knowledgeable consumer can effectively make use of goods and services according to her or his own interests. As a result of global competition, consumers may prefer also locally manufactured or traditional products because of their safety and familiarity. Socially responsible business practice is an important competitive advantage when consumers value and rely on them (Uusitalo, Oksanen, 2004).

The research problem: consumers are more concerned on conditions under which products have been manufactured in developing countries. In this context, social responsible consumption has been associated with the ethics of care, ethical and moral principles and the social factors that influence consumer choice. In scientific literature (Brekke *et al.*, 2003; Barrientos, 2013; Sprinkle, Maines, 2010; Webb *et al.*, 2008, Ohman, 2011), there are observed increased interest in socially

responsible consumption and social factors influence on consumers' decisions. It should be noted that there are just few scientist (Webb *et al.*, 2008; Marquina, Morales, 2012; Mohr, Webb, 2005; Ruiz, 2007; Maignan, 2001), who analyzed only isolated areas of CSR and potential consumer response. Only Manning (2013) examined the opportunity for companies to identify and act on the basis of complex consumer buying choices that balance personal and ethical consumerism circumstances.

Lynikaitė and Liesionis (2010) investigated what factors could affect buying of green products. They identified the main factors influencing green products buying process are consumer awareness of environmental problems, accessibility of green products. Meanwhile, Karlaitė and Tamošiūnaitė (2013) tried to determine the scope of on-line social networks in promoting socially responsible decision on safe food consumption. Arlauskienė and Vanagienė (2011) investigated promotion of corporate social responsibility by strengthening the brand equity for the customer. These scientists defined that CSR concept, as a part of brand equity management process in modern organization, is highly important to the customer. It can be assumed that in Lithuania, only some aspect of socially responsible consumption have been analyzed (Lynikaitė, Liesionis, 2010; Karlaitė, Tamošiūnaitė, 2013; Arlauskienė, Vanagienė 2011). There is a lack of analysis of socially responsible consumption and social values influence on the consumer's decision making in Lithuania.

The purpose of this article is to investigate social values influence on consumption decision making in Lithuania.

The object of the article is consumption decision.

The research methods applied in the article are comparative and systematic analysis of scientific literature, generalization, survey.

2. The analysis of theoretical researches on social responsible consumption

In recent years consumers, according to Schlegelmilch *et al.* (1996), tries not to reduce consumption but began to seek out environmentally-friendly alternatives in preference to their usual product purchases. Barrientos (2013), Sprinkle, Maines (2010), Brekke *et al.* (2003), Webb *et al.* (2008), Ohman (2011), Marquina, Morales (2012) and others examined social responsible consumption and demand for products of socially responsible companies. When analyzing such issues, firstly there is a need to define the concept of socially responsible consumer.

The perception of socially responsible consumer

In scientific literature (Webster, 1975; Roberts; 1996; Mohr *et al.*, 2001; Webb *et al.*, 2008, Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2005; Baron, 2009; Ruiz, 2007; Maignan *et al.*, 2002; Uusitalo, Oksanen, 2004; Ellen *et al.*, 2006), there are observed increased interest in the perception of socially responsible consumer and socially responsible consumption. Socially responsible consumer is understandable as: a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change (Webster, 1975; Webb *et al.*, 2008), one who purchases products and services perceived to have a positive (or less negative) influence on the environment or who patronizes businesses that attempt to effect related positive social change (Roberts, 1996; Webb *et al.*, 2008; De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2005, Baron, 2009); bases his or her acquisition, usage, and disposition of products on a desire to minimize or eliminate any harmful effects and maximize the long-run beneficial impact on society (Mohr *et al.*, 2001); seeks to consume products of companies, which contribute the development of society and takes into account ethical and unethical corporate activities, also is willing to "punish" businesses who do not comply at least the minimum standards of ethical conduct (Ruiz, 2007); feels responsible toward society and expresses these feelings by means of his or her consumption behavior (Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2005).

Maignan *et al.* (2002) brought a new approach to the concept of socially responsible consumer. According them, social conscious consumer in consumption decisions involves social

issues, which are supported by stakeholders of company. In this respect, stakeholders are perceived as agents of social demand.

Mohr *et al.* (2001) emphasize that CSR should be included as one of the factors that influence individual consumption patterns and argue that consumers firstly need to understand the level of CSR that this factor would affect consumption decisions. Moreover, Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004) argue that choices of social responsible consumers are becoming a factor in consumers' lifestyles. It should be emphasized, that the consumer considers not only individual but also social goals, ideals and ideologies. Consumers may find it difficult to consider several ethical aspects simultaneously.

Table 1 summarizes the definitions of socially responsible consumer and there are characterized the main areas considered in these definitions.

Table 1. The concept of social responsible consumer

Definition	Main area	Author
Take into account the consequences of own consumption on community or seek to use purchasing power for achieving social changes.	Environmental domain	Webster (1975)
Purchase goods and services that have a positive impact on the environment and promote business, aiming to contribute to positive social change.	Environmental area, general social problems	Roberts (1996)
Purchasing, usage and disposal of product or service are based on the desire to reduce or eliminate negative and increase the long-term positive impact on society.	CSR	Mohr <i>et al.</i> (2001)
In consumption decisions involves social issues, supported by company's stakeholders.	Social issues	Maignan <i>et al.</i> (2002)
Seeks to consume products of social responsible business.	Ethical behaviour	Ruiz (2007)
Through everyday consumption promotes ethical business practices.	CSR	Uusitalo, Oksanen (2004)
Feels responsible for the development of society and the concern of ethical issues transfer into consumption decisions	Ethical behavior, social changes	De Pelsmacker (2005)

Source: Webb *et al.* (2008), Mohr *et al.* (2001), Maignan *et al.* (2002), Ruiz (2007), Uusitalo, Oksanen (2004), De Pelsmacker (2005)

According to scientific literature (Barrientos, 2013; De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2005), there can be distinguished some demographic characteristics of the socially responsible consumer: younger consumers are more conscious, level of education is not fully clear, income has no bearing on socially responsible consumption, gender may affect the consumption (as women are more frequent buyers of ethical goods).

Summarizing, socially responsible consumer must be aware of social problems, must believe that she or he has the power to make a difference, and must be active in the community. Besides, consumers can translate their ethical concerns by means of buying products for their positive qualities (e.g., green products) or by boycotting products for their negative qualities (e.g., not buying products made by children). Consumers can decide to consider one or more ethical attributes when consuming products.

The concept of socially responsible consumption

The consumer-oriented companies are more responsive to changing consumers' social values. An active and knowledgeable consumer can effectively make use of goods and services according to her or his own interests (Sprinkle, Maine, 2010, Webb *et al.*, 2008, Manning, 2013; Uusitalo, Oksanen, 2004; Ellen *et al.*, 2006; Nyborg *et al.*, 2006). Socially responsible consumption may be due to external pressure, which can be seen as a psychological tool occurs (or not) on the grounds that: the consumer believes that the purchase is in charge of his duty; other individuals or monitors

are adhered to his duties and values (Ohman, 2011). Consumption often goes beyond the value of the product and reflects how consumers perceive the value created by the company (Manning, 2013). Burinskiene and Burinskis (2012) argue that different decisions are made by individual or family, men or women. Barrientos (2013) emphasizes that women (especially in developed countries) have a higher purchasing power and more emphasize "ethical" side of consumption. Moreover, according to Manning (2013), due to the increased consumer disposable income, the consumption must provide not only functional, but also emotional satisfaction. Barrientos (2013) and Auger *et al.* (2003) argue that ethical or socially responsible consumption is more concerned with the ethics of care, ethical and moral factors influence on consumer choice.

Socially responsible consumption can be defined in different ways, focusing on a variety of ethical and social aspects. According to Manning (2013), a *socially responsible consumption defined as the conscious and deliberate choice to make certain consumption choices based on personal and moral beliefs*. De Pelsmacker *et al.* (2005) argue that socially responsible consumption is the purchase of a product that concerns a certain ethical issue (human rights, labor conditions, animal well-being, environment, etc.) and is chosen freely by an individual consumer. Manning (2013) emphasized, there are two main elements of socially responsible consumption: "ethical" component relating to the perception of an organization's corporate social performance and product performance; a component of "consumerism", which is expressed in terms of purchasing behaviour.

Socially responsible consumption is a dynamic complex that is often overlooked by companies. Such consumption is focused on certain issues, such as on products which do not contain chemical additives and are friendly to the environment; company operates a fair trade criteria, and so on (Manning, 2013; Uusitalo, Oksanen, 2004). There must be emphasized consumers' identification with the specific company whose activities are based on the principles of CSR (Manning, 2013; Mohr, Webb, 2005; Ellen *et al.*, 2006; Nyborg *et al.*, 2006). Consumers identify themselves with the company that can offer a positive and meaningful social identity (Mohr, Webb, 2005).

Webb *et al.* (2008) identified three dimensions of socially responsible consumption: purchasing, based on CSR activities; recycling; avoidance of buying products that have a negative impact on the environment. It should be noted that these dimensions are important; companies pay off financially CSR activities when consumers apply this idea as one of the consumption criteria (Webb *et al.*, 2008, Sprinkle, Maines, 2010). For businesses it is important not only to know whether social responsibility is an important target for consumer but also to figure out what social issues have the greatest influence on purchasing decisions and to identify key trends.

Summarizing, the term of socially responsible consumption is broad, diverse, encompassing a variety of corporate social responsibility areas and various consumer behaviour. It should be emphasized that socially responsible consumption is not self-centered.

The link between corporate social responsibility and social responsible consumption

Marquina, Morales (2012) argues that there is a link between the company's social responsibility and consumers' reactions to the company or its products. However, this relationship is not always clear and direct. Many factors can influence whether the company's CSR activities will lead to the purchase of products of these companies. Mohr and Webb (2005) emphasize that consumers are interested in the CSR level of company. These researchers assert that consumers will be willing to pay more for a more responsible corporate product only if it is accompanied by an additional value.

Manning (2013) was analyzing the relationship between CSR and socially responsible consumer behaviour. The author's model shows the possibility for firms to identify and act on the basis of complex consumer buying choices that balance personal and ethical consumerism circumstances. The company's ability to understand and predict the final impact on the balance between CSR and consumer responsibility influence financial, environmental and social factors affect corporate brand value (Manning, 2013). As shown in Figure 1, consumer social responsibility

CSR determines the level of company's CSR, on the other hand, CSR have hold on consumer social responsibility. It should be noted that social responsibility affects the consumer and corporate environmental responsibility. Relationship between CSR, corporate environmental responsibility and consumer social responsibility is mutual.

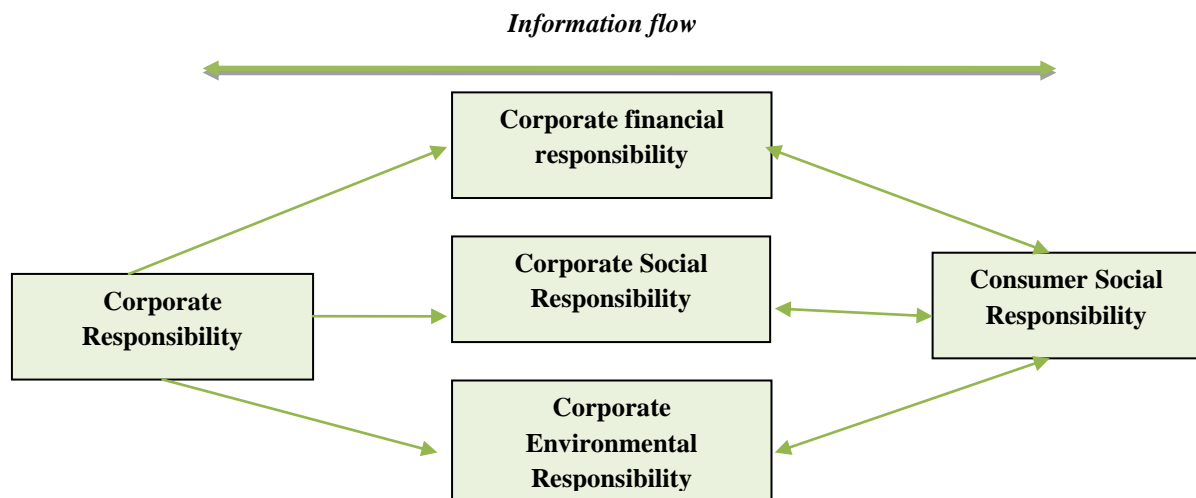


Figure 1. Interaction between corporate social responsibility and consumer social responsibility

Source: Manning (2013)

Consumers' awareness of CSR practices can positively affect the attitude to the companies, their reputation and product performance evaluation (Ruiz, 2007). Consumers are demanding more than simply a product of quality at low price; they expect that some values between community organizations would congruence.

Consumer perception and attitude affects their behaviour. However, it should be noted that only the attitude is bad prediction factor of behaviour. While some consumers, according to De Pelsmacker *et al.* (2005), do not buy products made by unethical companies, but most of the individuals making consumption decisions collectively assesses characteristics of the product. Ruiz (2007) and De Pelsmacker *et al.* (2005), Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004) highlight that CSR activities are not the dominant criteria of consumer buying decisions. Price, quality, convenience and brand awareness is still the most important factors affecting purchasing decisions and consumers continue to buy goods for personal rather than social reasons.

Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004) emphasize that although the consumer attitudes to social responsible consumption have become more positive, but this approach often does not reflect to the real behaviour. The gap between attitudes and behaviour can be seen in many consumption decisions (Uusitalo, Oksanen, 2004; Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2005). This can be caused by the lack of ethical product availability, distrust of socially responsible requirements and the lack of information. In addition, there is no clear method of predicting socially responsible purchasing behaviour. Discrepancy between attitudes and behaviour can be affected also by factor of price. De Pelsmacker *et al.* (2005) noted that not all consumers are equally tended to buy the products of socially responsible companies. On the other hand, Moosmayer (2012) pointed out that consumers would be willing to pay higher prices for products of companies acting ethically, and even though they might buy products from companies acting unethically, they would expect to pay less in the latter case.

It should be noted that the behavior of the consumers is associated with developed social rules that govern socially acceptable nature and use of certain normative acts (Kaze *et al.*, 2012).

To summarize, the socially responsible consumer behavior is determined by many factors, such as CSR level, price differences, quality, adequacy of information, availability of socially responsible companies' products. Despite the increasing emphasis on the demand of socially

responsible product, there is often observed discrepancy between attitudes and actual purchase or consumption decision.

3. Research of social values influence on consumption decisions making in Lithuania

In scientific literature (Brekke *et al.*, 2003; Barrientos, 2013; Sprinkle, Maine, 2010; Webb *et al.*, 2008, Ohman, 2011), there are observable notable increase in research on socially responsible consumption and social factors influence on consumer decisions. Unfortunately, only isolated areas of CSR and potential consumer response are examined (Webb *et al.*, 2008; Marquina, Morales, 2012; Mohr, Webb, 2005; Ruiz, 2007; Maignan, 2001). In Lithuania, social factors influence on consumer's choice has not been analyzed yet.

Methodology

Reconnaissance survey was conducted using a questionnaire survey method. Questionnaires were designed to ascertain whether consumers in their purchase decisions integrate social principles and the factors that can lead to discrepancy between attitudes and actual behaviour.

The questionnaire was posted on surveys portal: www.e-apklausa.lt. The survey was carried out in a month's time, and it was open to all.

Results

68 individuals, of whom 69 percent were women and 31 percent men, were interviewed. Respondents by gender were as follows: 13 percent respondents were 20 years, 28 percent respondents were 21-30 years age, 31-40 years age group accounted for 22 percent of respondents, 15 percent respondents were 41-50 years, 51 year and over accounted for 22 percent of interviewees.

The majority of those surveyed - 62 percent - had received higher education. Secondary education was completed by 24 percent of respondents. Number of professional and college-trained respondents was negligible, respectively, 4 and 10 percent.

The majority of respondents (79 %) considered themselves as socially responsible consumers; 6 % of interviewees indicated that they are not socially responsible consumer; only 14 % of respondents had no opinion on this issue. 80 % of women and 77 % of men indicated themselves as socially responsible.

56 % of the respondents presume that the social responsibility principles are quite important, and 41 % of interviewees' indicated this aspect as very important. In interviewees' opinion, the company should contribute to the solution of social problems, to ensure that employees comply with legal standards, improve economic efficiency. The least important roles are: to allocate part of resources for philanthropic activities and profit maximization.

Respondents were asked to indicate what factors are important in their consumption decisions making. Key factors were identified as product quality and cost, respectively, 94 % and 82 %. Among the least important there should be mentioned company's social policy and the brand awareness, respectively 24 % and 25 %.

Interviewees were asked to choose the statement which can best describe his/her consumer decision-making. The vast majority of consumers - 52 % – own consumption decision make based on the product and service quality, price and convenience. 28 % of respondents believe that socially responsible activities of the company are important, but do not base decisions on these issues than making consumption decisions. Only 4 % of surveyed women try to find out more about socially responsible companies and are willing to pay more for such products.

Interviewees pointed out that they would choose socially responsible companies products if such products would be up to 10 percent more expensive than alternative products of irresponsible companies. As shown in Figure 2, 78 % of respondents try to buy environmentally friendly

products. Respondents also indicated that they tries to buy products of companies that are seeking to improve their working conditions and donate some share of income to charity.

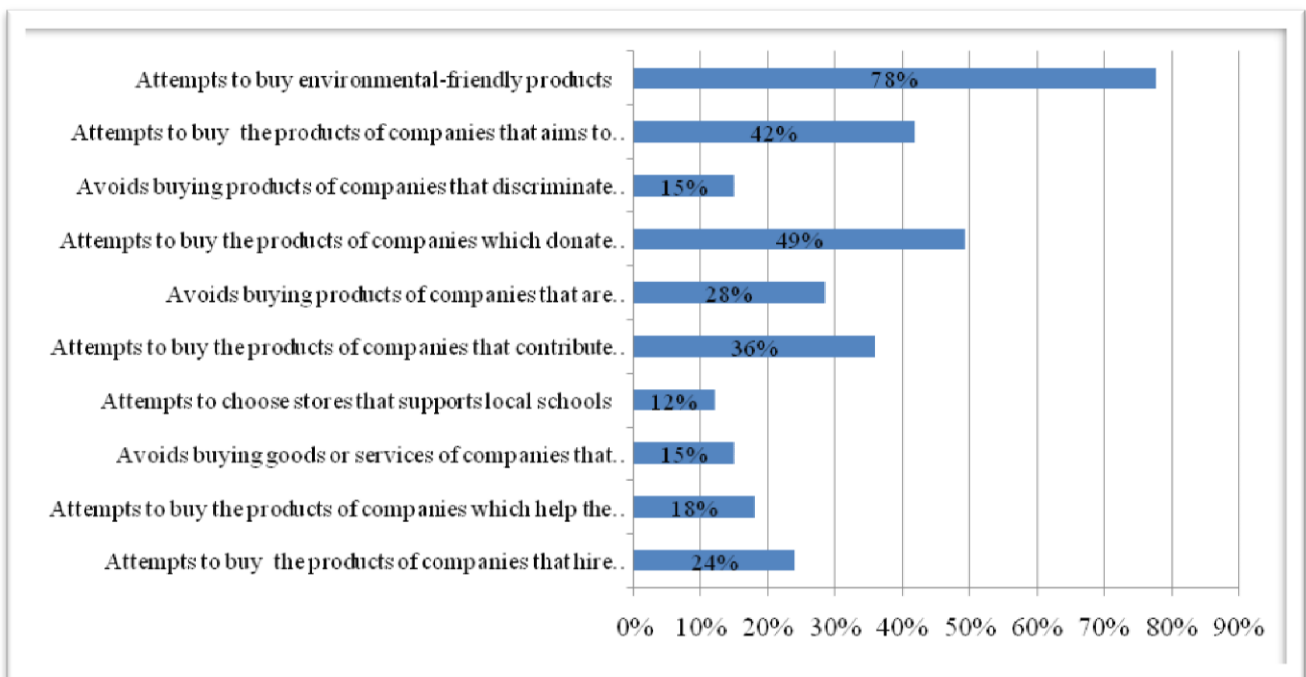


Figure 2. Factors influencing consumption decision-making of the respondents’

The vast majority of respondents - 47 % argued that they have a positive impact on society through consumption decisions. Respondents strongly agreed that the consumers can affect social and environmental problems solving, and can affect the working conditions of employees. The majority of respondents - 52 % - stated that the company can be socially responsible and at the same time provide high quality products at a fair price (see Figure 3). There is a prevailing opinion that social responsibility companies charge higher prices for their products. It should be noted that the majority of respondents (39 % strongly disagree and 25 % partly disagree) does not believe that socially responsible business activity is a waste of financial resources and reduce the opportunity for enterprises to provide the highest quality products.

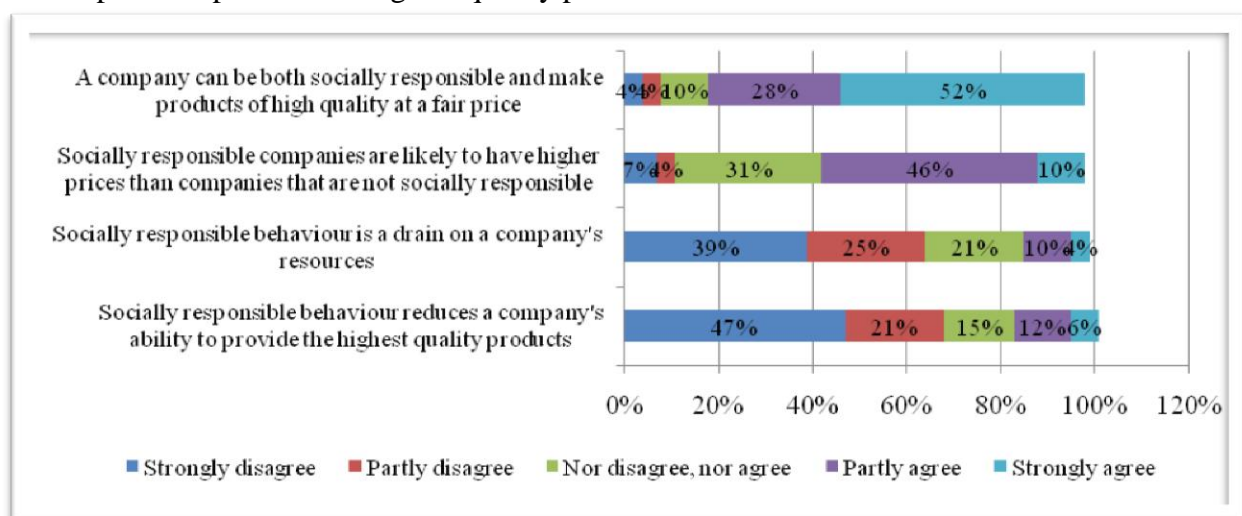


Figure 3. Interviewer’s opinion about the products of socially responsible companies

Respondents indicated factors limiting socially responsible companies products chose. Among the most important factors, should be mentioned the lack of information and the lack of guarantee that the company actually takes the principles of social responsibility. Such product

selection is limited also because of the shortage of alternatives and the price of products. The selection of socially responsible companies' products would encourage dissemination of information, greater choice of such products, lower prices and income increase.

After analyzing the research data, it was found out that majority of respondents consider themselves as socially responsible consumers, but in consumption decision-making rarely take into account social responsible side of business. This discrepancy occurs do to the lack of information, entrust in socially responsible business practices, higher such products prices.

4. Discussions

Consumers can translate their attitudes on social responsibility by means of buying products for their positive qualities (e.g., green products) or by boycotting products for their negative qualities (e.g., not buying products made by children) and can decide to consider one or more ethical attributes when consuming products.

Socially responsible consumption is more concerned with the ethics of care, ethical and moral factors influence on consumer choice. There are possibilities for companies to identify and act on the basis of complex consumer buying choices that balance personal and ethical consumerism circumstances.

Price, quality, convenience and brand awareness is still the most important factors affecting consumption decisions. Although consumer attitudes to social responsible consumption have become more positive, but this approach often does not reflect to the real behaviour and consumers continue to buy goods for personal rather than social reasons.

Majority of respondents indicates themselves as socially responsible consumers, but in consumption decision-making rarely take into account socially responsible side of business. This discrepancy occurs do to the lack of information, entrust in socially responsible business practices, higher prices. In Lithuania, socially responsible consumers are mainly seen as consumer who chooses environmental-friendly products.

Demographic characteristics of socially responsible consumer in Lithuania: younger consumers (up to 30 years old); gender does not affect the consumption; income and level of education has no impact on socially responsible consumption.

In future research there could be included real consumption decision-making situation, when interviewers can choose among the products of socially responsible company and irresponsible ones.

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