



## Consumer Responses to CSR in Greek Banking Sector: Does CSR Really Matter?

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on investigating the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on consumers' preferences and loyalty in the banking sector. The researchers examined the main concepts associated with CSR and how it is related with the choice and the retention of customers to a specific bank. 67 individuals participated in a qualitative research, which was conducted through semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the research was to analyze the extent to which CSR actions affect customers' choice and loyalty to a bank. The main conclusions that emerged reveal that although the satisfaction and commitment, as well as the positive perception of consumers depends on the trust created by the banks, customers in Greece still believe that the CSR actions implemented by banks only contribute to increasing their organizational profits through the improved corporate reputation and recognition. It is thus evident that CSR does not have a significant impact on customers' attraction and loyalty. This paper also identified that one of the major problems in the banking sector is the lack of public confidence in the way banks operate and the special role they play in modern societies.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Customer Loyalty, Consumer Behavior, Banking industry

## 1. Introduction

Every organization, especially in the private sector, seeks to maximize the wealth of its shareholders (Mayer, 2018). On the other hand, an organization's actions has a direct impact on the wider environment, both social and physical (Devie et al., 2019). Therefore, companies in the context of their decisions must consider the various social groups, the environment, the conflicting interests, the social needs, the social goals, and changes. The banking system plays a key role in the everyday transactions of people. More so, they assist in the management of capital and savings and in the creation of wealth. Banks also affect the economies of entire countries, since they determine the size of investments around the world. The current challenges that individuals have to face, not only in Greek society but globally, include the fair distribution of wealth, employment, environmental pollution, education for all, and dealing with health crises. This is something that has emerged, especially with the current COVID-19 pandemic. The social face of organizations is most commonly expressed through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) actions. In general, it is accepted that these actions help organizations to build a responsible corporate image, which further enhances their reputation and competitive advantage. Furthermore, social responsible actions create trust for customers and employees and are positively related with loyalty. However, in the case of banks, these findings cannot be generalized.

The present study intends to examine Corporate Social Responsibility in the banking sector as well as its impact on consumers' preference and loyalty in a specific bank among other competitive ones. An attempt is made to determine whether a bank's CSR actions affect consumer behavior and preference as well as the choice of cooperating with a specific bank. Now that the banking system is changing and restructuring in a prolonged economic and humanitarian crisis, it is of particular interest to explore the perceptions that society has formed about the social face of banks, given the growing interest in the behaviors and actions of the environment, employment, and quality of life. The study also seeks to clarify the concept and content of Corporate Social Responsibility and to investigate the impact of CSR actions on the Greek consumer. For this reason, a secondary research was implemented with the use of secondary sources (relevant literature, articles, studies). 37 individuals participated in a primary survey, which was conducted through semi-structured interviews. The dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility as perceived by consumers will be identified. Also, consumers' perceptions of CSR as well as their attitude towards banks' CSR actions will be explored in a

reasoned manner. More specifically, the objectives of the research refer to the investigation of:

- The impact of CSR in attracting new customers.
- The impact of CSR on consumer loyalty.
- The CSR as a means of enhancing customers' feelings of trust and security.

The banking industry is a particularly important sector in which the satisfaction of each customer is associated with the efficiency of each service or product offered to him/her. This implies that there are different degrees of satisfaction (Mercer, 2003). According to many researchers (Darzi & Bhat, 2018; Fida et al., 2020; Aramburu & Pescador, 2019), banks worldwide try to develop good relationships with their customers with the aim of their retention and loyalty to the organization, especially through their CSR actions (Stanaland et al., 2011). Additionally, banks need to focus on meeting the financial needs of organizations in order to operate smoothly. Corporate Social Responsibility enhances this effort as a means of competitive advantage and differentiation (Saiz & Pilorge, 2012). Thus, the two main criteria for starting the research refer to the importance and trust of the banking sector for consumers, as well as the importance of CSR and the value it offers to them. Therefore, the research questions are stated as follows:

- 1) How does CSR impact on the attraction and loyalty of customers in the banking sector?
- 2) Which CSR actions are most important for customers to prefer and continue their cooperation with a bank?

The significance of the present study is in twofold. Firstly, the conclusions that emerged will enrich the Greek and international existing literature on the concept and application of CSR, which has attracted the interest of the academic community but has not been thoroughly investigated in terms of its implementation by the banking sector. Secondly, the perceptions of the consumers will be reflected as they exist during the current period and will give the direction that CSR actions should be implemented by banks to keep pace with changing societal expectations.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Definition and Debate on CSR**

The development of CSR has its roots in 1960, when economic and legal aspects appeared. Afterwards, it was developed mainly in 1970 (Carroll, 1999). Although there are different approaches to the definition of CSR (Garriga & Mele, 2004), most scholars refer to it with different meanings. In general, Corporate Social Responsibility is referred to as a commitment for

companies in order to shape their socio-ethical behavior and optimize the quality of work standards so as to exert high influence on financial issues (Hahn et al., 2018; Gond & Nyberg, 2017). The Green Paper of European Commission defines CSR as the concept of involving companies in voluntary acts with social and environmental content. Bowen's book (1953) is considered the beginning of the modern literature on Corporate Social Responsibility, since he is also known as the "father" of CSR. Therefore, he introduced a first approach that refers to the entrepreneurs and the obligation they have towards the society in order to achieve the desired actions and goals. According to Luo and Bhattacharya (2006), CSR first developed in the United Kingdom and the United States and subsequently in Greece. For this reason, it was embraced to describe corporate actions and initiatives. Another view of CSR theory is that of Becker- Olsen et al. (2006), who argue that CSR is a motivator and one of the most effective and reliable tools for businesses to improve their image to society. It is also regarded as a significant part of an organizational strategy (Dathe et al., 2022). The first global CSR strategy was announced by the Commission of the European Communities in 2001 with the aim of defining this concept in order for companies to implement this strategy in social and environmental issues in combination with the contacts they have with their stakeholders (Hoffman, 2018). It is observed that many of the CSR definitions do not have common characteristics and consist of different factors (Tauringana & Chithambo, 2015). Brown and Dacin (1997) wrote that CSR defines and represents the activities as well as the profile of a company. Another definition of Hohner (2007) refers to CSR as a business policy concerning activities and actions of educational, environmental, and cultural content (external CSR), as well as actions in favor of employees' rights, health and safety rules (internal CSR). Therefore, organizations incorporate social environmental and voluntary concerns into their business activities (Fahy et al., 2005). During the 60's, an effort was made to finally understand what Corporate Social Responsibility meant for society and business (Carroll, 1999). By the end of the decade, CSR was mainly related with charities, better working conditions for employees, and improvements in customer relationships (Heald, 1970). In the 1970s, Carroll (1979) gave a definition of CSR that consisted of four points or responsibilities within a framework (called "Carroll's CSR pyramid") that explains how and why organizations should take social responsibility. It referred to the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations that a society has from organizations. In the next decade, Freeman's (1984) contribution to the concept of stakeholders was also considered important since they were seen as individuals who can be influenced and also influence a company to achieve its goals (Goodpaster, 1991).

The challenges of Corporate Social Responsibility and its real purpose started from the beginning of its development (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). However, there have been different definitions and perceptions of its true meaning. One of the scholars who discussed the main purpose of CSR was Friedman (1962), who strongly supported that the sole responsibility of companies is to increase the profits of shareholders and owners (Jahn & Brühl, 2018). For Friedman and his supporters, CSR is not the responsibility of companies since these are considered issues to be resolved by the free market and even if it cannot intervene, it is of a legal and governmental nature. The same opinion is shared by Davis (1973), who also expressed his own view against CSR while arguing that companies are incapable of organizing social actions due to lack of appropriate means. This is because business executives are more focused on financial issues and do not have the appropriate training to take on social responsibilities. In conclusion, he questioned that if companies have enough power, why give them the opportunity for more. Nevertheless, the theory of Hayek (1969) argues that any CSR action within a business can mislead it from its core objectives. Brummer (1991) examines various approaches to CSR definitions and proposes some relevant types of corporate behavior. He starts from voluntary acts that go beyond the legal framework of the company and continues with the execution of actions under the conditions of responsibility of each company. He also refers to the theory of “social contract” and “social legitimacy”, arguing that few companies can compete with these theories (Steiner & Steiner, 2000). Another well-founded theory of Kotler and Lee (2005) reveals that CSR signifies the improvement and commitment of society through business processes, which refers to the obligation of companies to undertake voluntary acts that are not based on law and rules.

Considering the increasing importance of CSR practices in the way businesses conduct themselves and the rising trend of adopting such practices and communicating them to the stakeholders involved, the knowledge produced about corporate CSR practices can help in the creation and enrichment of best practices. This can be communicated and advertised to the wider population of the country’s businesses (Sahinidis & Kavoura, 2014). Therefore, it is concluded that companies deliberately delimit CSR actions and its importance is not so familiar to the citizens. As a result, it is treated with suspiciousness even though they defend this initiative. The ultimate goal is not to judge the philosophy of CSR, but to give a general view of how both citizens and businesses perceive it. This view externalizes the difficulty faced by Greek companies not only in including CSR in their actions, but also in convincing society that they can manage to operate in this way.

## 2.2. CSR in Banking Sector

Although CSR is general for all organizations, it deals with more complex issues in the field of banking as banks have to quickly respond and satisfy customers' needs with their policy. They also play a vital role in each country's economy (Farcane & Bureana, 2015). In essence, banks do not rely on proving their social activities since the importance of their social role is their own banking activity. However, banks have been researching social and environmental issues since 1990 and they have incorporated these activities to add value to their policies. They played a leading role in the risks of pollution, while they also focused on financial incentives and gave access to affordable and short-term credit for low-income consumers (Smprini & Ouzouni, 2010). In addition, banks developed collaborations with institutions and various organizations and bodies in order to publish reports of their corporate social responsibility actions in the context of their social contribution. As a result, banks run programs supporting environmental, educational, and cultural voluntary economic activities in non-profit organizations, but also in vulnerable groups. For example, in terms of environmental protection, these organizations contribute to energy savings by reducing electricity consumption and paper recycling management (Venturelli et al., 2018). A survey conducted in the Bangladeshi banking industry found that the main benefits of the implementation of CSR were initially the improvement in staff recruitment, the improvement in the way that decisions were made within the bank, and the reduction of costs (Wu et al., 2017). In addition, Bihari and Pradhan (2011) examined the relationship between corporate social responsibility and banking performance in India. The results were positive for CSR since it proved its contribution to the overall performance and reputation of the banks towards their consumers and the whole society of India. Therefore, in order for banks to be able to build their public image, they would have to be socially responsible (Aramburu & Pescador, 2019). As a result, they would initially attract high-performance and quality employees, expand their customer base, and attract more investors by encouraging them with greater market growth so as to gain the trust of a wider audience (Kostyuk et al., 2010; Hoang, 2014). Furthermore, several academic authors such as Hackethal et al. (2005) and Grove et al. (2011) have also investigated the application of CSR in the banking industry. Specifically, Hackethal et al. (2005) have identified three areas in which banking policy emphasizes:

- In the human resources
- In liquidity control
- In lending

Regarding the human resources, the emphasis is placed on the defense of the employees within the banks and on the development of their skills for a



greater productivity. However, in liquidity control, the policy concentrates on the shares in order to control the liquidity in the market. In conclusion, Hackethal et al. (2005) confirms that a CSR policy in the banking sector should be able to change strategy if the vision of the policy is to be effective and to be able to survive in continuous changes at the global level. A viable bank should set more and more specific sustainability development goals beyond its expectations of customer and shareholder satisfaction (Landgren & Catasus, 2000). This is because banks are directly involved with the economy and their actions can significantly affect both the economy itself and the society. In recent years, CSR has been increasingly accepted by companies and is now considered one of the most important objects of competitive advantage (Saeidi et al., 2018). More specifically, it enables banks to take initiatives to improve their environmental and social behavior, as well as their image. Benn, Abratt, and Kleyn (2016) pointed that the risk of creating an unwanted corporate reputation is associated with decisions that take into account the claims of stakeholders, which are conflicting with liability to society as a whole. The findings of Benn et al. (2016) indicate that senior executives should not put corporate reputation at risk by setting priorities that could undermine the confidence of stakeholders and threaten the legitimacy of their claims. This confirms the theory that corporate reputation is a function of complex relationships and exchanges between organizations and stakeholders. Fatma and Rahman (2016) further suggest that corporate ability has a strong effect on customer's purchase intention, while CSR activities were found to exert influence on customers' purchase intention in cases where they were aware of such activities being conducted. Therefore, it is equally important for banks not only to take CSR actions but also to communicate them effectively.

However, there is still a significant percentage of consumers who believe that banks are not socially aware (Jonathan, 2006; Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009; Bhaskaran & Hardley, 2002). For example, the findings of Jahan and Shahria (2021) revealed that expense, responsiveness, and relative advantage do not have a significant influence, while security and convenience have insignificant influence on customers' satisfaction. Although they are not directly related with their loyalty, satisfaction and loyalty are strongly related with each other. According to the research of Chomvilailuk and Butcher (2014), bank consumers in Australia found that the existing perceptions of socially responsible performance had a negative effect on purchase intentions in the banking sector.

An interesting and important variable is recognized in various scientific disciplines, which is the trust of customers towards companies. Businesses rely on CSR actions to enhance their reputation and economic growth. Today, organizations realize that customers will be motivated and will

feel a greater need for loyalty towards them. However, if consumers are positively or negatively affected by those business activities, it is based on the characteristics of each organization and the resources it has to convince the consumer (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Therefore, consumers will prefer companies with a strategy and culture that enhance security and trust and create an even more positive opinion to the public (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Another issue related with CSR actions and their impact on consumer behavior is the size of organization. Specifically, Green and Peloza (2014) pointed that, although their interview findings generally suggest that small firms benefit from CSR engagement because of positive attributions that consumers hold, there were also identified opportunities for large firms to develop positive attributions amongst consumers. Furthermore, they found that consumers are often willing to accept socially irresponsible behavior by small firms while showing very little tolerance for similar transgressions by large firms.

It is also important for banks to improve their reputation and recognition as a sensitized category of business, with the support of their consumers and employees. Most companies now focus on environmental and social issues by creating more value and showing that their concern is not only customer service and their financial criteria but also their ethical satisfaction (Carrasco, 2007). Creating such values in loyal customers becomes even more necessary because loyal and satisfied customers are more resistant to malicious comments and negative views (Carroll, 2015). Banks are often met with suspicion and negative criticism from the superficially socially responsible company and the company that targets CSR actions to increase its profits without much social contribution. On the other hand, it is certain that CSR actions help and enhance both consumer's confidence and employee's confidence in the company they work for (Hansen et al., 2011). Specifically for the banking sector, an empirical study by Bolton (2013) regarding the relationship between CSR, financial performance, and risk in US banks during the period 1998 - 2010, confirmed that the banks participating in CSR activities tend to have better financial results and a better reputation. It is noted, however, that all CSR actions do not add the same value to the financial results, but the greatest impact seems to have those actions that are directly related to the core activities of the bank and are part of its business mission. The same conclusion is reached by a large number of researchers who support the positive relationship between CSR actions and the financial results of banks and their corporate reputation (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2005). In the research of Ellen, Webb, and Mohr (2006), there was a difference in the attitude of consumers regarding the motivations that lead a company to take CSR actions. Consumers were more positive in CSR actions that were evaluated as part of the business strategy or were inspired by the organizational values. Furthermore, in this study, the buying

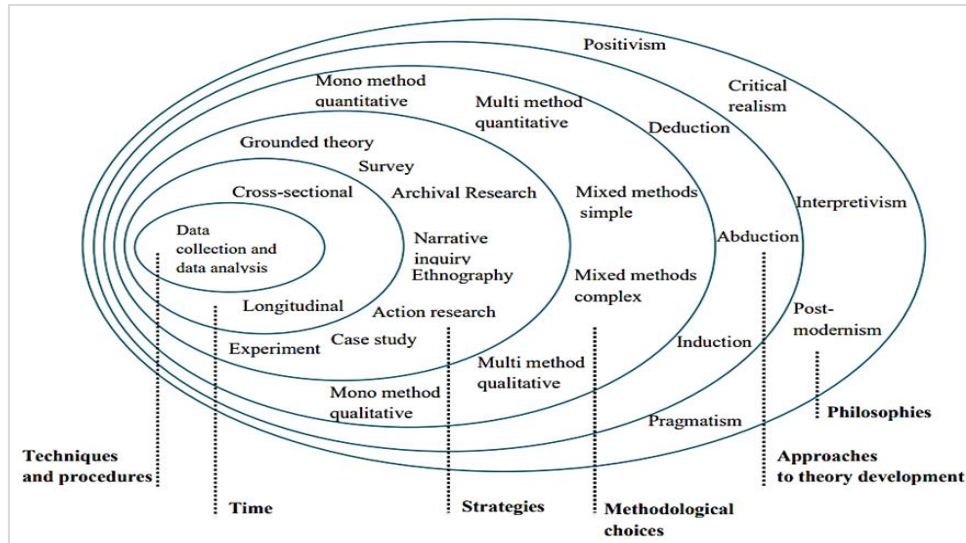


behavior of consumers is influenced by the view they have about the CSR actions. Finally, another study of Lee, Park, Rapert, and Newman (2012), which examined the relevance between consumer perceptions and the CSR actions of a company and its impact on consumer behavior, suggests that there is a positive correlation between the actions perceived as harmonized with the personal beliefs of the consumer and the degree of consumer loyalty to the company.

Generally, in comparison with other sectors, the banking sector responded relatively slowly to CSR challenges. Initially, the perception was that it was about environmental and social issues (Viganò-Nicolai, 2009). However, CSR helps to increase and legitimize the economic performance of the sector and also appears as the integration of the fundamental principles of business ethics (Scholtens, 2006). In Greece, the four big banks have incorporated the concept of CSR in their vision and mission, which has given great importance to their relationship with society. With the above formulations, the banks have accepted their social responsibility and are committed to implementing actions that stem from their vision and mission. Thus, they specialize through their strategy for the benefit of their various stakeholders.

### **3. Methodology**

The methodology concerns the approaches, the techniques, the means, and the way in which a specific topic is investigated (Hakim, 2012). It defines the process that the researcher has chosen to start with and complete his/her research. The ultimate purpose of the present study is to find out how CSR in the banking sector can affect consumer preference and loyalty and whether potential actions can strengthen their sense of trust in the banks that already cooperate or intend to cooperate. The research process used the “research onion” tool developed by Saunders et al. (2007), which illustrates the stages involved in the development of a research project (Figure 1). In other words, the onion’s layers give a more detailed description of the stages of a research process. This tool provides an effective development through which a research methodology can be designed. Its usefulness lies in its adaptability to almost any type of research methodology and can be used in a variety of contexts (Bryman & Cramer, 2012). Saunders et al. (2012) noted that while using the research onion, the researcher has to go from the outer layer to the inner layer. When viewed from the outside, each layer of onion describes a more detailed stage of the research process (Saunders et al., 2007). The following figure (Figure 1) presents the layers of the research onion that was considered very useful for conducting the research in a logical way.



**Figure 1.** The research "onion" according to Saunders et al. (2016) as cited in Saunders et Al. (2015)

As for the *philosophy* described in this graph, this study was based mainly on *epistemology*. Epistemology is mainly used in scientific research and helps to find information that can be proved without a doubt.

Regarding the *research approach*, there are two recognized types: the inductive and the deductive approach. While inductive reasoning aims at developing a theory, deductive reasoning aims at testing an existing theory (Soiferman, 2010). The present study, however, followed the *deductive* approach. The *research strategy* used is the *survey* since it is one of the best and most economical research strategies that enable the collection of rich and reliable data. Additionally, with regard to the fourth layer of the onion, the *single method* was chosen as it allows the collection of a type of information either by quantitative or qualitative methodology.

The *cross-sectional approach* is used since the cross-sectional time horizon has already been defined and the data must be collected. This approach is used when the research concerns the study of a specific phenomenon at a specific time.

Regarding the sixth and final layer of the research onion, the data collection was implemented through the *interview* and *qualitative research*. A main characteristic of the qualitative method is its reference to the species, i.e., to the character of the phenomenon (Kvale, 1996). This type of research explores human motivation through the understanding of consumer views and perceptions. This is because it can be used to study a section of the population to explain their choices and thoughts based on the perception of ideas they hold, which vary between different sections of the population (Creswell, 1998). According to Lincoln and Cuba (1985), the qualitative method is

characterized by a normal directional flow and is not so much influenced by the individual researcher. Therefore, the researcher is able to understand and penetrate the personality of consumers. In the present study, *semi-structured interviews* were selected and categorized into *non-standard interviews*. In non-standard interviews, the researcher prepares a series of questions that he/she would like to be asked, which is included in his/her research. The difference between this type and the traditional semi-structured interviews is that some of the interviews in the present study were done through email, while others were conducted through phone. Thus, there was no direct personal contact with the respondents due to the conditions of the current pandemic. According to Meho (2006), email interviews can replace interpersonal ones when the sample is in a different geographical area from the researcher. The interviews took place during the period of October 2020 to April 2021.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Interview Design

1. *Selection of respondents:* The first step was the selection of the respondents. The researchers managed to communicate with 67 individuals who are bank customers. The respondents were all adults and majority of them (48%) were between 41-50 years old, while the minority (6.3%) were under the age of 30. 72.1% were men while 27.9% were women. Regarding the education level, 49.3% holds a master's degree and 43.9% holds a bachelor's degree. The basic criteria taken into account for the selection of the respondents were not specific as the only element that should be taken into account was their coordination with one of the big four Greek banks. As a result, the convenient sampling was followed.
2. *Preparation, interview planning:* The second step was the creation of the interview questions. The interview questions arose after the completion of the literature review to better answer the main research questions. The interviews created were based on three thematic axes/themes that coincided with the purpose of the research findings and research questions (see Table 1). Each theme consisted of specific questions for data collection.
  - The first theme consisted of 7 questions related to the recognition of CSR by consumers and whether they knew CSR programs of the banks they cooperate with.
  - The second theme consisted of 6 questions based on consumer's criteria in choosing a bank. The aim was to indicate whether CSR was one of the main criteria for choosing a bank. Emphasis was also placed on the question of whether CSR

actions benefited themselves as customers or only the banks as organizations.

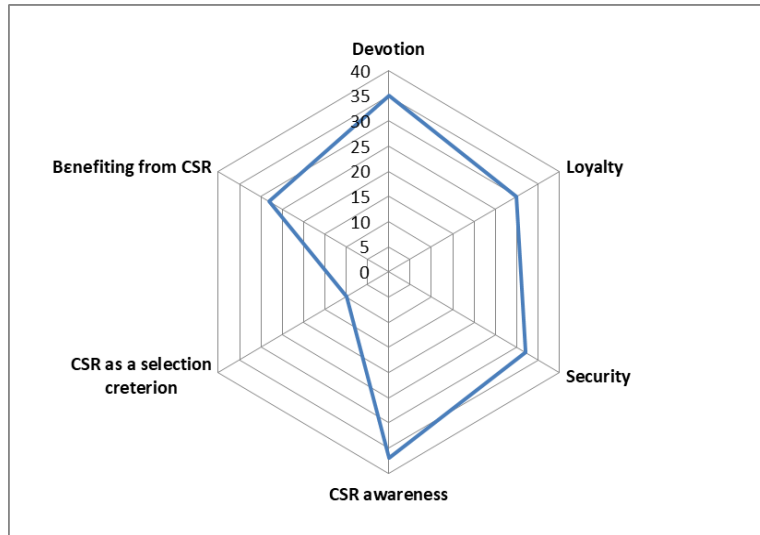
- The third theme consisted of 5 *questions* related to the feeling and attraction of consumers due to CSR actions performed by their banks. The variables of loyalty, safety, and trust played a major role here as they are very important elements related to consumer behaviors (Rita, Oliveira & Farisa, 2019).

**Table 1.** The thematic axes

Thematic Axis 1	
Recognition of CSR by the consumers	7 questions
Thematic Axis 2	
CSR as a bank selection criterion	6 questions
Thematic Axis 3	
The effect of CSR on creating loyalty in the banking sector	5 questions

## 4.2 Data analysis

The analysis of the interviews was carried out through the content analysis. This is a process that refers to a continuous interpretation of the findings which decodes the discussions that take place within an interview (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The first step is the recording and storage of data from the interviews, so that the frequent data are listed and can be categorized and later analyzed. According to Downe - Wamboldt (1992) and Morgan (1993), thematic analysis uses a descriptive approach both in data coding and in the interpretation of code quantitative measurements. For this research, thematic analysis was used because it is a more specialized framework of analysis for searching and finding thematic units through texts and data. Through the data, it focuses on a topic related to a research question and can be expressed in a phrase or word and included in the coding. It can also be researched through the expressions and ideas that arise based on the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis provides a purely qualitative, detailed view of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Assaroudi, Heshmati Nabavi, Armat, Ebadi & Vaismoradi, 2018). Below (Figure 2) are the initial codes that emerged from the answers of the interviews.



**Figure 2.** Initial codes from answers

The following paragraphs present the analysis of the participants' answers based on each question (Q).

Q1, *“on the importance of CSR and how it relates to consumers”*, was initially answered by the various concepts and definitions of the literature. It was found that Corporate Social Responsibility has evolved over time and companies choose it to compete in the market, as well as to offer social outcomes. In terms of loyalty, although with a small difference, few respondents answered positively to whether CSR actions can be a reason to remain loyal to their bank. However, majority did not consider it an important reason to stay or to change their bank. The result of the question whether they knew the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility was positive since everyone knows it and many of them referred to terms such as “sustainable development” and “environmental protection”. Most respondents mentioned an environmental action, which means that CSR has been formulated in the minds of the consumers as an action to protect the environment. Other topics mentioned by the minority of respondents (R) include the following examples:

- **R32** referred to CSR as *“actions such as sponsorships in the culture and arts as any collaborations for sustainable development”*. This is in contrast to **R58** who was not aware of CSR actions of his bank.
- Respectively, **R11** stated that *“he was interested in the actions for the awarding of excellent pupils-students”*, while **R45** stated that *“he is interested in CSR actions in the arts and culture”*.

Another question was asked if CSR is a reason for loyalty to the bank that respondents prefer. Here, 34 out of 37 answered “No”, claiming that CSR

is not a reason for their loyalty to a bank but the services they receive, the privacy offered by their bank, as well as whether it offers them online services and internet or mobile banking options. From these data, it seems that customers do not emphasize CSR's importance so much. For instance, **R22** stated that *"the reason for my loyalty was the bonus programs offered by my bank as well as the security of my privacy"*. The same opinion comes from other respondents. Many respondents (58) also pointed the importance and impact of "quality and fast services" on their loyalty. However, when asked about security issues, i.e., whether they believe that the CSR actions carried out by their banks may increase the sense of security, the vast majority (63) answered "Yes". This result shows that although CSR is not a reason for customers to remain loyal, it creates a sense of security. This is probably because their banks show a more socially and environmentally friendly profile, and this makes customers trust them more. Some of the respondents' answers are outlined below:

- **R36** said *"I would be interested in working with another bank that would run more CSR programs and that would provide me with greater security"*.
- Similarly, **R24** stated that *"I feel more secure knowing that my bank is environmentally and socially aware, through CSR actions"*. This is in contrast to **R63** who stated that *"CSR actions do not increase my sense of security"*.

Results were also obtained from the next question whether CSR is the criterion of customers' choice for a bank in the future and whether CSR was the criterion for their cooperation with their current bank. All respondents answered that CSR actions are not a selection criterion and they focused again on the criteria of fast services and security in financial transactions. This is probably due to the fact that while they know CSR, they still believe that organizations and mainly banks "use" CSR actions as a way to attract more customers and not because they are really socially responsible. Furthermore, the past financial crisis pointed the need for more financial security and development. In addition, emphasis was placed on the question of whether they feel that they receive benefits from the CSR actions. Interestingly, 65 out of 67 believe that only the banks gain some benefits, which is mainly associated with better financial results and reputation.

According to Gibs (2007), each code resulting from the answers can intersect and record specific passages that explain the theory itself by linking their meaning and the code to a name. As a result, anything that is repeated in the text is categorized so that a set of ideas on the subject can be found and analyzed. In addition, the approach of the present research is inductive as the data of the interviews have been codified and grouped in relation to the

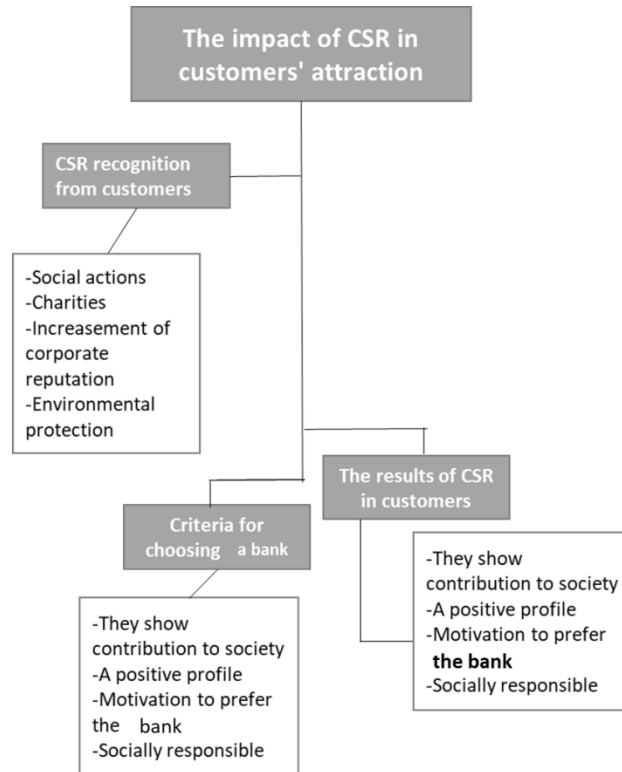


research questions that have been formed in 3 thematic axes. Table 2 shows the codes that emerged from the most common answers given by the respondents. As to whether CSR is a term that people know its meaning, the resulting codes are mainly associated with *environmental issues*. Also, many answers created codes such as *the strengthening of corporate reputation, donations, social activities, and sponsorships in education*. For example, **R64** during the telephone communication claimed that *"I know CSR as a voluntary act of companies, mainly environmental ones"*. However, it was understood that the respondent had previously studied and memorized a definition of CSR and he was not aware of its real meaning. The next category highlighted important codes and information on a bank's actual cooperation criteria. The words *"security", "reliability", "fast service", and "payrolls"* were repeated. In conclusion, the criteria of consumers mainly focus on their financial benefits and their financial security. Some of the respondents also mentioned that *"bonus packages"* and some *"better financial offers"* could make them change their bank, which confirms that the main concern of most of the respondents is their financial benefits. The third category refers to the reasons for attracting the respondents and what they feel about the CSR actions of their banks. Therefore, regardless of whether everyone knew the importance of CSR, what has emerged shows that although CSR is not a criterion for selection and loyalty, it nevertheless creates a positive perception and a positive impression on the bank they cooperate with. More so, they stated that they are willing to trust it even more because CSR actions make banks look socially and environmentally responsible. It was also found that the majority of responses showed more interest in CSR actions related to the human factor (e.g., support for vulnerable groups, employee benefits) and less for environmental issues such as recycling actions.

**Table 2.** Codes from answers

<b>WHAT CSR MEANS FOR CUSTOMERS</b>	<b>COOPERATION CRITERIA WITH A BANK</b>	<b>CUSTOMERS' FEELINGS ABOUT CSR</b>
Environmental protection	Financial issues	Social offer
Social actions	Security	A positive company's profile
Better brand name and reputation	Security in transactions	An incentive to remain at this bank
Charities	Fast services	Responsible organizations
Sponsorships	Internet banking and mobile banking services	Increased trust

Based on these codes, a thematic map (Figure 3) was created in order to summarize the important results and data as well as to codify the findings of the present study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



**Figure 3.** The thematic map

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the role of Corporate Social Responsibility in the banking sector. From the various concepts and definitions of CSR literature, it is found that Corporate Social Responsibility has evolved over time and companies choose it today to strengthen their corporate image and to attract consumers. It further serves as a means of social and environmental contribution. The implementation of CSR includes many fields with a multidimensional character that can be implemented with a variety of actions.

The research questions were based on CSR and the impact that it has on the banking sector in terms of attracting and creating loyal customers. After the completion of the research, which was conducted through 67 semi-structured interviews, it seems that customers' first contact with their banks was due to their jobs (payroll bank accounts) and the suggestion of the related bank by their relatives. As for the motivation for their retention, the answers showed that majority of the respondents stated that it was not CSR but the reliability of the bank, the security of their transactions (Jahan & Shahria, 2021), as well as the immediate and fast services. In terms of how attractive

the CSR actions of their banks are, security was the most important issue they mentioned. This further proved that CSR is not a strong incentive for attracting them and for creating loyalty to a bank. However, most of the respondents knew the term of Corporate Social Responsibility and some of the CSR actions implemented by their banks. Although CSR is not a strong incentive to be loyal and to choose one bank or change it with another competitive one, they stated that they have a positive view and a sense of greater trust and security since these organizations attract high-skilled employees who ensure a greater productivity and quality in their services (Klan et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2017; Bihari & Pradhan, 2011; Aramburu & Pescador, 2019; Marconi, 2012; Kostyuk et al., 2010; Hoang, 2014). The responses here highlighted the importance of human-related CSR actions (e.g., charities, donations, education awards, cultural activities, etc.), while the minority referred to the importance of environmental actions.

Furthermore, the data from the primary research showed that loyalty and consumer attraction is not affected by bank's CSR actions. This confirms the perception of Davis (1973), who argued that most companies are not competent to support such actions due to lack of specific resources and knowledge. The results are also confirmed by the vast majority of studies in the field of CSR in the banking sector, which showed that these actions do not have a significant impact on consumer behavior and loyalty even though they enhance their sense of trust (Jonathan, 2006; Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009; Bhaskaran & Hardley, 2002; Chomvilailuk & Butcher, 2014; Green & Pelozo, 2014; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Although satisfaction and commitment, as well as negative or positive perceptions of consumers, depend on the trust generated by the organization (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002), the CSR actions implemented by the banks are considered because of the increase of organizational profits and corporate reputation and recognition. This finding that CSR actions benefit only banks and not their customers is also supported by literature (Carroll, 2015; Lee, Park, Rapert & Newman, 2012; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2005; Ellen, Webb & Mohr, 2006; Bolton, 2013).

In conclusion, the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility may be unknown to many individuals but is an interesting topic that needs further study especially in the banking sector. For more specific results, scientific research could be conducted on the actions implemented by specific banks and for a particular consumer audience. Another suggestion is the analysis of new aspects of CSR, which combines qualitative and quantitative research. Finally, a survey of the views of executives and employees is also suggested as this would highlight the recognition of CSR by employees and whether their involvement can improve the transmissibility of CSR actions to consumers,

which will maintain a competitive advantage and perhaps a faster recognition of Corporate Social Responsibility by the consumers at the banking sector.

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