

(Arařtırma)

**THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL
RESPONSIBILITY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MATERIAL
VALUES, CONSUMER CYNICISM AND PRODUCT/SERVICE QUALITY**

Çaęla Pınar UTKUTUĐ^{1,2}

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the mediating role of corporates' social and environmental responsibility in the relationship between material values, consumer cynicism, and product/ service quality. In the present study, data related to 16 popular clothing brands were gathered by means of a questionnaire filled out by 805 young consumers. Findings revealed that material values encourage positive evaluations of perceived product/ service quality with the mediating role of corporates' social and environmental responsibility, whereas cynicism leads to negative appraisals of product/ service quality without the mediating role of social and environmental responsibility. This study provides important contributions to the marketing literature because this model has sustained the elaborative understanding of consumer reactions at the product level and at the corporate and industry levels.

Keywords: Material values, cynicism, social and environmental responsibility, product/ service quality, clothing

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1 Arş.Gör.Dr., Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi, İİBF, Sağlık Yönetimi Bölümü, cutkutug@hotmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-4147-9519

2 İletişim Yazarı / Corresponding Author: cutkutug@hotmail.com
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SOSYAL VE EVRESEL SORUMLULUĐUN ALGILANAN KALİTE ÜZERİNDE ARACILIK ROLÜ: GEN TÜKETİCİLERİN MATERYALİSTİK DEĐERLERİ VE SİNİK TUTUMLARI

ÖZ

Bu arařtırma materyal deđerler, sinik tutumlar ve ürün kalitesi arasındaki iliřkide kurumların sosyal ve çevresel sorumluluklarının aracılık rolünü analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Arařtırmada, 16 popüler giysi markasına iliřkin veriler 805 genç tüketiciden anket yoluyla elde edilmiřtir. Bulgular, sosyal ve çevresel sorumluluĐunun aracılık rolü ile materyal deđerlerin algılanan ürün kalitesi ile ilgili pozitif deđerlendirmeleri desteklediĐini, sinisizmin ise böyle bir aracılık rolü olmaksızın olumsuz deđerlendirmelere yol atıĐını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu arařtırma, sadece ürün seviyesinde deĐil, aynı zamanda kurumsal ve sektörel düzeyde de tüketici tepkilerinin anlaşılmasını saĐladıĐı için pazarlama literatürüne önemli katkılar saĐlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Materyal deđerler, sinisizm, sosyal ve çevresel sorumluluk, mal/hizmet kalitesi, giysi

1. Introduction

As a marketing asset, brand equity leads to unique and intimate relationships by differentiating the associations between a corporate and its stakeholders (Ambler, 2003; Capron and Hullan, 1999; Davis, 2000; Hunt and Morgan, 1995). Society is one of the stakeholders that have the power to force a corporate for changing its business rules. The attitudes of a corporate towards societal and environmental concepts are identified as CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), which indicates the perception of a company's status in terms of its fulfilled obligations towards the public (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001).

The CSR concept is generally considered to be social obligations. According to Carroll's Pyramid (1979), social obligations can be classified as economic, legal and ethical, and philanthropic obligations. However, in time, some researchers approached CSR in terms of a win-win strategy called corporate social responsiveness (e.g., Wartick and Cochran, 1985; Wood, 1991). CSR drives efforts to create a value chain by addressing public needs (Porter and Kramer, 2011: 64). Sometimes, it can also be seen as a tool for enhancing a positive corporate image (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). These generate the satisfaction of stakeholders and facilitate the achievement of goal-oriented considerations of businesses, such as gaining competitive advantage (Bansal and Roth, 2000) in markets that are more sensitive to public welfare. In these markets, corporates delicately plan their branding strategies such as functional/ symbolic utilities and quality aspects associated with their products and brands regarding their CSR priorities.

The institutionalized material values of a culture can restrain the prioritization of environmentalism or social concerns due to disparate values (Wachtel, 1983). This is because cultures of industrialized countries feed on material values, and citizens try to decrease the cognitive dissonance by distorting environmental information conflicting with them (Kilbourne and Pickett, 2008). Consumers seek confirmation and stability about the self in case of a perceived threat to its integrity (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Hence, consumers with higher material values can perceive any kind of CSR action (sincerely involved or not) as an unanticipated profit for "others", not for self-profit, whereas consumers with lower material values can discern sincere CSR actions as an anticipated profit for "everyone". Although it is important that perceived social and environmental responsibility is formed based on consumers' self-schema, such as owning higher material values, it is not sufficient to explain the fact that responsible brands are also seen as functionally satisfactory. At that point, the direct and indirect effects in the relationship between material values and perceived social and environmental responsibilities and perceived products/service quality need exploring.

In addition, the intensive mass communication and consumption efforts have triggered anti-consumption movements (Choi, 2011). Consumers approaching

brands with a growing suspicion is an attractive and fresh research field that still requires an analysis of the most effective psychological factors in terms of product and brand evaluations. The recent Edelman trust barometer (2020) demonstrates that none of the four societal institutions—government, business, NGOs, and media—is trusted. In addition to that, competence (delivering on promises) and ethical behavior (doing the right thing and working to improve society) are the fundamental drivers of trust. These findings indicate an increase in consumer cynicism. Consumers who have had bad experiences or have developed cynical or skeptical attitudes toward consumption cannot be sure of the sincerity of CSR actions. Especially, literature has demonstrated the effects of CSR activities on consumers' attitudes towards corporate brands (Andreasen, 1986; Berens et al., 2005; He and Li, 2011; Hsu, 2012; Gurhan-Canli and Batra, 2004; Lai et al., 2010; Marin et al., 2009; Ross et al., 1991; Skard and Thorbjørnsen, 2014, p. 150; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Tingchi et al., 2014; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). However, as of yet there was not found any study analyzing the mediating role of business actions related to social and environmental responsibility in the relationship between consumer values, attitudes, and perceptions related to product/ service judgments. As a result, the present empirical study focuses on the mediating role of corporates' perceived social and environmental responsibility (SER) on the interaction of material values, cynicism, and perceived quality of products and services (PSQ).

To this end, the paper begins by delineating material values, followed by the assertion of supportive evidence from previous researches on each interaction. Finally, the findings of structural equation modelling analysis and its results are presented. The last section presents a discussion of the findings and states recommendations for future research.

2. Material Values

In the literature, there are three different but popular approaches for analyzing consumer materialism. First, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1978) consider materialism based on the purpose of consumption. In their view, instrumental materialism is harmless in the case the object leads the owner to search for personal goals of life. On the other hand, if possessions do not trigger spiritual development, terminal materialism becomes dangerous for the person. Second, Belk (1985) conceptualizes materialism with three constructs: possessiveness, non-generosity, and envy. In this approach, materialism is “the degree to which an individual holds onto his or her possessions, dislikes sharing his or her possessions with others, and feels negatively when others have more than he or she” (Fritzmurice and Comegys, 2006). Third, Richins and Dawson (1992) define materialism as a personal value consisting of three main constructs, that is, acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success. Richins and Dawson (1992: 305, 306) also criticize previous materialism scales due to low scale reliabilities and being distant from

real content (e.g., Inglehart, 1981). This approach is a widely accepted structural body for consumer research that is established on environmental responsibility issues (e.g., Banerjee and McKeage, 1994; Good, 2007; Kilbourne and Pickett, 2008; Kolodinsky, Madden, Zisk, and Henkel, 2010; Park and Oh, 2005; Urien and Kilbourne, 2011) and the self-concept (e.g., Fitzmaurice and Comegys, 2006; Freling, Crosno and Henard, 2011; Rindfleisch, Burroughs and Wong, 2008; Sprott, Czellar and Spangenberg, 2009).

Consumers in materially oriented societies prefer specific brands that primarily make them happy and feel successful in order to protect them from disappointment by taking a risk with choosing an unfamiliar/ unapproved/ unknown brand (Podoshen and Andrzejewski, 2012). Previous research on Social Identity Theory has already indicated that brand experience enriches one's self-identity and social identity (e.g., Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Marin, Ruiz and Rubio, 2009). Consumers with higher material values are more likely to prefer specific brands to sustain happiness (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012, Šeinauskienė, Maščinskienė, and Jucaitytė, 2015). On the contrary, consumers prioritizing social and environmental issues predispose to define themselves by responsible brand values (Bozoklu, 2018). Previous research shows that sincere CSR actions have a halo effect on consumer judgments, such as positive evaluations of products that are socially and environmentally responsible (Klein & Dawar, 2004). However, there is a limited number of studies that examine these halo effects depending on whether consumers own higher or lower material values. An explanation of these kinds of interactions is essential in order to develop a consistent brand identity as consumers tend to evaluate individuals/ brands more positively when they are in the same group as them due to in-group favoritism (Balliet, Wu, and De Dreu, 2014). Besides, according to Indirect Reciprocity Theory, people are also predisposed to reward and punish people/ brands because of their friendly and hostile acts towards others, respectively. Depending on these assumptions, it is possible to opine that owning higher or lower material values can change the perceived competence of a corporate brand's SER, and then PSQ.

2.1. The Effects of Material Values on Consumer Cynicism

Consumer cynicism "is a learned attitude towards the marketplace characterized by the perception that pervasive opportunism among firms exists and that this opportunism creates a harmful consumer marketplace" (Helm, 2004: 2015). Cynics generally tend to reflect their reactions in two ways: a) marketplace shaping behaviors, and b) withdrawal behaviors. Helm (2006: 74) proposed three possible antecedents of a cynical attitude. For her, consumer cynicism can be observed in the perception of general opportunism, the perception of opportunism specifically directed toward consumers, and the perception of deception.

Within the context of general opportunism, cynics believe that firms focus on their self-interests, regardless of the universally accepted principles or the

consequences of their unconcerned actions. The opportunism that is specifically directed towards consumers is related to customers who get harm from the self-interest-oriented actions of a firm. On the other hand, a deception is a form of opportunism, particularly emphasizing deceptive marketing practices.

Cynicism can be observed in four different tendencies. Defensive cynicism is a consumer coping strategy formed to protect themselves from manipulation attempts in the market. They focus mainly on protecting themselves from businesses chasing their own interests (Lee et al., 2009; Odou and Pechpeyrou, 2011; Webb and Mohr, 1998). They always intensively feel suspicion, mistrust, and fear about being misdirected (Roux, 2007). Offensive cynicism is based on the distinctive idea that “everybody chases their interest.” Briefly, offensive cynics are usually sensitive to price differentiation strategies. According to Kretz (2010), this behavior pattern usually does not transform into a cynical attitude without a trigger. In subversive cynicism, “individuals should denounce the consumption ideology, which colonizes consumers’ minds and appearances, by idiosyncratic creative strategies for raising awareness of society” (Odou and Pechpeyrou, 2011: 1803). Within the context of strategies, they generally adopt a proactive approach that aims to demonstrate the significant differences between the corporates’ images and their identities. It is also possible to maintain that subversive cynics are inclined to perceive the corporates’ reputation as negative and weak. Ethical cynicism is the most similar one to its original philosophy. Ethical cynics target consumption in a general manner and are motivated by the realization of societal welfare. The most common drivers they give for this form of anti-consumption attitudes are environmental concerns and material inequity.

Ancient cynicism was the school attributed to Antisthenes (446-366 BC) and Diogenes of Sinope (404-323 BC). The famous cynic Diogenes attacked materialism and urged a sort of back to nature movement (Laursen, 2009: 470). Similarly, in the modern age, defensive cynics prioritize spiritual satisfaction rather than material values (Choi, 2011). An increasing body of research on consumer rebellion behaviors suggests that at least some consumers predispose to show market-shaping behaviors, when consumers try to minimize materialism (Helm et al., 2015; Zavestoski, 2002). Ethical cynicism is also explained as managing individual needs by the most appropriate products regardless of materialism (Onfray, 1992). Especially if it is assumed a person identifies his/her success and happiness based on the quantity of possessions, he/she cannot be open to sharing materials -even when they are out of use- with people who actually need them. Moreover, Richins (1994) states that consumers with lower material values tend to prefer items with private meanings, which can be seen as a common behavior of cynics. It is thought that a cynical attitude may come into existence as a result of anti-material values. Therefore, it is suggested that:

H1: Material values have a negative direct effect on consumer cynicism.

2.2. The Effects of Material Values on Perceived Social and Environmental Responsibility

Inglehart and Welzel (2005) distinguished post-materialism and materialism as two different concepts. According to Jones (1987), in industrial societies, materialism has been reinforced and rewarded as a mode of consumption; thus, individuals with higher material values are alienated from acting for the welfare of the environment and/ or society. In societies where post-materialistic values prevail, some living standards for a majority of the population are assured because they concede more value to other subjects (Carrasco, 2007). Materialism focuses on physical and economic security, whereas post-material values emphasize emotions, personal identification, self-esteem, self-expression, trust in oneself and the group, aesthetics, subjective welfare, and quality of life (Carrasco, 2007). With the ongoing change in the cultural, social, demographic, and technological environments, social and environmental risks gain more volatility for the corporates (Cowe 2004, p. 20).

Richins and Dawson (1992) define materialism as a concept that influences the way consumers interpret their interactions with the external environment changing their lives. Material values are usually accepted as correlated with the brand evaluations and environmental responsibility perceptions (Banerjee and McKeage, 1994; Freling et al., 2011; Kilbourne and Pickett, 2008; Kolodinsky et al., 2010; Rindfleisch et al., 2008; Sprott et al., 2009; Urien and Kilbourne, 2011). Materialism generally manifests itself in compulsive consumption depending on the needs of the consumer's personal and social identification (Nga, Yong, & Sellapan, 2011). Consumers with higher material values initially prefer luxury brands (Bearden, Netemeyer, Teel, 1989; Richins, 1994), as they are individuals concerned with social acceptance within reference groups (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). For example, consumers who prefer to buy high-priced clothes strive to satisfy their needs such as identity expression (O'Shaughnessy, 1987), self-ego (Vreeman and Morganosky, 1986), and status (Kamineni, 2005). These needs can be observed all over the world and in every society. For example, status-based consumption is positively associated with materialism among students in Malaysia (Heaney et al., 2005). It is also suggested that in a competitive environment, the fulfillment of social needs through tangible goods by high-materialism consumers can lead to the irresponsible use of credit cards (Pirog & Roberts, 2007; Fitzmaurice, 2008).

On the other hand, business actions related to SER is a basic constituent of the perceived ethical brand. Fan (2005) defines an ethical brand as "a brand acting with honesty, responsibility, honesty, respect, and accountability towards a wide variety of stakeholders." According to Muncy and Eastman (1998), there is a reciprocal relationship between ethics and materialism. They argue that consumers with higher material values display lower ethical standards and are less concerned about ethical issues. Similarly, Kozar and Marcketti (2011) argue that higher material values trigger less ethical buying behavior. If a consumer with higher material values does not identify himself/ herself with a socially responsible

brand, he/ she will not initially prefer it due to the pursuit of own happiness. Their leading expectations based on material values (self-profit orientation) will conflict with the final acquisition (others-profit orientation). Therefore, the literature assumes that materialism and environmentalism are contradictory structures (Good, 2007; Kasser et al., 2002) since environmentalism especially adopts the understanding that natural resources are ultimately scarce and that each ecosystem has an unsubstituted value in addition to its natural resources (McKibben, 1989). As Schumacher (1973: 30) explains, "... just the pursuit of wealth - in short, materialism - ... has no limiting principle in itself, while the natural environment in which it lives is strictly limited." Consumers with higher material values tend to be more self-centered. Consequently, they are not expected to give priority to pro-environmental initiatives (Tilikidou and Delistavrou, 2004), and they are far from acting for the welfare of the environment and/ or society. Depending on favoritism, they can evaluate more positively the business efforts related to SER of a preferred brand. Therefore, it is assumed that:

H2: Owning higher material values strengthens the perceived SER of a brand.

2.3. The Effects of Material Values on Perceived Quality of Products/ Services

In the literature, research is limited that indicates the effects of materialism on the perceived product/ service quality. Madden et al. (2012) found that the halo effect is more prevalent for product quality than for CSR, and it highly correlates with the brand. Social Identity Theory suggests that consumers are predisposed to identify or associate themselves with highly-regarded and reputable brands because they "always" offer high quality↓ that can speed up in order to reach their desired self-schema by halo effects of values in self-definition, self-distinctiveness, and self-enhancement processes (Pratt, 1998; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Similarly, in the materialism concept, the dimensions of happiness and success assume that consumers that own higher material values view their possessions and their associations as a means to satisfaction in life. Richins (1994) found that consumers with higher material values prefer products that are consumed publicly. The utility, appearance, financial worth, status, success, and prestige are the distinctive aspects of possessions that are also associated with product/ service quality. Some researchers suggest that consumers may purchase luxury goods to secure a superior quality, not necessarily to signal their wealth or status (Silverstein and Fiske 2003, 2005; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999, 2004). Jin et al. (2019) examine the effect of Korea's macro and micro country image and global consumers' materialism level on the quality evaluation of Korean cosmetics among the consumers in four countries. Their findings indicate a significant influence of materialism on the product quality evaluations in Vietnam for Korean cosmetics. Depending on these limited suggestions, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Owning higher material values enhance the perceived quality of products/ services.

2.4. The Effects of Perceived Social and Environmental Responsibility on Perceived Quality of Products/ Services

Consumers may make inferences about missing product attributes by drawing a connection between another available piece of information and the missing attribute (Simmons and Lynch, 1991). Previous researches have demonstrated that socially responsible actions enhance corporate reputation and image (Turban and Greening, 1997), which affects the perceptions of product quality positively (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Purohit and Srivastava, 2001; Stanaland, Lwin, and Murphy, 2011). Although Aaker (1996) emphasizes the potential minor effect of CSR associations on the product attribute perceptions, he suggests that it may be useful for enhancing the liking or trustworthiness of the company. Trust that is aroused by sincere SER actions is likely to reduce the consumer's perception of risk (Ganesan, 1994). Calveras and Ganuza (2018) show that if consumers seek sincere CSR practices when supplied by a firm selling high-quality products/ services, the perceived CSR signals and reduce the asymmetric information problem of the quality supply. However, they emphasize the basic assumption that the signalling role of CSR should occur only when experiencing products/ services of high quality. However, Huang et al. (2014) found that corporate social responsibility significantly affects perceived service/product quality.

As Indirect Reciprocity Theory posits, individuals confer important advantages on those who act pro-socially towards others; they reciprocate benefactors indirectly (Simpson and Willer, 2008). It is information-seeking behavior that focuses on the other's profit orientation. However, some corporates operate their CSR actions for only gaining a competitive advantage. Within the context of Indirect Reciprocity Theory, those corporates' actions can be defined as the self-profit orientation. Companies adopt this perspective due to prioritizing their interests instead of others' needs even when they see the situation as a win-win concept. There are several studies that indicate that suspicion about the sincerity/ true motive of CSR actions may backfire (Foreh and Grier, 2003; Landman, Ling, and Glantz, 2002; Strahilevitz, 2003; Webb and Mohr, 1998; Yoon, Gürhan-Canlı and Schwarz, 2006). For example, promotional type of CSR actions triggers skeptical attitudes because companies enter cause-associated alliances, and those efforts do not display a commitment to institutionalized corporate social responsibility (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990; Mohr et al., 1998; Skard and Thorbjørnsen, 2014; Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). Hence, it is assumed that:

H4: *Perceived SER has a positive direct effect on the perceived quality of products/ services.*

2.5. The Effects of Consumer Cynicism on Perceived Social and Environmental Responsibility

Some businesses carry out CSR activities only in order to gain a competitive advantage. Within the context of the Indirect Reciprocity Theory, this perspective

can be defined as a self-benefit focus. Even if businesses see the situation as a win-win concept, it can be accepted as adopting this point of view because they prioritize the interests of others over their needs. This kind of orientation can be a boomerang in terms of the corporate reputation that covers perceived SER (Foreh & Grier, 2003; Landman, Ling & Glantz, 2002; Strahilevitz, 2003; Webb & Mohr, 1998; Yoon, Gürhan-Canlı & Schwarz, 2006). Strahilevitz (2003) states that CSR efforts negatively affect evaluations related to reputation when the business is perceived as unethical because the morality of a brand acts as an interface to present the brand identity as a person's identity, and this identity contains values such as compassion, trust, and care towards stakeholders (Grohmann & Bodur, 2015). Similarly, Archimi et al. (2018: 914) found that cynicism and the ethical sub-dimension of CSR are negatively correlated. Hence, it is possible to hypothesize that:

H5: Cynicism has a negative direct effect on the perceived SER.

2.6. The Effects of Consumer Cynicism on Perceived Product/Service Quality

Dodds (1995: 51) has identified perceived quality as “the belief in the overall goodness of what is received.” During the evaluation of perceived quality, consumers generally rely on heuristics (e.g., product signals or cues) (Dawar and Parker, 1994). However, consumers high in cynicism have a mistrust of both social institutions and their motives (Aqueveque and Encina, 2010). Aqueveque and Encina (2010: 320) assume that individuals with a high level of cynicism tend to think as “too good to be true.” Therefore, it is expected that cynics tend to evaluate the perceived quality more negatively because of the skeptical perception of product signals and cues. Thus, one can assume that:

H6: Cynicism has a negative direct effect on the perceived quality of products and services.

2.7. The Mediating Role of SER between Consumer Cynicism and Perceived Product/ Service Quality

As Kozar and Marcketti (2011) argue, higher material values trigger less ethical buying behavior. If a consumer with higher material values does not identify himself/ herself with a socially responsible brand, he/ she will not initially prefer it in the pursuit of happiness. His/ her leading expectations based on material values (self-profit orientation) will conflict with the final acquisition (others-profit orientation). Therefore, he/ she may overrate the SER and product/ service quality. On the other hand, if the consumer seeks sincere CSR practices when supplied by firms selling high-quality products/services, the perceived CSR will signal and reduce the asymmetric information problem of the quality supplied (Calveras and Ganuza, 2018). This sounds logical because consumers with higher material values give importance to perceived product/ service quality to fulfil their need for success. Hence, it is assumed that:

H7: SER has a mediating role in the relationship between material values and perceived product/ service quality.

3. Research Method

3.1. Data Collection

The material values were measured by the shortened form of the Material Values Scale (Richins, 2004) designed as a five-point Likert scale. Success-oriented, Centrality-oriented, and Happiness-oriented subscales consist of three items. Seven-point Likert items were employed for the measurement of cynical attitudes. The items were adapted from Consumer Cynicism Scale, which Helm et al. (2015) has proposed. Nevertheless, the statement that “Manufacturers do not care what happens once I have bought the product” was changed to “Many manufacturers deliberately design products to wear out quickly” after discussions with several marketing academics. This choice seems more appropriate for Turkey’s market conditions based on the general judgments on the website www.sikayetvar.com, a platform where one can voice their complaints about products or services. The old item which was dropped out from the scale was replaced with another item that, although it got a high mean rating for the mode element in Helm’s (2006) doctoral dissertation. Elsewhere, Bozoklu and Ermeç (2020) conducted the reliability and validity tests for the adapted form of the scale and published their analyses and results previously. Lastly, Consumer Based Corporate Reputation Scale (five-point Likert) developed by Walsh and Beatty (2007) is composed of five sub-dimensions entitled Customer Orientation, Good Employer, Reliable and Financially Strong Company, Product and Service Quality and Social and Environmental Responsibility. Four items in the Product and Service Quality subscale and another four in the Social and Environmental Responsibility subscale were utilized for the measurement of the SER and PSQ variables.

Before finalizing the questionnaire, a double-blind back-translation process was conducted with two experts from the fields of marketing and linguistics to avoid potential misinterpretations. A group of target respondents (93 consumers) were asked to assess the comprehension of the items. These respondents were also undergraduate students enrolled in the course named Branding and Corporate Reputation at Hacettepe University during the Fall 2019 semester. In addition, 73 students taking the same course were asked to name the most popular clothing brands. Thus, 16 popular clothing brands in Turkey were determined based on their statements. The questionnaire presented these brands and asked the participants to choose the most preferred brand for the survey. Clothing brands were chosen because Onfray (1992) specifically states that cynicism can be easily recognized by one’s fashion preferences as “refusing any fashion is also a way to escape from mass consumption practices and to affirm one’s singularity (p. 36).”

The questionnaire was conducted by the above described university students to 963 young consumers who they could easily reach within their social environments and

who were also predisposed to show similar cynical attitudes and material values. Based thereupon, data were collected by convenience and snowball sampling methods through electronic Google survey forms during December 2019. Of the forms, 157 excluded due to the missing values and incorrect responses given to control questions. Nearly half of the samples (59.8 %) were female. The majority of the participants (89.3 %) can be classified as young consumers (between the ages of 18 and 32), and at the time they completed the questionnaire, they commonly (83.4 %) had a bachelor's degree at least. However, the percentage of employment (21 %) was low.

To analyze the proposed model (Figure 1), the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) approach was employed on SmartPLS 3.2.8, an advocated methodology in the marketing literature (Roldán and Sánchez-Franco, 2012; Reinartz et al., 2009). Another reason for this preference was because the questionnaire comprises several constructs and items that are measured by different potential scale values (five-points and seven-points Likert scale). Although the author of the present study could transform the number of scale points to a common scale before estimating the model, this is not necessary as SmartPLS is capable of analyzing multiple indicator variables using different scale point numbers (Hair et al., 2014, p. 612).

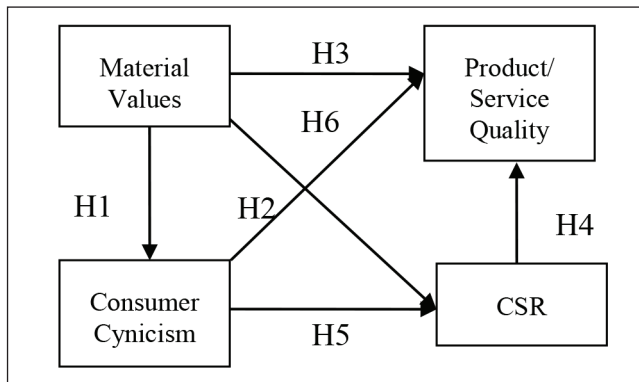


Figure 1. Research Model

4. Findings

In this section, the results of reliability and validity tests, descriptive statistics and model tests will be presented.

4.1. The Reliability and Validity Tests

At this stage, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity tests were conducted. Table 1 demonstrates the data across the 16 clothing brands. AVE (Average Variance Extracted) values for composite reliability and Cronbach's α values for internal consistency reliability were preferred. In order to obtain initial findings, it was necessary to drop the items pertaining to centrality-

oriented material values (5th item), happiness-oriented material values (6th item) and consumer cynicism (6th item). The rest of the values were satisfactory as recommended, that is, above the threshold of .5 and .7 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2006; Hair *et al.*, 2014; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). In the secondary test, the internal consistency reliability was achieved with most variables having loadings higher than .7 (Hair *et al.*, 2011), with the exception of several items from the material values and the cynicism scales. As the composite reliability coefficients and AVE values for material values and cynicism were above the threshold, they were retained in the scale for preserving content validity (Hair *et al.*, 2014). After the exclusion of the three items, the internal consistency reliability and convergent validity were sustained, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between .731 and .856, CR coefficients between .847 and .915, factor loadings between .566 and .923, and AVE values between .510 and .844 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

Table 1. The Findings of Validity and Reliability Tests

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Material Values	Success 1	.709	.839	.880	.512
	Success 2	.649			
	Success 3	.765			
	Centrality 1	.804			
	Centrality 2	.765			
	Happiness 2	.635			
	Happiness 3	.666			
	Happiness 3	.923			
Cynicism	Cynicism 1	.676	.842	.878	.510
	Cynicism 2	.759			
	Cynicism 3	.801			
	Cynicism 4	.689			
	Cynicism 5*	.566			
	Cynicism 7	.699			
Social and Environmental Responsibility	CSR 1	.804	.856	.902	.698
	CSR 2	.850			
	CSR 3	.862			
	CSR 4	.823			
Product and Service Quality	Product 1	.826	.853	.900	.693
	Product 2	.835			
	Product 3	.840			
	Product 4	.829			

p < .001

CR= Composite reliability AVE= Average variance extracted

Table 2 also shows that discriminant validity was achieved in AVEs for all latent constructs which were higher than each construct's highest squared correlation with any other construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Nevertheless, it also reveals lower rates of correlation than expected.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	Material Values	Cynicism	Social and Environmental Responsibility	Product and Service Quality
Material Values	(.716) †			
Cynicism	.007	(.714) †		
Social and Environmental Responsibility (CSR)	.148	-.039	(.835) †	
Quality of Products and Services	.152	-.140	.586	(.833) †

† Values indicated with parenthesis are the square root values of AVE.

CSR= Corporate Social Responsibility

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for all brands. Happiness-oriented material values of participants are higher than their success-oriented and centrality-oriented ($X_{success} = 2.89$, $X_{centrality} = 3.21$, $X_{happiness} = 3.47$). Their general material values show an average level (= 3.20) whereas cynicism was observed to be relatively high ($X_{material\ values} = 3.60$) among the participants. The participants can be said to perceive the social and environmental responsibility and the quality of products and services as approximately similar and weak ($X_{SER} = 2.63$, $X_{PSQ} = 2.86$).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

n= 805	Mean	SD	Skewness	
			Statistic	SD
Success	2.89	1.0961	.168	.365
Centrality	3.21	.9981	-.112	.365
Happiness	3.47	1.1069	-.282	.365
Material values	3.20	.9271	.152	.365
Cynicism	3.60	.7586	-.939	.365
Social and Environmental Responsibility (SER)	2.63	.9455	.023	.365
Quality of Products and Services (PSQ)	2.86	.8359	-.309	.365

SD= Standard deviation

4.3. Model Tests

PLS algorithms and blindfolding analysis were run for the measurements of collinearity, path coefficients, R^2 , effect size (f^2), and model prediction power. For

an initial assessment, 5000 subsamples were taken from the original sample with a replacement to give bootstrap standard errors, which would in turn give approximate t-values for significance testing of the structural path. Thereby, the bootstrap result approximated the normality of the data (Kwong and Wong, 2013). The coefficients of research model tests are presented in Table 4. As it can be seen in the table, there is no collinearity problem due to the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values observed under the threshold of 5 as per the suggestion (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

R2 values indicate that the material values and cynicism explain 2% of the variance of perception of businesses’ social and environmental responsibilities, whereas cynicism and social and environmental responsibility explain 36% of the variance observed in the perceived quality of products and services.

Furthermore, the dependent variables of the model have the prediction power based on the cross-validated redundancy measures Q² from the blindfolding procedure for social and environmental responsibility, and perceived quality of products/ services is larger than zero.

4.3.1. Total Effects

Firstly, it is seen that the material values have no significant effect on cynicism. Moreover, cynicism has no significant effect on the perception of social and environmental responsibility ($\beta_{M-C} = -.038$, $\beta_{C-SER} = -.007$; $p > .05$) whereas material values affect the perception of social and environmental responsibility ($\beta = .147$; $p < .001$). The casual influence of the effect size is statistically weak but significant ($f^2 = .022$) (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, the causal effects of material values ($\beta = .147$; $p < .05$), cynicism ($\beta = -.117$; $p < .001$), and social and environmental responsibility ($\beta = .571$; $p < .001$) on the perceived quality of products and services yield different results. Material values ($f^2 = .007$) and cynical attitudes ($f^2 = .022$) have relatively weaker causal effects, whereas social and environmental responsibility strongly enhances the perceived quality of products and services ($f^2 = .499$). Depending on these findings, H1, H2, H4 and H6 were accepted while H3 and H5 were not.

Table 4. Statistics of Research Model

Variables	Standardized β	SD	t	p	R ²	f ²	Q ²	VIF
Material Values→ Cynicism	-.007	.046	.155	.877	.000	.000	.000	1.000
Material values→ SER	.147	.036	4.051	.000	.023	.022	.015	1.000
Cynicism→ SER	-.038	.051	.753	.451		.001		1.000
Material values→ PSQ	.067	.031	2.194	.028		.007		1.022
Cynicism→ PSQ	-.117	.033	3.540	.000	.361	.022	.237	1.002
SER→ PSQ	.571	.025	22.833	.000		.499		1.024

SER= Social and Environmental Responsibility, PSQ= Perceived Product/ Service Quality, SD= Standard deviation, VIF= Variance inflation factor

4.3.2. Mediating Effects

H7 assumes the mediating role of social and environmental responsibility for the interactions between materialism and perceived quality of products/ services. The indirect effect can be analyzed as the outcomes of the path from X (independent variable) to M (mediator) and the path from M to Y (dependent variable). As can be seen in Table 4, the direct effects from material values to social and environmental responsibility and the direct effects from social and environmental responsibility to the perceived quality of products and services were positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .084$; $p < .001$).

As the indirect effect was observed at least in the Material Values→Social and Environmental Responsibility→Quality of Products and Services path, VAF (Variance Accounted For) value was calculated (Doğan, 2018; Zhao *et al.*, 2010). The VAF value was measured as .36, which supports the mediating role as stated in H7. Social and environmental responsibility partially mediates the interaction between material values and the perceived quality of products and services.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study contributes suggestions for the effects of social and environmental responsibility on the quality perceptions of cynical and materialist consumers. It was especially structured with two different corporate associations, the perceived quality of products and services and social and environmental responsibility, as recommended by Marin *et al.* (2009). In line with their suggestion, this model has sustained the elaborative understanding of consumer reactions not only at the product level but also at the corporate and industry level.

Particularly, it is revealed that material values lead to more positive social and environmental responsibility and higher quality assessments of clothing products. On the other hand, cynicism has no such effect on social and environmental responsibility perceptions. These findings also produce the significant result that social and environmental responsibility has a halo effect as a mediator in the interaction between material values and the perceived quality of products/ services.

This study also presents distinctive contributions to the literature because there is limited evidence on the interaction between psychological factors such as material values and cynicism, social and environmental responsibility perceptions, and perceived product/ service quality. For example, several studies measured the mediating effects of brand-related factors on CSR studies (He and Li, 2011; Hsu, 2012; Lai *et al.*, 2010; Marin *et al.*, 2009; Tingchi *et al.*, 2014). Folkes and Kamins (1999) found the negative effects of products with poor quality on corporate associations. Compared to their findings, it is understood that the interaction of SER and product/service quality is a bi-directional relationship. However, Brown and Dacin (1997) had emphasized that consumers' cognitive associations

of corporate outputs were more influential than SER associations, as this model propounded.

According to Berens et al., (2005), when people assess the quality of products and services, the strength of the corporate brand enhances corporate ability related associations. As the quality is an indicator of reputation, it also reflects the reliability and trustworthiness of the brand to the consumer through its reputation. The SER, which is also another cue of reputation, has a unique relationship with lower-material values and cynicism. Therefore, product and brand managers may achieve goal-oriented expectations in the markets known as against consumption by fundamentally focusing on the perceived quality rather than SER activities. However, if they can devote themselves to the cause-oriented SER activities, this may have a significant effect on the cynical consumers' product/ brand evaluation, because they can be convinced that these activities are a commitment to institutionalized corporate social responsibility. It is thought that systematic public relations for related stakeholders about cause-related and full commitment SER activities will ensure the loyalty of cynical potential consumers.

On the other hand, it is important to state that snowball and convenience sampling does not represent the whole population. Even though these results contribute to market segmentation, product/ brand, and corporate strategies, it has ascertained weak effect sizes for the chosen psychological factors. It is clear that there should be several different influencing factors on consumers' market-shaping behaviors. For further research, an examination of the relationship between cynicism, brand utility, and corporate reputation is recommended by clustering different types of cynics. This model can be expanded with motives and values related to the social entrepreneurship approach in addition to other corporate associations. As the social entrepreneurship concept is closely related to entrepreneurial activity with an embedded social purpose like SER, it can be used as a determinant between self-interest CSR activities (focused on value creation) and full commitment SER activities (focused on value appropriation).

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