

EFFECTS OF REPUTATION AND DISCLOSURE ON CONSUMER EMOTIONS AND PURCHASE INTENTION IN AGRIFOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

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Introdução

The agrifood supply chain is vital for sustainability and social renewal. Corporate sustainability impacts consumer perceptions, emotions, and buying decisions linked to food security and labor conditions (Durach et al., 2025). A positive socially responsible reputation (SRR) builds trust and boosts purchases (Bulsara & Vaghela, 2023). Transparency fosters sustainable consumption but needs better communication (Durach et al., 2025). Thus, we examine how proactive SRR and disclosing sustainable practices (DSSP) affect trust, guilt, and purchase intention in agrifood supply chain.

Problema de Pesquisa e Objetivo

How do proactive, non-incident socially responsible reputation (SRR) and disclosing socially sustainable practices (DSSP) affect consumer trust, guilt, and purchase intention in the agrifood supply chain? This study aims to examine these effects, as understanding the impact of SRR and DSSP on consumer attitudes and behavior is key to aligning corporate actions with social and environmental expectations in this sector.

Fundamentação Teórica

Appraisal Theory (AT) explains why consumers react differently to events affecting well-being (Urda & Loch, 2013). In agribusiness, AT use is limited. Our framework links sustainable practices, social reputation, and disclosure to trust, guilt, and purchase intent. We hypothesize SRR affects trust and guilt, with disclosure boosting these effects. Trust and guilt mediate purchase intention in agrifood (Bulsara & Vaghela, 2023).

Metodologia

We conducted two scenario-based, role-playing experiments (SRE). In Study 1, we used a 2 (incident SSR vs. non-incident SSR) x 2 (no disclosure of SSP vs. disclosure of SSP) design. In Study 2, we employed a 3 (disclosure of SSP compliance: via the own company, via a third-party organization, or control) x 1 between-subjects design. We also conducted qualitative interviews with seven UK grocery shoppers to understand the results of Study 1. Additionally, we performed further analyses to better understand the patterns observed in Study 2.

Análise e Discussão dos Resultados

This study clarifies SSR and DSSP effects on consumer emotions and purchase intentions in the agrifood supply chain, with trust as a key mediator and the role of credible, especially third-party, sources. SSR builds trust, reduces guilt, and boosts purchase intention. DSSP alone does not significantly moderate SSR effects, needing more study. Transparency without external validation risks perceived hypocrisy. Emotions mediate decisions, linking responsible practices to behavior, highlighting combined rational and emotional strategies for sustainability.

Considerações Finais

This study advanced understanding of how socially responsible reputation and disclosure of sustainable practices affect consumer trust, guilt, and purchase intentions in agrifood. A strong reputation builds trust and lowers guilt, driving buying behavior. Disclosure alone has limited impact without external validation. Agrifood companies should invest in SSR and transparent, third-party-verified disclosures to enhance trust and competitiveness. Future research should examine cultural, regulatory contexts, and other emotions in sustainable purchasing.

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Palavras Chave

Reputation, Disclosure, Social sustainability

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1 INTRODUCTION

Companies across industries face increasing pressure to demonstrate socially responsible practices (Unal & Tascioglu, 2022). The agrifood supply chain is vital in sustainability, consuming resources, and driving social renewal. Understanding how corporate sustainability impacts consumer perceptions, emotions, and buying decisions is key, given its link to social needs like food security and labor conditions (Durach et al., 2025). A positive, incident-free SRR signals ethics, boosting trust and purchases (Bulsara & Vaghela, 2023). Transparency in the supply chain promotes sustainable consumption, but consumer awareness gaps highlight the need for strategic communication (Durach et al., 2025). Though research on corporate sustainability and consumer behavior has advanced, gaps remain, especially regarding reputation strategies, emotions like guilt, and third-party validation in disclosures (Durach et al., 2025; Ünal et al., 2024; Unal & Tascioglu, 2022). This study explores how proactive, non-incident, socially responsible reputation (SRR) and disclosing socially sustainable practices (DSSP) affect consumer trust, guilt, and purchase intention in the agrifood supply chain. The results help align corporate practices with consumer expectations for social and environmental progress.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Appraisal Theory (AT) explains why consumers react differently to the same situation (Moors et al., 2013). Emotions arise when consumers see an event affecting their well-being or potentially harming them (Urda & Loch, 2013). In B2C, a company's ethical or unethical actions trigger these emotions (Xie & Bagozzi, 2019). In agribusiness, the use of AT is limited. Yu et al. (2022) applied AT to study consumer responses to food-related corporate social irresponsibility (CSI), analyzing their evaluation of such behaviors. This improves understanding of how emotions influence purchasing decisions related to corporate ethics, opening avenues for future research on consumer-company-social responsibility dynamics in agribusiness.

Our framework combines behavioral decision-making and AT to examine how sustainable practices (Davis-Sramek et al., 2020) link social reputation and disclosure to consumer trust, guilt, and purchase intent in the agrifood sector. We hypothesize SRR impacts trust and guilt, as supported by prior studies (Unal & Tascioglu, 2022). From the consumer's view, reversing an adverse company action is harder than benefiting from a positive one (Price & Sun, 2017). Hence, we propose hypothesis H1. *A non-incident company's socially responsible reputation will lead to higher consumer trust in the context of the agrifood supply chain.*

A positive reputation often results from a company's commitment to social causes, strengthening the link between CSR and public perception (Brammer & Pavelin, 2006). When companies fail to meet their socially responsible image or their CSR efforts seem insincere, consumers may feel guilt (Martins et al., 2024). Thus, we suggest the following hypothesis, H2: *A non-incident company's socially responsible reputation will lead to lower consumer guilt in the context of the agrifood supply chain.*

We extend its effects to a mediating construct in the agrifood supply chain and hypothesize that disclosing socially responsible practices influences this relationship. Sustainability disclosures reduce information asymmetry, increasing transparency and boosting

consumer trust. Fu et al. (2022) found that transparency of green agricultural production info positively affects consumer trust. Thus, we suggest the following hypothesis, H3: *Disclosing socially sustainable practices will increase the effect of the company's SSR on consumer trust in the agrifood supply chain.*

The concepts of disclosure, transparency, and information asymmetry relate to consumer emotions. Reid et al. (2024) highlight that transparency reports, often seen as voluntary disclosures, are vital for stakeholder relations and perceived sincerity. Inconsistencies in CSR communication can cause perceptions of hypocrisy, affecting consumer sentiment and behavior (Wagner, 2006). Thus, we suggest the following hypothesis, H4: *Disclosing socially sustainable practices will increase the effect of a non-incident company's socially responsible reputation, leading to lower consumer guilt in the context of the agrifood supply chain.*

We hypothesize that trust and guilt mediate consumer purchasing intention, thereby explaining complex relationships between supply chain practices and consumer behavior in agrifood. Trust mitigates risks and influences intent, especially in uncertain or complex supply chains (Bulsara & Vaghela, 2023). Thus, we suggest the following hypothesis, H5: *Consumer trust mediates the effect of a company's socially sustainable reputation on purchasing intentions in the context of the agrifood supply chain.*

Emotions from interactions influence consumers, with negative emotions having a lasting, detrimental impact on purchase intentions (Masorgo et al., 2023). In social sustainability, information about corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) triggers guilt in consumers (Green et al., 2023). Thus, we suggest the following hypothesis, H6: *Consumer guilt mediates the effect of a company's socially sustainable reputation on purchasing intentions in the context of the agrifood supply chain.*

3 METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW AND RESULTS

We conducted two scenario-based, role-playing experiments (SRE). In Study 1, we ran a 2 (incident SSR vs. non-incident SSR) x 2 (no disclosure of SSP vs. disclosure of SSP). In Study 2, we ran a 3 (disclosure of the SSP compliance: via the own company vs. via third-party organization vs. control) X 1 between-subject design. In Study 1, we examined SSR's effect on trust and guilt, and how DSSP moderates these. We also tested if trust and guilt mediate consumer purchasing intentions. The UK is ideal for this research as UK adults consume more fruits and vegetables than in other developed countries (The Guardian, 2024). The UK relies more on imported fresh produce due to higher demand and lower local production, while imports from developing countries rise. Consumers focus on sustainable, responsible production, leading to stricter ethical and traceability standards for large retail food chains (CBI, 2022).

We tested the effectiveness and realism of the vignettes through a preliminary pre-test with business students, which validated their use. The vignette included two independent variables, SSR and DSSP, each with two levels. Table 1 outlines the treatment conditions for Study 1. All key experimental checks—manipulation, attention, realism, demand effect, and Hawthorne effect—were successful. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four vignette versions via SurveyMonkey's A/B test. After reading a news article about an ESG achievement of a fictitious produce company, participants answered questions on their purchasing intention for Pegasus produce, rated on a 7-point scale adapted from Duan et al. (2021). They also rated their trust in the online e-tailer using four items on a 7-point scale adapted from Davis-Sramek et al. (2020). Participants completed attention, realism, and general questions. We recruited 200 British primary grocery shoppers from Prolific Academic, with seven responses excluded for

incomplete answers, leaving 193 valid responses. Participants were 76.7% female, 22.8% male, with an average age of 44.7 years.

Table 1: Experimental Treatment Summary

Independent Variables	Treatments	
	Incident	Non-incident
SSR	But it wasn't always like this. After being associated with suppliers that exploited child labor and that had been accused of harassment and employing working conditions similar to slavery, Pegasus remodeled its entire social responsibility and sustainability strategy.	Pegasus was one of the pioneers in its sector, striving to employ good social practices and working conditions throughout its supply chain.
DSSP	<p>No disclosure</p> <p>No additional information about social sustainable practices.</p>	<p>Disclosure</p> <p>To ensure good practices throughout the supply chain, Pegasus has a rigorous, socially responsible supplier selection plan, which only allows the company to do business with suppliers that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the production of local communities; • Buy from and/or produce in developing countries; • Respect human rights (that is, they do not use child or slave labor, promote gender equality, pay fair wages, and offer adequate working conditions); • Have environmentally sustainable work practices.

Source: authors.

We performed a moderated mediation regression model using the Process macro. The effect of SSR on trust (H1), Model I, is positive and significant ($b = 0.91$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 5.45$, $p = 0.000$), revealing that consumers' trust is greater when the company has no socially sustainable harmful incidents on its reputation. The effect of SSR on guilt (H2), Model II, is negative and significant ($b = -0.81$, $SE = 0.19$, $t = -4.18$, $p = 0.000$), revealing that consumers' guilt is lower when the company has no socially sustainable harmful incidents on its reputation. Thus, we found support for H1 and H2.

The interaction between the DSSP and SSR on trust (H3) in Model I was negative but not significant ($b = -0.41$, $SE = 0.33$, $t = -1.25$, $p = 0.2133$). Similarly, the interaction between DSSP and SSR on guilt (H4) in Model II was positive but not significant ($b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.36$, $t = 0.74$, $p = 0.4623$), again suggesting no moderation effect. Consequently, hypotheses H3 and H4 were not supported.

The results of Models I and III indicate that trust mediates the effect of SSR on purchase intention, providing empirical support for hypothesis H5. Trust was positively and significantly associated with PI ($b = 0.76$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 16.74$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that higher levels of consumer trust in the producing company corresponds to a greater willingness to purchase. Similarly, the results of Models II and III show that guilt also mediates the effect of SSR on purchase intention, further supporting hypothesis H5. Guilt was negatively and significantly related to PI ($b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -3.02$, $p = 0.0029$), indicating that higher levels of this emotion are associated with a lower willingness to purchase.

We conducted qualitative interviews with seven UK grocery shoppers to understand the results. Participants clarified that social responsibility isn't the primary concern when shopping. However, negative information from reliable sources about a company's social responsibility harms purchasing intent. To restore reputation and mitigate negative impacts, interviewees stress the importance of presenting evidence of improvements, including news articles, reports, and independent sources. Simply obtaining a seal is insufficient; effective dissemination through media, regulations, and unbiased sources is crucial.

Study 2 complements and expands the findings of Study 1 by investigating how the source of DSSP affects consumer trust and guilt in the produce company and purchasing intention in the scenario that the company has had an incident of social irresponsibility in the

past. We employed a 3 (disclosure of the SSP compliance: via the own company vs. via third-party organization vs. control) X 1 between-subject design. We used a procedure comparable to the one implemented in Study 1. In all scenarios, participants were told to imagine they were customers of Pegasus, a fictitious produce company. Each participant was provided with the same common module. Table 2 provides the content of the vignettes used for each treatment.

Table 2 Manipulations in Study 2

Control	Own company	Third-party organization
No information	Pegasus's compliance with socially responsible supplier selection is proven by company reports and audited by an internal department.	Pegasus' compliance with the socially responsible supplier selection is proven by reports from OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) reports and audited by an external independent organisation.

Source: authors.

We recruited, from Prolific Academic, 200 British primary grocery shoppers in their households. We discarded six responses because respondents either failed to check the questions or gave incomplete answers, resulting in 194 valid responses. Participants were 70.6% female, 29.4% male, and the average age was 42.36 years old. We employed all experimental checks as used in Study 1.

The one-way MANOVA results suggest that trust in the company varies across sources of the disclosure of the company's socially sustainable compliance (Wilks's $\Lambda = .90$, $F [6, 378] = 3.76$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta^2 = .056$). Tukey's post hoc test indicated that trust in the company was significantly higher in the third source scenario than in the control (mean difference = 0.87, $SE = .26$, $p = 0.003$, Cohen's $d = 0.60$). However, there was no significant difference compared with the company source scenarios (mean difference = .56, $SE = .26$, $p = .073$, Cohen's $d = 0.43$). For the other variables, guilt and purchasing intention, no significant differences were identified between the sources of compliance disclosure and the control group. The results show that disclosing compliance from different sources results in variations in consumer trust in the company in the context of the produce supply chain. Compliance disclosure validated from third-party organizations yielded significantly higher scores than the control (no information) and higher, but not significantly at 95% CI, than disclosure of the compliance sourced by the company itself.

We conducted additional analyses to gain a deeper understanding of the pattern of results in Study 2. We run two separate regressions using Process Model 4 (bootstrapping method, $n = 10,000$). The regression models included scenarios as independent variables (disclosure sourced by the company and by third-party organizations), trust in the produce company, and consumer guilt as mediators, and purchase intention as the dependent variable. This post hoc procedure helps examine whether trust and guilt work as mediators, as observed in Study 1. The regression results indicate that consumer trust in the produce company mediates the effect of disclosing socially sustainable compliance by a third-party organization on purchasing intention. Conversely, the mediation via guilt was not observed. However, we found no similar results for disclosing socially sustainable compliance by the company itself (indirect effect via trust = .24, $SE = .21$, 95% CI [-0.1532, 0.6883]), indirect effect via guilt = .02, $SE = .03$, 95% CI [-0.0212, 0.0806]). This result highlights the importance of disclosure sourced by third-party organizations.

This study enhances understanding of SSR and DSSP effects on consumer emotions and purchase intentions in the agrifood supply chain, with trust as a key mediator and credible sources, especially third parties. It confirms SSR's role in building trust, reducing guilt, and positively influencing purchase intention, supporting models linking ethics to behavior (e. g. Tian et al., 2020). SSR's positive impact on trust and guilt aligns with research on social responsibility's influence on corporate image (e. g. Yu et al., 2021). DSSP does not significantly moderate SSR effects, requiring further study. While transparency aims to close informational gaps (Battisti et al., 2025), findings suggest disclosure alone may not improve perception

without verification and action (Bundy et al., 2021). Qualitative interviews and debates highlight risks of hypocrisy without external validation. Emotions, especially trust and guilt (Sharma et al., 2023), mediate consumer decisions, influenced by emotional responses to corporate social and ethical reputation (Öberseder et al., 2014). This broadens understanding of how practices, communication, and behavior interact, emphasizing strategies combining rational and emotional factors. The study adds emotions as a key link between responsible practices and purchase decisions. As social and environmental awareness grows, incorporating such practices and credible communication will be vital for the sector's competitiveness and sustainability.

4 CONCLUSION

This study advanced understanding of how socially responsible reputation and disclosure of sustainable practices influence consumer trust, guilt, and purchase intentions in the agrifood supply chain. A strong reputation is crucial for establishing trust and reducing guilt, which in turn drives buying behavior. However, disclosing sustainable practices alone has a limited impact without external validation, highlighting the need for independent verification to build genuine trust. For the agrifood sector facing rising sustainability demands (CBI, 2022), companies should invest in SSR and transparent disclosures backed by third parties to foster long-term relationships and competitiveness. Future research should explore different cultural and regulatory contexts and other emotions affecting moral purchasing in sustainable supply chains.

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