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USING CSR COMMUNICATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA FOR DEVELOPING LONG-TERM CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS. THE CASE OF ROMANIAN CONSUMERS

Abstract. The digital technology evolution and the pandemic context has altered the way people do business across the world. Marketers must use the new methods that include digital technology to surpass their competition, as traditional competitive techniques will not yield spectacular outcomes. In this situation, using social media as a marketing tool gives a strategic touchpoint for marketers to develop long-term relationships with their customers. In this context, our study highlights the way CSR communication through social media platforms can generate long-term relationships as it influences the customer, corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, and customer trust. For our research, the data were collected with the help of an online self-administered questionnaire filled in by 658 customers. The results emphasize that CSR communication through social media platforms strongly and positively influences corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, customer trust, and customer loyalty. The research results emphasize that communicating CSR initiatives through social media platforms must be part of

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the corporate communication strategy as it contributes to developing long-term relationships between companies and their customers.

    Keywords*: CSR Communication; Satisfaction; Trust; Reputation; Loyalty; Social Media; Long-Term Customer Relationship.*

JEL Classification: M 31, M 14

1. Introduction

With the advance of technology, especially internet, customers are increasingly using social media to engage with companies, because of its interactive capabilities, and open-source features. Nowadays customers are looking for communication, two-way communications and social media offers them exactly that. Using social media, they interact with companies and their engagement toward a company increases.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is not anymore just a concept that sounds very nice while presenting the companies on their websites, but it became a corporate instrument, part of their management strategy, that will ensure companies' existence in the future, if accordingly communicated on social media, and this can be proved by the creativity of the CSR initiatives and the related budgets.

Many companies implement CSR activities voluntarily to build and improve their corporate reputation, improve customer satisfaction and organizational performance, to attract more customers or even to build employer reputation to attract employees (Latif et. all, 2020).

Previous studies have focused mostly on how CSR initiatives relate to brand reputation and firm performance, or on the relation between CSR initiatives and corporate image, and only few of them focused on communicating CSR in retail sector.

As research mention, it is impossible to create a preference for a specific store or retail format unless the retail company maintains good communication (Dabija and Băbuț, 2014). For communicating with its stakeholders, the retail company can use either traditional advertising, or other modern advertising, sponsorship, outdoor, or unconventional advertising like viral marketing, or guerrilla marketing. For maximizing their advertising effort, retail companies use different media channels (TV, Radio, Internet, Direct Mailing, SMS etc.) to inform consumers about their products but because of the increase of the expenses for the mass media advertising and supported by the digitalization trend, more and more retail companies move their communication on social media platforms (Dabija and Băbuț, 2014).

The company's communication policy remains a critical component in influencing customers' behaviour and in creating a positive image in consumers' minds, as well as achieving the company's strategic goals. Although most businesses use social media as a marketing tool, more and more companies start using it as a platform where they can involve customers in their own CSR initiatives. For creating a more favourable image among consumers, more and

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more retail companies concentrate on other issues such as CSR initiatives aimed at environmental conservation, consumers', and employees' rights, improving people's living conditions and start communicating about those activities on social media (Cheng et. all, 2021).

The way a consumer perceives a company's CSR activity influences the way he sees the company (Brown and Dacin, 1997), while authors like Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) found that CSR initiatives have a positive impact on a company's image and reputation.

Because creating competitive advantages and effectively differentiating products and services takes a lot of time and work, it's critical for businesses in this sector to establish a favourable, positive, and strong image in the minds of their customers, so that a lasting relationship with customers may be developed later. The retail sector is highly competitive, which makes it very challenging for companies to retain their customers (Cheng et. all, 2021).

Raising customer awareness becomes a significant issue as the saturation trend gets more and more evident on the dynamic retailers' markets. To better manage this issue, retail companies are increasingly attempting to reach the customers not only through communication, but also through their social responsibility initiatives (Dabija and Băbuț, 2014).

Research show that if CSR is properly communicated, it can positively contribute to the development and sustainment of long-term relationships with customers (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Sen et. all, 2006). During pandemic times, as they are now, customers expect companies to behave as good corporate citizens, and to show empathy to stakeholders. This responsible behaviour can influence consumers repurchase decisions while a good CSR reputation can lead to customer loyalty, which can directly influence business performance (Becker-Olsen et. all, 2006).

Company managers, being aware of the positive influence that CSR initiatives have on their customers' loyalty, decided to revise their online CSR communication, and place it in the middle of their marketing communication strategy (Perez et. all, 2013).

Few studies have studied the way CSR communication through social media platforms can contribute to the development of long-term customer relationships and even less have studied this phenomenon in Romania. Therefore, the aim of our research is to examine whether companies can develop and maintain long-term customer relationships by properly communicating their CSR initiatives not only through their web sites in their non-financial reports, but also through social media platforms as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, or even TikTok, considering the Romanian consumer.

The results of our research bring practical implications for companies, as they demonstrate how companies can develop long-term customers relationships (loyalty) by using social media platforms to communicate their CSR initiatives. We argue that an appropriate communication of the CSR initiatives on social media

platforms can contribute to increasing the customer satisfaction, creating customer trust and good corporate reputation and, in the end creating customer loyalty. And loyalty means long-term relationship, repurchase, recommendation and increased customer value.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

Nowadays, CSR has gain an important place for companies' management and marketing, not very far from what the first definition meant: "businessmen's obligations to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those directions which, in terms of values and objectives, are agreed by our society" (Bowen, 1953), or "companies include the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic-discretionary expectations that society has on the organization at a certain time" (Carroll, 1979). Another important conceptualization of the CSR is the one of Freeman who developed the framework of the stakeholder theory. From his perspective, CSR comprises specific responsibilities for each stakeholder of the company (employees, customers, shareholders, suppliers, business partners) (Freeman, 2010).

Also from a stakeholder perspective, European Commission, first, in 2001, defined corporate social responsibility as "a concept where companies integrate social and environmental concerns of their activities and of the interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (European Commission, 2011), but after ten years it modified into: "companies voluntarily decide to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment beyond the limit imposed by the law, and investing in human capital, in environment and in the relations with stakeholders", and with the publication of the new 2011-2014 European Strategy on Corporate Social Responsibility, the European Commission published a new definition for CSR: "the companies' responsibility for the impact they have on society" (European Commission, 2011).

There seem to be different reasons why companies choose to conduct social responsibility activities: some are related to companies' concern about the environment, the legislation, the customers' or employers' rights; or the pressure of customers' expectations, or the pressure of the market, the competition. Some reasons are strategic, while others are defensive. Some companies argue they are just being altruistic and moral, while others have financial reasons as the fiscal benefits. But, in the end, we believe that all these bring the company to the same place, that of using CSR to satisfy the stakeholders' demands, enhance the corporate reputation and change consumer behaviour, increase his satisfaction, trust, and in the end, his loyalty (Martinez and del Bosque, 2013).

Specialty literature mentions the association between CSR initiatives and consumer responses while some of the corporate managers started to consider CSR the fundamental strategy that influence consumers' behaviour (David et. all, 2005). We believe, this might be the reason for more than 90 % of the Fortune 500 companies to engage in explicit CSR activities and to communicate that not only through companies' websites, but also through social media platforms. As a result,

some research corelate CSR with corporate reputation (Ozdora et. all, 2016). This is the reason why, in this study, we include also corporate reputation as an analysed variable, trying to answer the following questions: do CSR initiatives that are communicated through social media platforms influence customer satisfaction, customer trust, company reputation and, in the end generates long-term relationships by creating customer loyalty? do customer satisfaction, corporate reputation, and customer trust influence customer loyalty also in the case of Romanian customers?

To be able to answers to these research questions, first, we carried out a serious review of the specialty literature that presents the relation between CSR communicated through social media platforms and the concepts: (customer) satisfaction, (customer) trust, (corporate) reputation and (customer) loyalty. Second, considering the stakeholder theory and the resource-based view, we created and tested a research model that indicates that CSR initiatives communicated through social media platforms enable businesses to establish a long-term relationship with their customers by increasing customer satisfaction, creating customer trust, corporate reputation, and consumer loyalty.

We started our model based on two main theories, practically, the first two theories when it comes to CSR: the stakeholder theory introduced by Freeman in 1994 and the resource-based theory. The first theory considers the customers the most important stakeholders, and that's why companies should consider all stakeholders' interest (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001).

Stakeholder theory has been debated and discussed during time by different researchers that have incorporated in it also the social response and marketing. After research, some of the authors found out that stakeholders respond positively to different CSR initiatives which means good consumer response and even customer loyalty (Frow and Payne, 2011).

The resource-based theory argues that companies' resources lead to its competitive position, the organizational resources being the most valuable assets that can drive the company to a competitive position, or it will create a sustainable competitive advantage for the company that will satisfy the customers (Kozlencova et. all, 2014).

Consumers assess the companies, like in the case of products, in terms of CSR, therefore, negative CSR associations are more powerful and have a more negative effect than the positive ones. Still, positive associations do increase company's and products' evaluations. In consequence, the better the CSR activities are perceived by the customer, the higher customer's satisfaction, and loyalty.

As regards CSR in Romania, we must mention that, in April 2014, the European Parliament adopted the Directive on the disclosure of non-financial and diversity information. „By disclosing social, environmental and governance information, enterprises often find that they can better identify and manage issues that influence their business success" (European Commission, 2011). In Romania,

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only starting from 2020, all the companies that have more than 500 employees are obliged to publish a non-financial report.

CSR initiatives differ across the world, as companies tend to adapt CSR activities based on stakeholders' needs and expectations. For example, during 2020, in the case of Romanian companies, most of the CSR projects were focused on managing COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021 the CSR projects address not only the human resources market, but also the quality of the future human resource.

As regards social media, it can be defined as a technology-enabled communication that takes place on platforms such as blogs, wikis, content sharing, social networking, and social bookmarking. It varies from traditional media in that it provides for a two-way interactive experience between organizations and stakeholders, as opposed to media sources that is disseminating information to the public with no direct reaction or response (Aral et. all, 2013).

Social media stimulates social interactions and user-generated content, and it becomes fundamentally important, especially now, in the digital era, when COVID-19 pandemic sent almost all companies online (Anastasiei et. all, 2021). In this era of digitalization, companies started using social media to remodel and complete the business activities. Companies have switch to social media as a supplementary channel for external and internal CSR communication. They use social media both external (e.g., Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter) and internal (e.g., Facebook Workplace, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom) for both to acquire and share knowledge from the market/customers and employees. The online presence gives companies the chance to build long-term relationships with their potential and current customers, as well as with other stakeholders and to improve their online corporate reputation (Mandviwalla and Watson, 2014).

The focus of social media, is concentrated on three aspects: the first one considers IT and the managers and outlines behavioural models of conducting social media activities in organizations; the second aspect refers to the social media marketing and the way the company adopts social media for marketing purposes; the last aspect focuses on the relation between social media and the conventional online media. Therefore, social media is considered to be the most disruptive technology that businesses employ to transform their operations and create value (Benitez et. all, 2020). In the same time, social media is used to disclose different kinds of sensitive information as financial information, environmental, and even information about CSR initiatives, although sometimes this kind of information are considered to be misleading. Some companies even use social media to clean their social reputation.

During COVID-19 pandemic, customers have begun to wonder whether a company's CSR communication on social media reflects genuine social participation or is merely a front because of this phenomenon. As a result, for using social media for communicating CSR initiatives, companies receive more attention and gain social visibility. The ones that have fewer social media experience may find that the lack of communication about their CSR implication represents a

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disadvantage for their reputation. Still, we must admit that there are authors suggesting that many customers do not read companies' content from social media, hence the CSR initiatives communicated through social media have not much impact on corporate reputation. But, although initially, social media was primarily aimed at a younger demographic, the recent data shows that the majority of those over 65 are now connected to at least one social media network.

According to statistics, the number of Romanian users on the main social networks are: Facebook – 12.010.000 monthly users; YouTube – 12.000.000 monthly users; Tik Tok – 5.364.860 monthly users; Instagram – 5.053.000 monthly users (more than Instagram); LinkedIn – 3.014.00 monthly users; snapchat – 2.354.700 advertising audience (13+); Pinterest – 1.309.000 advertising audience; twitter – 668.000 advertising audience (13+) (Manafu, 2020).

What is also worth mentioning is that the company we address with our research, Kaufland Romania, has an active account in most social media platforms: Facebook (1.759.520 persons like the page), Instagram (81.1k followers), LinkedIn (43.8k followers), YouTube (31k subscribers), Tweeter (282 followers), and even on Tik Tok (8078 followers starting from March 2021), and from a simple glance on each of those ac-counts it can be seen that the company is daily active, creating and posting content and interacting with its customers, creating engagement, as through content, style, and tone, corporate communications through social media provide insight regarding the values underlying an organization's culture (Brown and Starkey, 1994).

However, social media can only help corporations optimize the impact of CSR operations on corporate reputation if it is correctly managed. Social media scanning and engagement of customers provide additional credibility and visibility to CSR initiatives that influences corporate reputation, thanks to dialogue and interactivity as a two-way communication channel. As a result, employing social media enhances the credibility of communications over strictly company-controlled messaging since the company exposes its messages to criticism and its social media capabilities can handle such criticism (Eberle et. all, 2013).

Most of the customer satisfaction definitions considered it to be whether the result of the comparison between customers' actual and his perceived experiences, an assessment after consumption, a positive reaction, a reflection of positive feelings (Oliver et. all, 1997), a business's effectiveness indicator, consumer's perceptions of the product or service attributes, but always the essential element of the corporate strategy, and a key driver for company's profitability and for creation of market value (Wu, 2013).

Trust is discussed in different domains starting from marketing to psychology and is still considered as the most important business ingredient through which they can develop long-term customer relationships. When a customer trusts a company, then he trusts its products and services, and thus, trust becomes a milestone barometer for the quality of the services / products the company offers (Wu, 2013). Trust does not have a vital importance only for

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businesses, in the sense of their future trade, but it is also recognized as a vital element for the long-lasting customer – company relationships (Pivato et. all, 2008).

Company reputation represents the most important intangible assets for a company. It represents an essential part of the business strategy as it can bring competitive advantage and success for the company. It contributes to obtaining customer satisfaction and loyalty as some consider it "an instant mental picture of the entity that grows over time as the result of high quality, standardization of operations, and a customer-centric approach to progress over time, the perception of a company in the public mind and a strategic technique that is used to achieve the strategic objectives of the business" (Roberts and Dowling, 2002).

Customer loyalty is nowadays considered one of the most important topics for both marketers and researchers. While some years ago, authors defined it as an attitude, as behavioural, these days it is explained as repeated purchase, a function of psychological processes resulting out of commitment. According to specialty literature, maintaining existing consumers' loyalty represents one of the biggest challenges for a company because it depends on the several factors: satisfaction, trust, service quality, corporate reputation (Nyadzayo), and CSR initiatives, but the loyal customer can bring different benefits to companies as research show that loyal customers see a high switching cost in changing the brand (Mascarenhas, 2006).

Building long-term relationships with customers, making them loyal, represents one of the main marketing goals for companies. Knowing how to build customer loyalty is seen as crucial element in maintaining long-term company profitability and success. Consequently, profits can be increased over the course of a customers' lifetime through their retention.

CSR has a proved influence on consumer behaviour, loyalty, and satisfaction and consumers analyse companies' CSR initiatives when they have to consider companies' products and services (Oberseder et. all, 2013).

As customer satisfaction generates customer retention long-term customer relationship are developed. In this case, the positive relation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty should not be a surprise.

Also, it is considered that CSR activities drove by companies positively influence their reputation and represent a support in developing positive relationship with companies' stakeholders (Maignan and Ferrell, 2004), a criterion for the company's values examination is corelated with the level of consumers' engagement in the CSR initiatives. Thus, we dare to hypothesize: *(H1). Corporate social responsibility communicated through social media positively influences corporate reputation.*

If considering the competitive advantage, satisfaction, or loyalty we have to keep in mind that the positive corporate reputation is crucial, that it is linked to the company's image in the market and that it represents a clear positive indicator about the company's success. When making the decision to buy, customers choose

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companies with a positive corporate reputation (Hetze, 2016). A good reputation for a company represents a clear reflection of its offerings and that leads to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customer loyalty is built also because CSR initiatives lead to good reputation and that impacts the global evaluation process and generates positive image. Concluding, CSR is treated as a essential strategy meant to enhance a company's reputation on the long run and employing the appropriate CSR approach might positively influence customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty (Caruana and Ewing, 2010). Having all this in mind, we designed the following hypothesis: *(H2). Corporate reputation positively influences customer loyalty.*

Implementing and communicating CSR initiatives through social media contributes to more positive consumer attitudes and higher satisfaction with the company. In the end, customers are company's most important stakeholders, and they consider not only the economic, but also the ethical performance of the company. As a result, if a company engages in ethical activities, their customers' level of satisfaction and loyalty increases. Corporate philanthropy initiatives, which is another type of CSR engagement, as well, prepares the path for customer satisfaction (Sen et. all, 2006), positive organization image, and more supportive customer behaviours (Latif et. all, 2020). Starting from here, we designed the third hypothesis: *(H3). Corporate social responsibility communicated through social media positively influences customer satisfaction.*

Companies with satisfied customers have loyal customer. As satisfaction is the most important antecedent of loyalty, managers keep in mind that if their customers are satisfied with the products, then they will most probably make repeated purchases and even recommend the company or its products. At the same time, customer satisfaction positively influences customer trust, its retention, and its repurchase intention (Nyadzayo and Khajehzadeh, 2016). Therefore, we dare to state that CSR influences customer satisfaction that indirectly influences customer loyalty. Considering this, we created the following hypothesis: *(H4). Customer satisfaction has a positive significant association with customer loyalty.*

Customer trust as a crucial construct related to satisfaction. Trust means confidence. Customer satisfaction, as a predictor of customer trust, remains a vital factor in developing successful long-term customer relationships (Wu, 2013; Islam et. all, 2021; Martinez and del Bosque, 2013; Oliver et. all, 1997; Oberseder, 2013).

Trust is the precondition for the establishment and maintenance of long-term partnerships between a company and its customers (Wu, 2013). To establish a trustworthy customer long-term relationship, consumer's ethical perception of the company is crucial. This might be the reason for companies' engagement in ethical and socially responsible initiatives - to prove their involvement into society. Trust is the expectation of ethically justifiable behaviour, and for that CSR is considered to be one of the most effective strategies to build customer trust (Park et. all, 2017) as behaving in an ethical manner enhances the image of the company and it

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customers' trust (Mascarenhas, 2006). Therefore, we hypothesize: *(H5). Corporate social responsibility communicated through social media positively influences customer trust.*

To build customers' loyalty, first, the company must gain customers' trust. A solid long-term customer relationship has to be developed on trust whereas customer loyalty must be treated as a company's long-term investment and the confirmation of company – customer engagement. Companies' involvement in CSR initiatives offers a clear perspective over a company's reputation, and also over the level of its honesty and transparency. Customers aware of companies' involvement in CSR programs perceive this as companies' concern for the society and generates a trust-based connection, which can be transformed later into loyalty (Martinez and del Bosque, 2013). Considering all this information, we hypothesize that: *(H6). Customer trust positively influences customer loyalty.*

As consumer awareness and assessments of CSR initiatives are generally determined by their own values, CSR has been recognized to enhance relationships with customers and other stakeholders (Caruana and Ewing, 2010). Most customers have expectations from companies when it comes to their CSR activities (Becker-Olsen et. all, 2006) and they consider this when they decide to buy from those companies (Brown and Dacin, 1997).

Involving in CSR activities remains one of the best strategies used in building customer loyalty (Mascarenhas et. all, 2006) as specialty literature mentions a positive relationship between companies' CSR engagements and their consumers' positions toward companies' products (Perez et. all, 2013). Although sometimes consumer awareness of CSR remains low, and companies frequently don't get satisfactory results despite the large amount of resources invested in their CSR initiatives. To further investigate this question, but in the context of Romanian retail market we hypothesize that: *(H7). Corporate social responsibility communicated through social media positively influences customer loyalty.*

Considering all the hypotheses from above, we propose the following conceptual model for the research. See figure 1 from below.
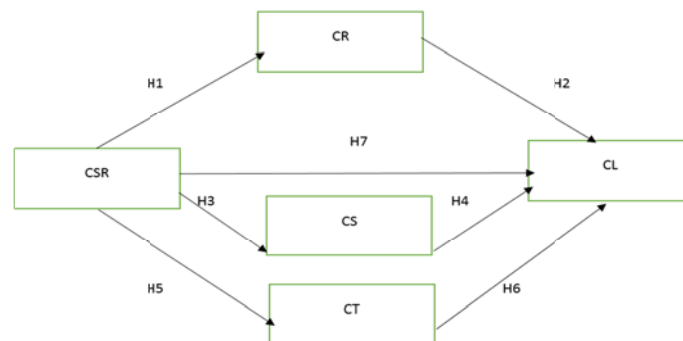

Figure 1. The proposed conceptual framework

3. Data and Research Methodology

In order to emphasize the influence that proper CSR communication initiatives through social media has on developing long-term customer relationships, and the way it influences satisfaction, trust, corporate reputation and in the end loyalty, we conducted a quantitative research among Romanian Kaufland customers (considered to be the most socially responsible company in 2020 according to Romanian CSR Index) that are active users of social media platforms and were following company's online communication. The study was conducted on a convenience sample of 658 individuals, ages 20 – 65 and of different levels of education.

For data collection, an online survey was conducted using social media platforms, starting from 1st of July 2021 to 30th of August 2021. The respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaire based on their most recent experience. The online questionnaire was distributed to 1500 persons. In the end, 658 valid questionnaires were collected, obtaining a response rate of 43,86%.

The constructs we used in our proposed conceptual model were adapted from past research. Therefore, CSR initiatives communicated through social media were measured by a scale developed by Brown and Dacin in 1997 and Öberseder et al. in 2014. Four dimensions of the concept were considered: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. Corporate reputation was measured with four items adapted from Latif et al., 2020 and Park et al., 2017; consumers' satisfaction with the retailer was measured with four items adapted from Oliver in 1980 and Latif et al. in 2020 and; customer trust was measured using four items adapted from Park et al., 2017; while customer loyalty was measures with four items adapted from Latif et al., 2020 and Park et al., 2017.

Table 1. Demographic information

Variable	Items	N	%
Gender	Male	316	48.02%
	Female	342	51.98%
Age	<=25	96	14.59%
	26 – 30	107	16.26%
	31 – 35	128	19.45%
	36 – 40	104	15.81%
	41 – 45	93	14.13%
	46 – 50	71	10.79%
	>=51	59	8.97%
Education	Secondary education	143	21.73
	Higher education	381	57.90
	Postgraduate	134	20.37

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The study used a five-point Likert scale for recording the responses. For each item on the measurement scales, consumers were asked to indicate their degree of agreement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Cronbach alpha and composite reliability analyses were carried out first in order to validate the measurement instruments. In both cases, the values were above threshold of 0.7 for each of the constructs.

Table 2. The measurement model results

	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	0.851	0.894	0.679	0.802
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0.931	0.870	0.627	0.849
Customer Trust (CT)	0.958	0.921	0.746	0.861
Corporate Reputation (CR)	0.913	0.919	0.741	0.875
Customer Loyalty (CL)	0.937	0.894	0.678	0.844

Second, Kaiser – Meyer – Olkin (KMO) test was done in order to measure the suitability of the sample. In the case of this test, the recommended minimum value has to be 0.5 for the sample size to be considered suitable to perform the factor analysis.

Using the IBM-SPSS AMOS program we computed a confirmatory factor analysis in order to assess the relevance of the relationships between the variables. The results can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Fit indices for the model

Model	P	GFI	AGFI	NFI	RFI	IFI
Values obtained from research	0.000	0.921	0.908	0.954	0.948	0.966
Statistical theoretical values	< 0.05	>0.90	>0.90*	>0.95	>0.90	>0.90
Model	**TLI**	**CFI**	**PNFI**	**RMSEA**	**PCLOSE**	
Values obtained from research	0.962	0.966	0.853	0.063	0.000	
Statistical theoretical values	>0.95	>0.95	>0.50	<0.07**	<0.05	

4. Results

As Table 4 shows, the hypotheses introduced by us in the proposed conceptual model are supported. All the tested hypotheses are supported and can be considered as eligible by the criteria mentioned in Table 3.

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According to the table below, all the tested hypotheses are supported and vali-dated. Therefore, we can mention, without mistaking, that the variables that are considered to be antecedents for customer long-term relationships (CS – customer satisfaction, CT – customer trust, C – company reputation) have a positive significant effect on CL – customer loyalty.

From Table 4 it can be seen that communicating CSR initiatives through social media platforms has the greatest impact on customer trust ($\beta = 0.996$; $p < 0.00$; critical ratio test $= 25.486 > 1.96$) which is the needed proof for validating Hypothesis 5, while customer trust has the greatest effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.995$; $p < 0.00$; critical ratio test $= 25.449 > 1.96$), therefore H6 is also validated. Regarding the impact of CSR communication through social media platforms on customers satisfaction, as Table 4 shows, H3 is also validated as $\beta = 0.992$; $p < 0.00$; critical ratio test $= 20.767 > 1.96$. In the same time customer satisfaction, as an antecedent of customer loyalty has a strong and significant influence on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.676$; $p < 0.00$; critical ratio test $= 16.997 > 1.96$) and in this way, H4 is also validated.

Table 4. The structural model results

Hypotheses	Correlations	β	P	Std.E.	C.R.	Hypothesis Testing
H1	CSR → CR	0.988	0.000	0.020	50.908	supported
H2	CR → CL	0.748	0.000	0.041	18.446	supported
H3	CSR → CS	0.992	0.000	0.048	20.767	supported
H4	CS → CL	0.676	0.000	0.059	16.997	supported
H5	CSR → CT	0.996	0.000	0.039	25.486	supported
H6	CT → CL	0.995	0.000	0.028	25.449	supported
H7	CSR → CL	0.520	0.000	0.034	29.402	supported

*Note: $p < 0.01$; statistical significance of parameter estimates test of the critical ratio (C.R.) needs to be > 1.96; * significant at $CR > 1.96$, $p < 0.01$.

Also, CSR communication through social media platforms has a strong and significant influence on corporate reputation as can be seen in Table 4 ($\beta = 0.988$; $p < 0.00$; critical ratio test $= 50.908 > 1.96$) and so H1 is also supported. In the same time, we can observe that corporate reputation has also a strong and significant influence on consumer loyalty ($\beta = 0.748$; $p < 0.00$; critical ratio test $= 18.446 > 1.96$) and in this way H2 is supported. Also, Table 4 shows that CSR communication through social media platforms has a strong and significant influence on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.520$; $p < 0.00$; critical ratio test $= 29.402 > 1.96$) and in this way H7 is also supported.

5. Conclusions and Discussions

The aim of our study was to analyse the influence that a properly done CSR communication through social media platforms has on developing strong long-term customers relationships, and to emphasize its influence on customer

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satisfaction, customer trust, corporate reputation and, in the end, customer loyalty. Even though previous studies have researched on all these separate components: CSR, customer satisfaction, customer trust, corporate reputation and customer loyalty, there is no similar research done in the Romanian retail sector. Beginning with the specialty literature and with related research, our main objective was to validate the influence the CSR communication through social media has on developing long-term customer – company relationship, on customer satisfaction, customer trust, corporate reputation, and customer loyalty. In the end, the results of our research show that communicating CSR initiatives through social media, also in the case of Romanian retail companies, strongly and positively influence corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, costumer trust and, in the end, customer loyalty. The findings of our research correlate to the past literature, as also all our hypothesis were supported.

Nowadays companies are very experienced, and they demonstrate that all their activities are complying with the social and ethical standards. When businesses meet certain standards to demonstrate their social responsibility, they can link their positive image to their products and promote in the local community by using different social media platforms (networks) that are available online. The present pandemic context helps even more the companies to communicate their CSR initiatives through social media, as most of the customers were forced by the COVID-19 imposed restrictions to move online and that brings all the potential customers even closer to the companies. The more companies implement these social standards to improve the target community's sustainability, the better the company's reputation gets, if all these actions are properly communicated through social media. Because customers are the company's main advertisers, companies struggle to create a long-term customer relationship. Research show that companies that are actively involved in CSR efforts outperform those that are not. Investing in strategic CSR and looking after the interests of all stakeholders will create value for companies, including a good reputation, increased customer satisfaction, consumer trust, and high loyalty.

In the present digital age, when social media becomes one of the most important marketing tools and channels used by businesses seeking to attract the attention of all stakeholders, especially customers, communicating CSR initiatives through social networks must be a part of each company's strategy. Opposite to conventional media, which regularly practices one-way communication, social media differentiates through its interactive two-way communication that offers more customers much more flexibility and the chance to directly communicate with the companies. A good social media specialist with an appropriate conduct of this kind of online communication can very easily change the potential customer into a supporter customer, or in an advocate for the company. Therefore, managers should be aware of the value and potential of social media, particularly in terms of achieving marketing-related goals by engaging customers in social media. Social

media, at this certain moment, is one of the most powerful tools used by companies
to engage with their customers (Micu et. Al, 2021)

In the last years, about half of the world population is using internet, and
customers obtain a lot of information from these social media platforms daily. We
can say that customers consume a lot of content (text, photo or/ and video) from
online and sometimes this leads to issues of virtual tiredness. As a result, modern
customers expect meaningful interactions with businesses and brands.
Communicating CSR initiatives on social media platforms and involving customers
on social media gives them the chance to interact meaningfully. Nowadays
customers tend to interact with companies, so they search for two-way
communication that social media platforms offer. This is the reason why CSR
communication through social media platforms contributes to companies create
good reputation among their customers.

In the case of the present research the practical implications refer to the
fact that, even in Romania, managers should change the way of thinking about
CSR, and not mistake it only to philanthropic activities, as CSR is a win- win
strategy that can bring social and economic benefits not only to society, but also to
the company itself through increasing customer satisfaction, customer trust,
creating good reputation and customer loyalty. On long-term it is proved that it can
develop customer relationships and engagement, and this can transform the
potential customer in a partner or advocate for the company or brand. In order to
improve the customer experience, modern marketers must adopt new ways to
effectively engage customers. In this sense, the use of social media signals the start
of a new era in which stakeholders, such as customers, are involved in CSR efforts,
when customers see an organization's responsible initiatives, they form favourable
associations with it and may even get involved in it. If not, at least, as they see the
company shares the same core values as they do, they will tend to trust more the
company, to refer to it as with good reputation and even get loyal.

Therefore, our results show that if companies choose to be transparent, to
communicate their CSR initiatives through social media and in this way prove their
honesty, customers will be willing to establish long-term relationships as their
satisfaction and trust with / in the company increases as well as their loyalty, while
the company will have a good reputation among its customers.

The research only covers the retail sector. All the discussions and
conclusions cannot be extrapolated for other sectors, especially for a market like
Romania, where CSR is still a not very known concept even among some company
managers.

The present research has certain limitations. The first one is given by the
structure and the size of the sample – using an online questionnaire it is very hard
to control the responding sample and to make sure that people representing
different segments of the customers respond. Another limit is given by not
including the quality of the products as a variable in the tested conceptual model,
but future research can try to validate the proposed model considering also this

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variable. Due to the relevance of this subject, we believe that such efforts recommended as social media becomes the most important marketing tool for companies and for developing long-term company – customer relationship where both have been profoundly affected by the pandemic on multiple levels.

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