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Managing Sustainability

Perspectives From Retailing and Services

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Contents

The Evolution of the Sustainability Mindset in Retailing and Service Management

Beatrice Luceri and Elisa Martinelli

Abstract The topic of sustainability is getting increasing importance around the globe since the 1987 Brundtland Report, by the World Commission on Environment and Development, introduced the concept of sustainable development. The need for organizations to answer the call to sustainability has prompted academics to take up the topic to support them, providing interpretations and management models. However, many relevant questions about sustainability remain unanswered, especially with reference to the retail and services companies. Producing a service offer and being the interface between production and consumption, they can influence pro-sustainability behaviors both upstream and downstream, making a major contribution to sustainability dissemination and achievement.

This chapter deals with the evolution of the sustainability mindset in retailing and service management through a literature review using SCIMAT. The bibliographic research process led to the identification of 363 papers in the period 2006–2022. While there were few scientific contributions until 2015, it is from that date—the year in which the 2030 Agenda was launched—that the interest of researchers has grown exponentially. The analysis revealed four clusters of themes on sustainability topic: the themes of utmost importance which are well-developed by scholars, the niche or marginal themes, the emerging or declining themes, and, finally, the relevant but still underdeveloped themes. The authors of this book have focused their attention on the latter to provide a structural guide to sustainability in the service industry, with an eye to specific emerging service sectors.

Keywords Sustainability · Retailing · Service management · Literature review · SCIMAT

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Why a book on sustainability and its management in the retail and service context? The answer is likely to seem almost obvious. The topic of sustainability is getting increasing importance around the globe since the 1987 Brundtland Report (also known as Our Common Future), by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), introduced the concept of sustainable development. Its definition represents an epoch-making breakthrough in the relationship between humans and the environment, namely a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." For the first time, it was put on paper that the traditional development model, if not corrected, would lead to the collapse of the Earth's ecosystem in the long term. The renewal of resources and the good health of the Planet emerged as priority objectives, cementing the status of the overarching paradigm in the United Nations for sustainable development.

From this ecology-centered definition, the concept has experienced a gradual evolution taking on a broader meaning to include the economy and society as well. How twenty-first-century organizations are addressing socially responsible consumers and meeting their needs while keeping their business profitable and having a neutral effect on the environment along the supply chain are current and key issues of debate. Today's thinking is that all these three aspects—People, Planet, and Profit, the so-called Triple Bottom—must be in a synergic and systemic relationship to ensure the overall balance between humans and the ecosystem.

Let's take a synthetic look at the individual aspects of sustainable development. Economic sustainability refers to the ability of an economic system to produce income and employment on a long-term basis; environmental sustainability deals with the protection of the Planet and the renewal of natural resources; social sustainability is the ability to ensure conditions of human well-being (security, health, education, democracy, participation, justice) equally distributed by class and gender. Summing up: sustainability implies, on the one hand, a steady and preferably increasing environmental, economic and social well-being; on the other hand, the ambition to leave future generations with the same quality of life as today. Everyone is called upon to play their part: policymakers, companies, and consumers. As regards the former, 193 countries have signed on September 25, 2015, the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: an action plan for people, the Planet, and prosperity. Companies, for their part, are subject to a twofold external pressure: that of political forces that are intervening with legislative measures and offering incentives to re-engineer business processes in a sustainable way to achieve global sustainability goals; and that of consumers who are concerned about the health of the Planet, are adopting sustainable behaviors and expect that all actors in the supply chain and at a political and administrative level do the same. As a result, they are querying themselves on the need to have purposes and strategies that go beyond mere shareholder value maximization.

The only viable way to make economic growth sustainable—that is, capable of avoiding a negative environmental, economic, and societal impact of the goods and services production process—is to rethink the traditional way of doing business and creating value. 2016 Nobel laureate Oliver Hart goes even further with the paper

"The new Governance" which he wrote last April with Zingales (Hart & Zingales, 2022). They underlined the "dramatic increase in shareholder engagement on environmental and social issues" and that "in some cases, shareholders are pushing companies to take actions that may reduce market value." The dominant corporate governance paradigm based on shareholders' value maximization appears, hence, to be outdated because it does not allow explaining this sort of corporate hara-kiri. Therefore, a new criterion is needed, identified by the authors in the shareholders' welfare maximization. To put it simply, profit is substituted by well-being since shareholders may be interested in more than just money or getting rich.

The need for organizations to answer the call to sustainability has prompted academics to take up the topic to support them, providing coeval interpretations and management models. However, many important questions about sustainability remain unanswered. In this book, we decided to focus on some specific actors that are strongly contributing to sustainable value creation in the supply chain: the retail and services companies. Producing a service offer and being the interface between production and consumption, retailers and service firms can influence pro-sustainability behaviors both upstream and downstream, making a major contribution to sustainability dissemination and achievement. Despite the topicality and importance of the subject, studies on the effect that sustainability and CSR policies developed by retail and services companies have on consumers is still limited (Louis et al., 2019; Dang et al., 2020), while the impact of retail and service sustainability practices and role in terms of business models (Elg et al., 2021) and within the supply chain (Vadakkepatt et al., 2021) is attracting increasing attention.

The evolution of the sustainability mindset in the retailing and service management context has been mapped with a literature review using SCIMAT. Web of Science (WoS) has been identified as the database for searching and selecting empirical as well as theoretical contributions in the literature. The search for scientific papers in WoS was carried out in March 2022. Based on the scope of the research, the keywords "sustainability", "sustainable", "retailing", "retailer*", "service*," and "service management" as search terms in "TITLE-ABSTRACT-KEY-WORD" were employed. As suggested by Caiado et al. (2017), the collection was limited to documents written in English. The filter for the publication period has been left free ("all years"), identifying the year 2006 as the starting point. The last search parameter set concerns the bibliographic indexes that allow detecting the number of citations of a publication and an author over time: "Sci-Expanded" and "SSCI." The bibliographic research process led to the identification of 363 papers in the period 2006–2022. While there were few scientific contributions until 2015, starting from that date—the year in which the 2030 Agenda was launched—the academy's interest has grown exponentially.

One of the first three 2006 papers was the one published in the Journal of Cleaner Production by Williams (2006). By analyzing the automotive industry, the author highlighted the central role of the retailer by stating that "companies must now consider the role of consumers, retailers, and other stakeholders outside their traditional sphere of influence to move towards the functional and systemic improvements necessary for sustainability." Both the other two papers written by Simpson
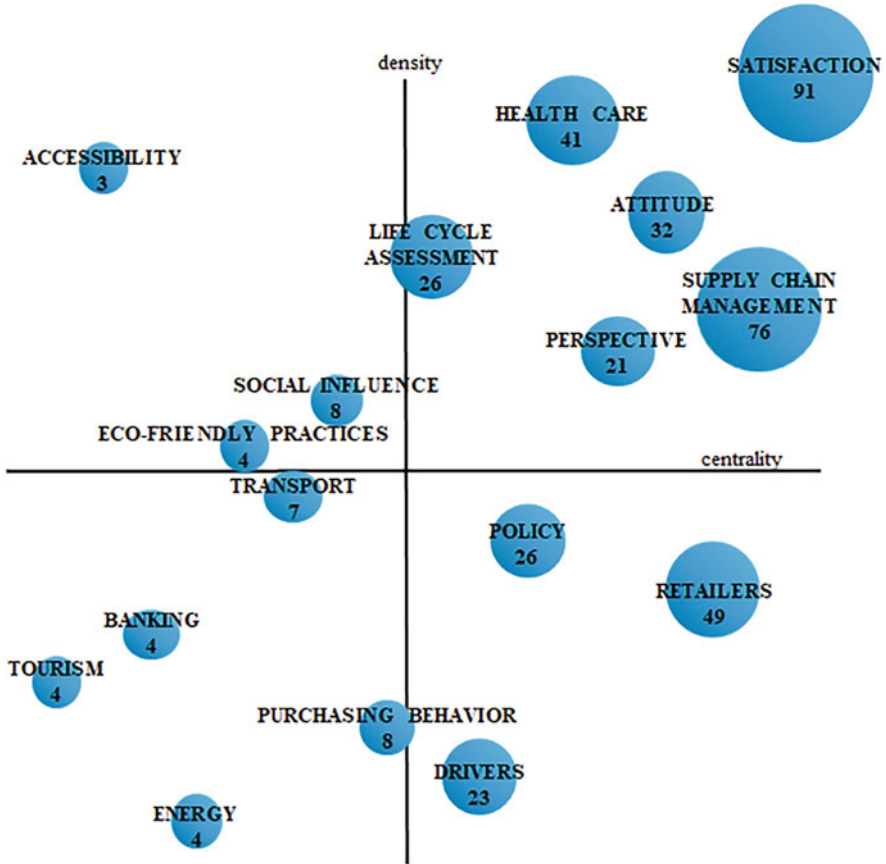
Fig. 1 Strategic diagram of sustainability. Source: the authors

(2006) and Hu (2006) addressed the urban and social impacts of the spatial retail evolution given their close connection and ability to reciprocally influence each other.

The strategic diagram in Fig. 1 shows the weight and relevance of each issue. These four-matrix quadrants have been obtained based on two parameters: centrality and density (Callon et al., 1991). Centrality measures the degree of interaction among clusters (or themes), that is, the strength of the link that a theme has with the others (external links). A theme with a high degree of centrality can be considered essential in the development of the entire field of research. Density measures the internal strength of a cluster, which means the strength of the links between the keywords that describe the theme (internal links). Therefore, it is a measure of the degree to which the theme has been developed (Nova-Reyes et al., 2020).

The upper right quadrant shows the key themes because they possess high centrality and density. Thus, these are of utmost importance for the sustainability

topic and are well developed by scholars to provide the theoretical basis for its consolidation. In particular, "satisfaction", with 91 contributions, appears to be the central theme on which researchers' efforts were focused, followed by supply-chain management (76 contributions) and health care (41 contributions). Studies on attitude (32 contributions), life-cycle assessment (26 contributions), and perspective (21 contributions) are also worthy of note.

The upper left quadrant hosts the niche or marginal themes in the field under investigation. These include the themes of accessibility (3 contributions), eco-friendly practices (4 contributions), and social influence (8 contributions).

The lower left quadrant identifies the emerging or declining themes as they show a low level of both density and centrality. These are the topics of purchasing behavior (8 contributions), transportation (7 contributions), tourism (4 contributions), and energy and banking (4 contributions). These themes appear more emerging than declining as they identify well-defined sectors of the service industry, thus suggesting the need to contextualize research in the specific field of sustainability application.

Finally, the basic and transversal themes are positioned in the lower right quadrant: retailers (49 contributions, the third-largest topic), policy (26 contributions), and sustainability drivers (23 contributions). These are relevant, but still underdeveloped themes creating a window of opportunity that the authors of this book are trying to seize on. Specifically, this volume is the result of the choral work of a group of scholars associated with the Italian Society of Management (SIMA) and participating in the Retailing & Service Management thematic group. The aim is to provide a structural guide to sustainability in the retail and service industry, with an eye to specific emerging service sectors. Both the strategic and operational levels are explored, as well as the drivers shaping behaviors and the contribution of new technologies to sustainability.

The book is structured in three parts: the first is devoted to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which is concerned with the actions implemented by retail and service enterprises to achieve sustainability; the second regards the management of marketing mix levers to shape consumers' behaviors in a sustainable perspective; the third concerns the exploitation of the potential of technologies applied to sustainability widespread.

In the second chapter, Bravi, Gori, and Musso afford the topic of CSR and analyze the social responsibility practices of several major retailers based on a longitudinal study. The sample represents the most advanced CSR experiences in the retail industry per country. The study aims to verify similarities and differences in the retailers' approaches to defining socially responsible strategies and examine how their strategies have changed over time. The good news is that the retailers go far beyond the limits imposed by law based on their CSR strategies. Moreover, their sustainability mindset evolved towards committing to social and environmental issues, thereby overcoming formal and showcase interventions.

The third chapter sheds light on the relationship between employees' perceived CSR and job satisfaction in the retail industry. The systematic literature review made by Castaldo, Ciacci, and Penco demonstrates that perceived CSR positively impacts

job satisfaction, often with the mediation of organizational constructs. Moreover, addressing the service management literature, the authors present a conceptual model considering CSR, job satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and performance in the same framework. The well-done aim is to offer a complete picture of the system of relationships existing between stakeholder-related concepts (e.g., employees' perception of CSR, their job satisfaction, and customer satisfaction) and organization-level factors (e.g., performance).

In the fourth chapter, Angelini and Nieri contextualize the topic of sustainability in the banking industry to give substance to the idea that it is possible "to do good while doing well." This is especially true for reputation, image, trust, and resources, all very sensitive issues for banks given the financial scandals in recent years. As a result, they are strongly committed to CSR to regain corporate reputation and image, as well as a positive financial performance over time.

The contribution by Mazaj, Grosso, and Castaldo (chapter five) closes the first part of the book by investigating the effect of a "black swan," such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on sustainability management. Management literature states that an external shock accelerates innovation processes at organizational and societal levels. Furthermore, recent studies stress that the latest health emergency spurred new policies and pushed heterogeneous actors of diverse business sectors to reflect on sustainability practices. The study focuses on the retail industry and lists potential research directions that scholars may consider for a deeper analysis of the COVID-19's impact on retail sustainability practices.

The second part of the book opens with the contribution of Vergura and Zerbini (chapter six) who address the environmental impact of e-commerce, an issue of utmost relevance given the increasing penetration of this sales channel. A conceptual model to investigate consumers' propensity to pay a small voluntary monetary contribution to offset the pollution generated by online purchases is proposed. The chapter clarifies the drivers that shape consumers' behaviors and the links among them, providing valuable insights to online retailers to encourage sustainability among their customers.

In the seventh chapter, Qualizza and De Luca put small local shops on the spot as they are fundamental spaces for socializing and supporting the community, with a view to social sustainability. The aim is to contribute to the knowledge of the urban retailing context from the perspective of social sustainability, especially as regards the quality of life. The authors succeed in this task by introducing—through field research on a historic town center—the consideration that every visit to an urban center, for shopping or other purposes, can be read in terms of a social sustainability experience. The knowledge of various shopping profiles could help to develop platforms of opportunities based on communities of place in a socially sustainable perspective.

The last chapter of the second part, written by Murtas, Pedeliento, and Andreini (chapter eight), deals with packaging-related environmental issues. Under the pressure of policymakers and consumers, companies and retailers are adhering to the principles of eco-friendly packaging to develop a sustainable image which may yield a broader competitive advantage. The authors review the extant literature on

the topic to investigate consumers' responses to environmentally friendly packaging to give valuable guidance to all firms and retailers striving to fulfil eco-friendlier packaging standards.

The third part of the book begins with the contribution of Caboni and Bruni (chapter nine), who explore the adoption of augmented reality (AR) for sustainable retailing, highlighting the opportunities and limitations of the application. Specifically, the intersections between the actual knowledge of the AR role in the retail industry and the 3Ps (Planet, People, and Profit) principle for sustainability in the business context are highlighted.

The last chapter of the book, by Dasmi, Acuti, Grazzini, and Aiello, (chapter ten) explores consumers' reactions and moral emotions evoked by the use of shocking images to communicate issues related to plastic waste. This is a largely under-researched topic in the literature; hence, the objective of this work is to fill this gap. Specifically, the chapter contributes in improving the understanding of which moral emotions are evoked by shockvertising and what the object of such emotions is. Now, companies know that shocking images arouse, for the most part, negative emotions and, in particular, contempt and anger. They are functional to capture users' attention, generate a discussion on the plastic issue, and enhance consumers' awareness.

That is the end of the presentation of the contents of the book; at this point, we can only wish you to enjoy the reading!

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Corporate Social Responsibility: A Longitudinal Analysis in the Retail Sector

Laura Bravi, Riccardo Gori, and Fabio Musso

Abstract Today, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a central topic in corporate management, such that it has favored the transition from the idea of organizational culture to that of a responsible corporate culture. The aim of this study is to analyze the social responsibility practices of several major retailers to verify similarities and differences in their approaches to defining socially responsible strategies and examine how this strategy has changed over time. The analysis is based on a longitudinal study that compares the CSR-related practices of 12 large retailers from five countries. Combining multiple case studies with a longitudinal analysis offers the opportunity to identify patterns indicative of dynamic processes, providing a close-up view of those patterns as they evolve over time. The companies analyzed are assumed to represent the most advanced CSR experiences in the retail industry and in their country of origin. The results show that these organizations go far beyond the limits imposed by law based on their CSR strategies. They evolved towards committing to social and environmental issues, thereby overcoming formal and showcase interventions, which were more frequent in the past.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility · Longitudinal analysis · Retail sector · Corporate strategies

1 Introduction

Both according to the literature and field research, it appears that over the last two decades, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a central theme in corporate management. It determines the transition from the concept of

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organizational culture, mainly of an endogenous nature (i.e., connected to the functioning of organizations) (Frost et al., 1985; Eisenberg & Riley, 2001), to that of responsible corporate culture (the result of an exchange with the environment), assuming strategic importance (Frederick, 2008; Swanson, 2014). The main idea underlying the concept of the "triple bottom line" (Elkington, 1994, 2013) is the pursuit of three types of results: economic (the creation of economic-company income, a primary condition for survival), environmental (limitations of the environmental impact of corporate decisions, in particular, those relating to production processes, the use of materials, product design), and social decisions (the satisfaction of the expectations of stakeholders relevant to the company) (Arrigo, 2005; Księżak & FischBach, 2017).

CSR is not easy to apply in companies since the primary concern for entrepreneurs is to reduce the gap between costs and revenues; social considerations are often secondary (Laudal, 2011; Goyal & Kumar, 2017). In fact, some companies implement CSR actions only to imitate the strategies put into practice by so-called first movers—if they do not follow the same path, they could experience a competitive disadvantage (Popoli, 2011; Kopel, 2021). However, this method is of dubious effectiveness, as it is known that consumers do not reward companies that adopt CSR policies merely to enhance their image instead of their firm convictions to behave in socially responsible ways. Many other entrepreneurs, on the other hand, have taken the opposite path, as they have understood the value and potential of CSR long ago (Deepa & Chitramani, 2015; Nyame-Asiamah & Ghula, 2019).

According to the literature, another variable that leads companies to consider social issues is competition, which drives companies to differentiate and qualify their offers through the certification of social responsibility (Albareda, 2013; Souza-Monteiro & Hooker, 2017). Large multinationals, including large grocery retailers, were among the first to adopt a policy of social responsibility (Gheribi, 2017). This choice is able to bring considerable benefits of various kinds, including an improved image and reputation of the company by promoting customer loyalty, effective management of human resources, respect for human rights, fairness in the redistribution of benefits among all actors in the supply chain (Musso & Risso, 2006; Costa & Menichini, 2013; Arevalo & Aravind, 2017), protection of the environment and the efficient use of natural resources (Risso, 2007; Kolk, 2016; Shahzad et al., 2020), and better management of business risk and relations with financial institutions (with consequently greater attractiveness of the company in the financial market) (Księżak, 2016; Chatzoglou et al., 2017).

In this way, a new form of competition has been established between companies based on their social and environmental choices, which can significantly help differentiate one product from another (Flammer, 2015). In recent years, there has been a rapid rise in the global fair-trade market; however, with reference to the context of large retailers, this is not a recent phenomenon (Raynolds et al., 2007; Pepe et al., 2010; Doherty et al., 2015). Until the 1980s, eco-friendly, organic, and fair-trade products were sold in specific shops or directly by farmers. Starting in the 1990s, these products entered large supermarkets, also under private labels (Moreno-Gavara & Jimenez-Zarco, 2016).

According to Becchetti and Rosati (2007), the decision of large retailers to include fair-trade products in their assortment is made through the process of ethical imitation. This is a choice with significant consequences given that it helps fair-trade importers reduce distribution bottlenecks caused by the limited number of points of sale dedicated to fair trade (Musso & Risso, 2013).

The choice of part of the fair-trade movement to also distribute products through large-scale distribution has been criticized both by other parts of the same movement (Becchetti & Rosati, 2007; Bezençon, 2011) and by consumers. This position is supported by the thesis that the social responsibility of small independent specialized stores is superior (for example, owing to their exclusive sale of fair-trade products and assiduous commitment to their knowledge and promotion) to that of large retailers (whose inclusion of fair-trade products in their assortments is less assiduously promoted) (Wilkinson, 2007; Moreno-Gavara & Jimenez-Zarco, 2016). Moreover, some authors argue that consumers are unwilling to buy certain products due to the insufficient perceived social returns of manufacturing companies (Meijer & Schuyt, 2005). According to this perspective, social benefits must reach a certain level to be acknowledged by consumers.

It should be stressed that we cannot speak of "responsible large retailing" if the entire upstream chain is not responsible. Therefore, it seems appropriate to mention the concept of supply chain sustainability (Jadhav et al., 2019; Anderson et al., 2020) before describing the CSR practices of large retailers.

The concept of supply chain sustainability has developed alongside that of CSR and has received considerable attention in the industrial world. In fact, an increasing number of companies are implementing annual social reports, sustainability strategies and codes of conduct derived from national legislative impositions, international conventions, standards, or principles such as Social Accountability 8000, ISO 14001, and Global Reporting Initiative (Mota et al., 2015; Martins & Pato, 2019; Murmura & Bravi, 2020). "In a supply chain context, a responsible company is one that is able to systematically create better relationships with the overall environment in which it operates. According to this logic, a deep awareness of the business environment, including its supply chain, is a crucial precondition to be effectively 'responsible'" (Musso & Risso, 2013, p. 23).

Strong integration between the internal and external environment of the company is required to apply a sustainable supply chain that utilizes certain mechanisms to increase awareness (Faisal, 2010; Perrini, 2005). The internal dimension includes training employees and sharing experiences between groups of workers (Martins & Pato, 2019). For the external dimension, on the other hand, training key suppliers and developing promotion programs through incentives (for example, long-term contracts and large volumes of orders) are considered for all those who implement codes of conduct and periodic reviews of their performance (Zaid et al., 2018).

Alongside these concepts, others have been added such as reverse logistics (i.e., a process that moves products from their natural final destination back in the distribution chain to the initial producer), logistics social responsibility (LSR), and purchasing social responsibility (Ciliberti et al., 2008; Nikolaou et al., 2013; Carter & Jennings, 2002). These concepts come from studies of researchers who have tried

to generalize the defining elements of supply chain sustainability in all industries. However, as stated by Maloni and Brown (2006), it is not possible to find a sustainable business model that fits all companies perfectly. Instead, each specific case must be studied. For this reason, the objective of this study is to analyze the social responsibility practices of some major global companies in the retail sector through a longitudinal analysis. This analysis is intended to verify similarities and differences in these companies' approaches to defining a socially responsible strategy and how such strategies have changed over time.

2   Methodology

2.1   Sample, Data Collection and Analysis

The analysis carried out in this study is based on a longitudinal observation that compares the CSR-related practices of 12 large retailers from five countries. Multiple case studies allow us to study patterns that are common to cases and favor theory-building (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). They also allow us to identify similarities and differences within a group of cases (Chetty & Blankenburg-Holm, 2000). Over time, cross-case analysis enables the identification and analysis of patterns in companies' policies and processes (Aaboen et al., 2012). Combining longitudinal studies with multiple case studies "offers the opportunity to identify patterns indicative of dynamic processes, and the longitudinal study provides a close-up view of those patterns as they evolve over time" (Leonard-Barton, 1990, p. 248). The advantage of this method over single case studies is that the single case studies become too context-specific, which limits the possibilities to generalize the findings to other settings. Therefore, the boundary between the phenomenon and the context may become obscured (Aaboen et al., 2012).

The multi-case study approach followed in this research was based on the progressive focusing model of Sinkovics and Alfoldi (2012), which starts with a thorough literature review and searches for new data patterns that may refine the existing theory. This approach was also considered suitable and, thus, adopted for analyzing issues related to specific contexts (Yin, 2003).

The longitudinal analysis consists of carrying out a new data collection process on the same object of study (in this case, the CSR reports of the 12 selected companies) after a given time. The results of "time t" (in this analysis, 2012) are then compared with those of "time $t + x$" (in this analysis, 2018) (Golding et al., 2001). For the purposes of the longitudinal analysis, documents provided by Deloitte on its website were considered, studied, and analyzed. We also used public-domain data that can be consulted in the relevant CSR reports of the selected companies as a sample. More specifically, regarding Deloitte's "Global Powers of Retailing 2013: Retail Beyond," the data refer to the 2011 fiscal year ending in June 2012. Meanwhile, for the "Global Powers of Retailing 2019," the data refer to the 2017 fiscal year ending in June 2018. The main sources of financial data and other information

used by Deloitte come from annual reports, Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) filings, press releases and information sheets of companies or company websites. If information issued by companies was not available, other publicly available sources were used, including estimates from trade journals, industry analyst reports, and press interviews.

For data analysis, a content analysis approach has been developed (Prasad, 2008). Content analysis may be seen as a method where the content of the message forms the basis for drawing inferences and conclusions about the content (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1976). In this study, a conventional approach to content analysis has been used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Conventional content analysis is generally used with a study design whose aim is to describe a phenomenon, in this case the social responsibility practices of some of the major global companies in the retail sector. Using this methodology, researchers avoid preconceived categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), instead allowing the categories and names for categories to flow from the data. Researchers immerse themselves in the data to allow new insights to emerge (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), also described as inductive category development (Mayring, 2004).

The companies to be analyzed have been identified in the "Global Powers of Retailing" world rankings. This ranking is promoted every year by Deloitte, and it is based on data published annually by companies. The largest retailers of five countries (the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy) have been selected. The selection of leading companies from five different countries was dictated by the intention to identify the most advanced practices in the field of interest. We assumed that the largest companies are also able to express the most advanced policies for CSR through their adequate financial and organizational resources. The choice to analyze the largest companies in each of the selected countries, rather than the largest companies in the world, was due to the need to examine practices considering the cultural and economic context of the country of origin of each company. The five selected countries can express the most advanced business models in the retail sectors. The case of Italy, despite the relatively small size of the leading companies, both in terms of employees and turnover, has been included to consider the cooperative model, which characterizes the two cases analyzed in the country.

The selected sample is shown in Fig. 1 and includes the following companies:

– *Walmart Stores, Inc.* is a US multinational retail chain founded by Sam Walton in 1962 in Rogers, Arkansas. It is the largest retailer in the world. It also owns and operates the retail warehouses of Sam's Club. It has 2.3 million employees and a turnover of $559,150 billion. It currently operates in 27 countries with the following store formats: Walmart Discount Stores, Walmart Supercenters, and Walmart Neighborhood Markets.
– *Carrefour S.A.* is a French chain of supermarkets and hypermarkets founded in Annecy in 1959 by Marcel Fournier and Louis Defforey. It has 321,383 employees and a turnover of $81.245 billion. Currently, it operates in 30 countries

Name of company FY 2011 Retail Revenue (US$M)	Country of origin	Number of employees (2021)	FY 2011 Retail Revenue (US$M)	FY 2017 Retail Revenue (US$M)	FY 2021 Retail Revenue (US$M)	# Countries of operation (2021)	Dominant operational format
Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.	US	2,300,000	446,950	500,343	559,150	27	Hypermarket/Supercenter/Superstore
Carrefour S.A.	France	321,383	113,197	84,916	81,245	30	Hypermarket/Supercenter/Superstore
Costco Wholesale Corporation	US	214,000	88,915	129,025	141,400	12	Cash & Carry/Warehouse Club
The Kroger Co.	US	465,000	90,374	118,982	137,900	1	Supermarket
The Home Depot, Inc.	US	490,600	70,395	100,904	151,200	3	Home Improvement
Walgreens Boots Alliance, Inc.	US	277,000	72,184	99,115	132,500	10	Drug Store/Pharmacy
Aldi Einkauf GmbH & Co. oHG	Germany	148,900	73,375(e)	98,287(e)	117,047 (2020)e	20	Discount Store
Tesco PLC	UK	367,321	101,574	73,961	76,934	10	Hypermarket/Supercenter/Superstore
Auchan Holding S.A.	France	179,590	60,515	58,614(**)	30,544	14	Hypermarket/Supercenter/Superstore
Metro AG	Germany	95,141	92,905	40,961(**)	24,765	30	Cash & Carry/Warehouse Club
Coop Italia	Italy	50,206	16,787(e)	13,593(e)	12,492	1	Hypermarket/Supercenter/Superstore
Conad Consorzio Nazionale, Dettaglianti Soc. Coop. a.r.l.	Italy	65,772	13,329(e**)	13,188(e)	17,798	5	Supermarket

Fig. 1 Sample profile of companies that participated in the longitudinal analysis (Source: elaboration on Deloitte 2013–2019 data and Company Reports). Note: e = estimate; ** = Revenue includes wholesale and retail sales

with supermarkets, hypermarkets, convenience stores, cash and carries, and e-commerce services.

– *Costco Wholesale Corporation*, an American chain of wholesale hypermarkets, was founded by James Sinegal and Jeffrey Brotman in 1983 in Kirkland, Washington. It has 214,000 employees and a turnover of $141,400 billion. It currently operates in 12 countries with the Cash & Carry and Warehouse Club formats.

– *The Kroger Co.* is an American retail chain founded by Bernard Kroger in 1883 in Cincinnati, Ohio. It has over 465,000 employees and a turnover of $137.900 billion. It currently operates in one country with the following three formats: supermarkets, multi-department stores, and price-impact warehouse stores.

– *The Home Depot, Inc.* specializes in products for home improvement, construction, and maintenance founded in Atlanta in 1978 by Arthur Blank, Bernard Marcus, Pat Farrah, and Ron Brill. It has 490,600 employees and a turnover of $151,200 billion. It currently operates in three countries with warehouse stores and neighborhood hardware stores.

– *Walgreens Boots Alliance, Inc.* (called Walgreen Co. until 2014, when the company acquired 55% of Alliance Boots) is an American multinational world leader in the distribution of health and wellness products. With 277,000 employees, the company achieved a turnover of $132.500 billion in 2019. It currently operates in 10 countries with drug stores and pharmacies.

– *Aldi Einkauf GmbH & Co.* is a German multinational retailer specializing in discount stores. Founded by brothers Karl and Theo Albrecht (hence the acronym Albrecht-Discount), the company's first store opened in 1946. It has 148,900 employees and an estimated turnover for 2020 of $117,047 billion. It currently operates in 20 countries with hard discount stores.

– *Tesco PLC* is an internationally active British retailer. This is the UK's first distribution group. The first Tesco store was opened in 1919 in the UK by Jack Cohen. It has 367,321 employees and, a turnover of $76,934 billion. It currently operates in ten countries, and its major operating formats are Tesco Extra (hypermarkets), Tesco Superstore, Tesco Metro, Tesco Express, and One Stop (the latter three are convenience stores).

– *Auchan Holding S.A.* is a French chain of supermarkets and hypermarkets operating at the international level that was founded in 1961 in Roubaix by Gérard Mulliez. In November 2015, it became Auchan Holding, bringing together three companies that carry out complementary activities: Auchan Retail markets everything that is useful in daily life, Oney provides banking services that allow customers to finance their purchases, and Ceetrus is a commercial real estate service. The company has 179,590 employees and a turnover of $30,544 billion. It currently operates in 14 countries with hypermarkets, superstores, supermarkets, and convenience stores.

– *Metro AG* is a German wholesaler founded in 1964 in Mannheim by Otto Beisheim. It has 95,141 employees and a turnover of $24,765 billion. It currently operates in 30 countries with cash and carries and wholesale stores.

– *Coop Italia* is an Italian consortium of cooperatives among consumers involving 115 cooperatives of various sizes. It was founded in 1967 in Rome. It has over 50,000 employees and a turnover of $12,492 billion. It currently operates in one country with hypermarkets, superstores, and supermarkets.
– *Conad Soc. Coop. a.r.l.* (an acronym of Consorzio Nazionale Dettaglianti) is a consortium of cooperatives among retailers. It was founded in Bologna in 1962 by 14 purchasing groups from northern Italy as a coordination structure. It has over 65,000 employees and a turnover of $17,798 billion. It currently operates in five countries with superstores, supermarkets, and superettes.

2.2 Conceptual Model Developed

The choice to focus on the retail sector is because it is characterized by companies that have to deal with a large number of stakeholders and that play a dual role. On the one hand, they constantly communicate with consumers, for whom the information and image of the company are decisive in the choice of products, thus playing a guarantee role for the products marketed. On the other hand, retailers act as intermediaries in the supply chain of consumers, and, for this reason, they also pay significant attention to issues related to the social responsibility of the companies with which they are linked. Therefore, the responsible behavior of retailers is a key aspect of this sector.

Starting from these premises, the purpose of this work is to analyze and compare the social responsibility practices of some of the leading companies in the retail sector, using a longitudinal analysis, in order to understand similarities and differences in their socially responsible strategy and how this has changed over time.

To this end, a conceptual model has been developed based on the four areas of influence on CSR introduced by Haigh and Jones (2006) and the analysis framework of Kolk et al. (2010). The model consists of four macro-areas (see Table 1): (1) company; (2) products and assortments; (3) social commitment; and (4) environmental commitment. Each of these macro-areas is further divided into items to aid a

Table 1 Conceptual model for the comparative analysis of CSR

Macro-area	Commitment
1. Company	1.1 Internal organization
	1.2 Family, social and stakeholder context
2. Products and assortments	2.1 Relationship with suppliers and degree of control
	2.2 Consumer protection
	2.3 Communication policies
3. Social commitment	3.1 Charity and community services
	3.2 Educational initiatives
4. Environmental commitment	4.1 Energy saving
	4.2 Emissions, waste and recycling

more in-depth analysis of all the characteristics of the socially responsible behavior of retailers.

The "company" macro-area is divided into "internal organization" and "family, social and stakeholder context." The first commitment includes all aspects related to employees and their lives in the company (e.g., respect for employees, their involvement in strategic choices, working hours), their health and safety (e.g., conditions of the working environment), training (e.g., improvement of skills, career opportunities), and equal opportunities (e.g., based on their sex or race). The second commitment refers, on the one hand, to benefits for family members and employees (e.g., pension programs, insurance, complementary health insurance, family assistance programs, childcare) and, on the other hand, to initiatives for stakeholders (e.g., relationships with and attention paid to interested parties, creation of value for shareholders).

The second macro-area, "products and assortments," is divided into "relationship with suppliers and degree of control," "consumer protection," and "communication policies." The first commitment is focused on suppliers (e.g., selection and control of suppliers on the basis of socially responsible criteria, codes of ethics, traceability of materials, protection of minors and local suppliers). The second commitment concerns consumers (e.g., after-sales services, consumer protection, privacy, labelling, sustainable packaging, organic products, and own brand products). The third commitment concerns the ways in which the company communicates its offers (e.g., use of online and offline channels, diversification of offers, interacting with and listening to customers, loyalty, transparency, trust, and reliability).

The third macro-area, "social commitment," focuses on "charity and community services" and "educational initiatives." The first commitment concerns solidarity and charity programs (e.g., fundraising, sponsorships, low or non-profit initiatives). The second examines the educational activities that the company undertakes for the benefit of the community (e.g., raising awareness of healthy lifestyles, cultural initiatives of public utility or interest).

Finally, the fourth macro-area, "environmental commitment," focuses on "energy saving" and "emissions, waste and recycling." The first commitment deals with alternative energy solutions (e.g., renewable energy sources, monitoring). The second considers the impact and the sustainable and reuse capacity of companies (e.g., greenhouse gas emissions, building materials for new openings or renovations, logistics, packaging solutions, separate waste collection).

3   2012–2018 CSR Report: Longitudinal Analysis

3.1   Company: Internal Organization

Regarding the data reported in the 2012 CSR reports, each of the selected retailers has a set of principles and methods that governs their employees and establishes their duties, rights, and working conditions. Mutual respect and dignity are the basis of the

values that distinguish the sample of analyzed companies. Almost all retailers cite compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, some companies, such as Walmart and Groupe Auchan, do not refer to the protection of workers' rights in their 2012 social responsibility report; instead, they report it on the principles that guide the choice of suppliers. Overall, it can be said that the common goal of all companies is to create a serene, friendly, stimulating work environment in which employees can grow professionally, develop their skills, work peacefully and aspire to attain leadership positions.

The active participation and involvement of employees represent another very important topic. All companies, with the exceptions of Conad, Costco, Kroger, and Metro, have in their 2012 CSR reports at least one reference to the centrality of their employees. All retailers are committed to developing their employees' skills and offering them career opportunities and training initiatives. In particular, Metro uses e-learning and the "Metro University Boarding," Walmart collaborates with universities and training institutes to develop mentoring programs, and Tesco established the "Tesco Academy Online" in 2011.

Racial and gender discrimination are contrasted with various programs and initiatives undertaken by companies. Carrefour, with the "Women Leaders" program, aims to encourage a more balanced combination of men and women in its management team. Metro offers people with disabilities or health problems the opportunity to be part of the job market. Group Auchan also employs people with disabilities in its supermarkets.

According to the data reported in the 2018 CSR reports, for all the analyzed retailers, ensuring the economic well-being of their employees is a form of investment because offering higher wages than the minimum standards guaranteed by the contract allows a company to build strong links with the community, increase employee loyalty, and strengthen the organization. Also, in 2018, most of the analyzed retailers listened to the opinions of their employees through surveys. The health and well-being of employees in 2018 have important implications for most of the analyzed sample. Metro, which made no reference to this aspect in its 2012 report, changed radically and recently began working hard to implement higher occupational safety management standards.

A fundamental tool for developing the skills and abilities of employees is training, which is positioned at the center of the human resources enhancement policies of all retailers. Much training focuses on health and safety in the workplace. In addition, training is also used to improve customer relationships, product knowledge, and capacity building for digital tools. Unlike in the past, modules have recently been developed to train employees on CSR, both in terms of its social and environmental aspects.

Making staff more competent and professional in the management of commercial dialogue is a commitment that all companies make to their partners and customers. An example is provided by Auchan that created in 2018, the "Auchan Touch" project, with the aim of conveying the passion of the retailer to employees who work at the forefront with customers, partners, and stakeholders. Through this project, the company offers an extensive training program based on the development

of knowledge and skills in the key areas of food safety and quality, digital transformation, and customer relations. The common goal of all retailers is to build a learning-rich environment in which employees and leaders are prepared to succeed, are motivated to serve customers well and offer opportunities for growth.

Appreciating the diverse backgrounds, experiences, knowledge, and skills of all employees and guaranteeing equal employment opportunities and equal treatment to all individuals is done by the entire sample analyzed today. When diversity is appreciated, decisions are made within companies regardless of gender, race, language, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, or disabilities. The common goal is to achieve gender equality and offer a wide range of job opportunities for workers of all ages and aspirations, from teenagers looking for their first job to experienced career professionals and seniors who wish to stay active and connected in their communities. Today, the corporate strategies of the world's top retailers involve making diversity a business asset.

3.2 Company: Family, Social, and Stakeholder Context

The analyzed companies are active in the social context towards the families of their employees through health insurance, subsidized pension schemes, family assistance programs, insurance services, and scholarships. The general objective of companies is to guarantee their employees have a good standard of living by providing satisfactory salaries and benefits. In the reports of almost all the analyzed retailers, the commitment of the companies to create value for the shareholders is mentioned, though not in detail. However, most retailers emphasize their member discount policy.

Later, companies began enforcing their awareness about the need to ensure a better life and good health for their employees. This is why, in 2018, almost all retailers implemented health coverage or additional benefits in all countries in which they operate. Internationalized retailers facing the disengagement of several countries regarding assumptions about health costs started to offer their employees quality health and wellness services at competitive prices, thus preserving their purchasing power and health. Other retailers, like Conad—which, in 2012, made no reference to benefits for family members and employees—changed completely in 2018, offering their collaborators the opportunity to join supplementary pension schemes. Similarly, Tesco increased its commitment to ensuring that employees could benefit from various physical, mental, financial health and wellness services, as well as flexible arrangements to fit their lifestyles.

Also, Coop launched numerous initiatives from 2012 to 2018. In particular, in 2018, Coop collaborated with the Edo Foundation and Elvo Tempia of Biella, thanks to which over 700 workers now benefit from free dermatological examinations. Coop then collaborated with Robintur Travel Partner to offer members a generous offering of social outings, trips, and stays in Italy and abroad. During the years, Coop has reserved numerous initiatives for its members, such as a 5% discount on all

expenditures, three 10% discount coupons per year, the assignment of 110 scholarships of total 50,000 euros for employees' children; personal micro-loans of up to 3000 euros, the "Coop Voce" mobile phone service that allows members and customers to access competitive promotional packages. Moreover, Coop launched the free "ViviBici" application that can be used to track motor activity and allows users to convert biking or walking activities into minutes of national calls or national internet traffic and a free service for shopping online and collecting it in the store comfortably by car known as "Coop Drive."

Kroger is also very keen on the physical, economic, and financial well-being of its employees. Differently from what can be seen in the company's 2012 report, in 2017, it started offering benefits to help employees to save money, continue their education, and take care of themselves and their families. Kroger also helps its collaborators through the Helping Hands fund, which, in 2017, provided $2.4 million in financial assistance to over 2600 employees.

As evidence of how much the analyzed companies have assumed responsibility for the lives of their employees, the initiatives taken by The Home Depot are also worth reporting. In 2018, The Home Depot launched an updated parental leave policy that provides 6 weeks of 100% paid leave to all parents, plus an additional 6 weeks of 100% paid maternity leave to all mothers after the birth of their children.

The expansion of the importance of the family, the social context, and relationships with stakeholders for the entire analyzed sample indicates that the gaps identified in the 2012 CSR reports have been largely filled and sometimes overcome. In particular, Costco, which made no reference to this aspect in 2012, now guarantees numerous services to all its employees and has a portfolio of over 1300 treatments and research centers of its own.

Finally, another detail that was overlooked in the 2012 reports (creating value for shareholders) has gained relevance in the 2018 CSR reports, as can be seen especially in the experiences of Carrefour and Walmart. These differences show how corporate welfare has changed. Employees are placed at the center of company policies—listening to their needs and looking for solutions that support them in different areas are the starting point for connecting the company with its employees. However, these efforts require internal communication, which must be conceived as a fundamental element of companies' organizational structures.

3.3 Products and Assortments: Relations with Suppliers and Degree of Control

In the sections of the 2012 CSR reports dealing with companies' relations with suppliers, the watchword for retailers was "responsible supply"—or, rather, the imposition of quality and social ethical standards that establish long-term relationships of trust. To this end, retailers established a code of ethics or a detailed list of requirements ranging from respect for human rights to responsible production chain

management. Along the supply chain, there are four main areas in which the responsible management of resources is activated: (a) cultivation and production of products, (b) logistics, (c) site management, and (d) waste disposal. Suppliers must ensure quality, safe and healthy products and raw materials and minimize the environmental impacts of the production phase, during the transport of goods and in the waste-disposal phase. In particular, Carrefour, Conad, and Coop promote environmentally friendly agriculture, define the production conditions of the agricultural sector with respect for natural resources, promote the development of sustainable supply chains and have responsible fishing policies. Costco and Metro also work to protect fish species and the marine ecosystem.

Suppliers are periodically checked on, for example, the use of pesticides or substances potentially dangerous to human health, as the nutritional, organoleptic, technological, and health quality of the products sold depend on such matter, as does the reputation and credibility of retailers.

Collaborations with local suppliers were clearly declared in 2012, demonstrated by the presence of products from local suppliers on the shelves of almost all the analyzed retailers. The relationship with local suppliers is considered central, with a focus on the quality of products, the quality of relations, and the desire to be part of the social and economic community of the territories in which the retailers operate. The enhancement of local communities is one of the ethical and moral principles defined in the code of ethics and behavior of Auchan, Conad, Metro, Tesco, The Home Depot, and Walgreens Boots Alliance. For example, Auchan develops local products that are grown or manufactured near the stores, thereby engaging in direct partnerships with small suppliers. These products meet the strong expectation of the inhabitants, who are eager to consume products from their region, both to support local employment and preserve the environment by purchasing products with a reduced carbon impact.

The 2018 CSR reports showed increased attention to qualified relationships with suppliers. In all the reports, complete and detailed information regarding the relationships and the degree of control of suppliers can be found. The increasingly strict regulations in terms of the control and selection of the supplier portfolio on the one hand and companies' standards that require high levels of efficiency, on the other hand, have led to increasingly accurate decisions. In 2018, all the analyzed retailers had a supplier rating system based on a detailed classification matrix of standards. These standards include prohibiting any form of forced labor and any form of slavery or trafficking of human beings, opposing discrimination in any form, ensuring that working hours do not exceed applicable legal requirements, prohibiting child labor, creating safe and healthy work conditions, and prohibiting corruption. Moreover giving workers the freedom of association and recognition of the right to collective bargaining, complying with applicable laws and regulations on environmental protection and committing to improving the sustainability of products.

An additional area of commitment in 2018 reports is that of traceability. In this regard, rules and processes have been improved in order to ensure complete control of all phases of supply chains. It can be concluded that different retailers strive more than ever to be responsible global citizens. Exploring ways to reduce their ecological

footprints, procuring goods responsibly, and preserving natural resources have become part of the core business practices of all analyzed retailers.

3.4 Products and Assortments: Consumer Protection

Consumer protection by retailers emerges in many ways (e.g., through the guarantee of hygiene and safety, product labelling, careful packaging and offering a full range of organic products and the brand's own products). In 2012, to ensure the maximum safety of consumers and predict risks, Carrefour introduced procedures with the aim of managing any non-conformity that could be detected through periodic analyses by independent laboratories, monitoring networks and dialogue with consumers, shops, and suppliers.

Product safety emerges as the primary commitment to consumers. At the very least, all retailers comply with national legislation and safety and hygiene regulations. However, established internal regulations often go beyond those required by legislation. In fact, most companies use a special management system that allows them to identify any suspicious products, stop selling them, and inform customers about the products that need to be returned. In addition to having suppliers demonstrate compliance with strict manufacturing standards for food safety, Walmart supports research and develops additional science-based food and raw material safety requirements. The company has also increased these activities over time, citing them as relevant parts of its program in the 2018 report.

As mentioned above, customer protection is also achieved by creating innovative packaging that is sustainable (e.g., by reducing or eliminating unnecessary outer envelopes or using recycled materials), easy to use, and useful for rapid product recognition. Such packaging contains nutritional information and communicates a healthy lifestyle. Carrefour, Costco, and Coop create sustainable and easily manufactured (or recyclable) packaging. From a survey carried out in 2012 in France, it was revealed that about 25% of all consumers look for products whose packaging has the lowest possible environmental impact. Therefore, Carrefour listened to customers and worked to design innovative packaging that respects the environment and is safe and easy to use. This packaging also reduces or eliminates external envelopes and reflects a preference for single materials and the use of certified and recycled materials.

The theme of packaging is also linked to that of branded products and organic products. Many companies, such as Carrefour, Aldi, Auchan, Conad, and Coop, developed their own branded products to ensure quality and reliability at a competitive price. These product lines are generally successful in sales, and consumer surveys indicated the consumer's satisfaction.

According to the results that emerged from the comparison of the data in the 2018 CSR reports, the EU Regulation 2016/679—better known as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)—which came into effect in May 2018 had an important role. The implications for the retail industry have been relevant. With

the evolution of new technologies, personal data have taken on a significant role, including data related to electronic communications, as well as data that allow geolocation and provide information on places frequented and movements. As a consequence, all retailers improved their privacy protection systems.

Also, retailers showed an increased commitment to packaging in 2018, aiming to reduce the size and materials and use safer materials in non-food products. Carrefour planned to make the packaging of its own brand products reusable, recyclable, or compostable by 2025. In 2018, Aldi, according to the "avoid, reuse, recycle" principle, declared its aim to reduce the use of packaging material used for its own brand products by 30% by the end of 2025. Tesco operates a packaging strategy based on a "4R" approach: remove, reduce, reuse, recycle. More specifically, Tesco simplifies packaging materials and designs. The goal is to avoid using more packaging than is necessary, and what is used must come from sustainable sources. Furthermore, as much as possible, all packaging must be reusable or recyclable.

Following the reduction, reuse and recycling approach, retailers are working to reduce the environmental impacts of packaging by reducing unnecessary materials, increasing the recyclability of packages, and increasing the amount of recycled content in the materials used.

3.5   Products and Assortments: Communications Policies

With regard to communication policies, the analysis conducted for the 2012 CSR reports highlights a general trend towards the commitment of retailers to oppose acts of unfair competition and respect national antitrust legislations. Moreover, they made initiatives to sensitize consumers to sustainability issues by increasing their CSR actions to improve their image and reputation. Retailers understand that information must be accurate, correct, easily understandable, compliant with misleading advertising law and communicated clearly and transparently. However, investments in communication and advertising initiatives are quite different. Most of the companies promote specific actions, such as communication codes, promotional flyers, newsletters, press, radio, and websites. Aldi, however (and consistently with its position as a hard discounter), claimed to invest little in communication and public relations. There was no marketing department in the Aldi group, and the company tried to keep communication costs as low as possible.

According to the 2018 CSR reports, for most of the retailers, no data emerged with which real considerations could be defined. While more initiatives introduced by Aldi can be observed, this can be interpreted more as a consequence of the retailer's repositioning more than as a consequence of increased commitment to CSR communication. This notion is in line with the wheel of retailing theory (Patton & DeLozier, 2015).

In 2018 reports, some retailers differ by showing performing results for communication policies on CSR. In 2017, Conad began investing a lot of resources in the renewal of its brands. In particular, in recent years, a large part of product innovation

has been aimed at diversifying offers to meet the increasingly personalized needs of consumers. Brand proposals are based on the needs of new types of consumption, with attention given to those that are more sensitive to environmental and sustainability issues.

The major difference between 2012 and 2018 data for all the retailers is that the development of social media changed the way in which brands and consumers interact, giving greater importance to consumers' opinions. This requires companies to follow a customer-oriented approach, placing ever-higher expectations on brands, which must be authentic, respond to consumer concerns and take a stand on issues relevant to social and cultural responsibility. Consumer confidence has become crucial to brand success. Faced with the implementation of new technologies and services that improve the consumer experience, companies need to be authentic and reliable. On the other hand, it is not easy for retailers to gain consumer trust—doing so involves understanding each individual consumer and constantly satisfying their expectations.

3.6   Social Commitment: Charities, Community Services, and Educational Initiatives

The social commitment of retailers in local communities is divided into two types of actions. Solidarity and charity initiatives, fundraising, and community services are one type; educational awareness activities are the other. Solidarity and charitable initiatives are developed both locally and internationally. In 2012, each of the analyzed retailers created a foundation that deals with solidarity projects, fundraising, or food distribution for people in need. The projects were characterized by responses to the needs of the territories in the health sector (e.g., contributing to the purchase of equipment for hospitals or home care), culture (e.g., reading books for people with mobility difficulties), and social issues (e.g., supporting elderly or disabled people).

Community awareness campaigns have also been conducted in order to encourage customers to recycle their waste and save electricity, as well as to improve consumer education and food education (thus promoting a healthy and correct lifestyle) and to encourage sports activities and respect the environment, such as by reducing water consumption.

The 2018 CSR reports showed that charity and awareness initiatives implemented by retailers had increased considerably—and, above all, they resulted largely detailed compared to the past. Being a responsible business means being close to people not only at the point of purchase but also in critical situations. Many humanitarian and solidarity activities have been financed, education campaigns have been launched, and fundraising initiatives have been promoted in the medical and research fields.

In 2018, to make continuous progress towards the efficient and sustainable use of resources, Metro, Carrefour, Auchan, and Tesco were involved in the "Retail Forum for Sustainability," which includes a series of ambitious and specific environmental commitments. The Retail Forum for Sustainability is a multi-stakeholder platform that was established to exchange best practices on sustainability among actors in the European retail sector and identify opportunities and barriers that could favor or hinder sustainable consumption and production.

3.7   Environmental Commitment: Energy Saving, Emissions, Waste, and Recycling

To be truly responsible and gain the trust and loyalty of consumers and stakeholders, retailers must be engaged in preserving the environment, among other issues. In the analysis model used, the two commitments (energy saving and emissions, waste, and recycling) were divided during the research phase. However, one commitment implies the other. The analysis of the 2012 CSR reports on environmental commitment shows how companies were already active and taking various measures in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, the results in the 2018 CSR reports indicate significant improvements.

In 2012, companies tried to save energy through centralized management systems that automatically adjust heating, air conditioning, and lighting according to their needs while also monitoring consumption and avoiding waste. Furthermore, companies were committed to reducing pollution during the transport of goods and separating waste collection by installing recycling areas inside stores.

The analysis of 2018 reports shows a stronger commitment to reduce polluting emissions through multiple initiatives. These include increasing the energy efficiency of buildings, improving the performance of refrigeration systems, maximizing fleet sustainability, improving waste management, achieving electricity savings, contrasting food waste, promoting recycling, implementing new technologies designed to optimize the way energy and natural resources are used, and eliminating disposable plastic items.

Walmart was the first retailer to announce a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Paris agreement. The specific goal is an 18% reduction by 2025 (compared to 2015 levels). The company intends to accomplish this through multiple initiatives, including increasing the energy efficiency of buildings to power 50% of operations with renewable energy by 2025, improving the performance of refrigeration systems and maximizing fleet sustainability. Similarly, Kroger uses the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) waste management hierarchy to guide its work. It received the "US EPA ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year" award for adopting a continuous energy management strategy across its entire portfolio of buildings and plants. The Home Depot follows the GHG Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard protocol, which is adopted by more than 90% of Fortune Global

500 companies, to calculate how many tons of greenhouse gases are emitted from its operations. The Home Depot continuously reviews and refines emissions measurements to reflect business changes and improvements. Because of these initiatives, The Home Depot received an "A" rating from the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) in 2017, reflecting its high level of action on climate change mitigation and transparency.

4   Conclusions

Companies' approaches to corporate social responsibility (CSR) have changed considerably over time. Today, many organizations realize more than ever that in order to legitimize their presence in the market, it is no longer enough to ensure a return only in terms of economic performance. They are required to keep non-speculative behavior and respectful of the environment in which they operate, taking care of stakeholders' interests (Kolk, 2016; Shahzad et al., 2020). Today's economic, social, and environmental landscape is characterized by an unprecedented mix of risks and opportunities. The entire market can be interrupted quickly by countless factors, such as new technology or a sudden lack of natural resources. New markets are emerging rapidly due to megatrends such as population growth, resource scarcity, and global health risks like the COVID-19 pandemic (Jo & Na, 2012; Crane & Matten, 2020). Meanwhile, consumers and investors are increasingly informed and want companies to take responsibility for the pressures exerted on the planet and its population. Meanwhile, the growing technological and digital innovations that have characterized the last few years allow a growing and easier diffusion of sustainable development worldwide. Because of product and process innovation and the digitization of companies and business models, it is possible to save resources; improve the quality of life of workers; improve business efficiency; and greatly reduce consumption, carbon footprints, and waste production (Cyfert et al., 2021).

   Taking a voluntary path towards CSR and considering the growing number of rules drawn up to protect the environment and workers can allow companies to be ready to face future regulatory tightening and obtain a strong competitive advantage. The sample of companies analyzed in the present work allows the CSR actions implemented by some of the largest companies in the world of retailing to be defined and aids the understanding of how they evolved over time. These organizations go far beyond the actions required by law. Companies' commitment to social and environmental issues is aimed to produce long-term collective benefits; it is not reduced to formal and facade interventions adopted in the short term, mainly for opportunistic purposes. This is in line with what has been found by Deepa and Chitramani (2015) and Nyame-Asiamah and Ghula (2019). Companies in the sample are an essential part of the retail sector and represent one of the most advanced CSR business models. These major global companies have already understood the value and potential of CSR, developing proactive CSR strategies. They

consider sustainability not only as a goal to be achieved but as a continuous path, along which the company and its stakeholders try to continuously improve each other. They do this according to a solid corporate culture based on sustainability as found by Frederick (2008) and Swanson (2014).

This research underlines that social reports provide an excellent opportunity for companies to sum up their work, not only from a financial point of view (as can be done with an accounting report) but also from a managerial and administrative one. By integrating the Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact into strategies, policies, and procedures—and by establishing a culture of integrity— companies not only uphold their fundamental responsibilities towards people and the planet, but they also lay a foundation for long-term success (Nason, 2008).

The companies selected for this research exceed the average commitment of retailers as regards CSR involvement. They take a clear position and demonstrate bold leadership to further transform current business models and economies in order to become more inclusive. CSR extends beyond the perimeters of the company and is connected to the local community where it operates. Thus, CSR involves not only employees and shareholders but also a range of other stakeholders, such as business partners, suppliers, customers, and non-governmental organizations representing local communities and the environment.

For the application of a sustainable supply chain, strong integration between the internal and external environment of the company is required, putting into practice mechanisms to increase awareness (Faisal, 2010; Perrini, 2005). As regards the internal dimension, it includes the training of employees and the sharing of experiences between groups of workers (Martins & Pato, 2019). For the external dimension, on the other hand, the training of key suppliers and the development of promotion programs through incentives (for example, long-term contracts and/or large volumes of orders) are considered for all those who implement codes of conduct and periodic review of their performance (Zaid et al., 2018).

The largest retailers bring their contribution to the community, in particular to the local one: a part of the companies provide solidarity and charity initiatives, fundraising, and community services, while another provide educational awareness activities. Among the main efforts carried out we can mention commitment on jobs, salaries, services, and tax revenues, offering professional training, supporting non-profit associations active in environmental protection, providing custodial facilities for the children of employees, forging local partnerships, sponsoring local sporting or cultural events, or making donations to charitable works. The first step they take is to support their employees. In this regard, retailers envisage a series of measures such as the education and training of employees; empowerment of staff; improvement of the information circuit in the company; improved balance between work, family, and free time; greater diversity of human resources; the application of the principle of equality for wages and career prospects for women; participation in benefits and share ownership schemes and the job integration capacity and safety of workplaces.

Another area of commitment is company's relations with its suppliers. Companies are aware that their social images can be damaged by the practices of their

partners and suppliers throughout the production and supply chain. Therefore, they are increasingly adopting codes of conduct related to working conditions, human rights, and environmental protection. These codes must be implemented by suppliers as well as by themselves. All the companies developed a strong strengthening of the attention towards their stakeholders in the period 2012–2018.

Therefore, as found in previous works (Faisal, 2010; Perrini, 2005; Zaid et al., 2018; Martins & Pato, 2019) an effort has been made by all the selected companies in the retail sector to create a strong integration between the internal and external environment putting into practice mechanisms to increase awareness.

In detail, the CSR elements that have been improved in the time period considered are explained.

Employees are placed at the center of company policies. The interest towards employee opinion has increased and almost all retailers have developed surveys to evaluate the well-being of employees, since they have understood that this has implications for the company performance. What is more, during this time period also the importance retailers give to workers' families has been reinforced, developing benefits for employees and family members.

Even if collaborations with local suppliers were clearly reported in 2012, during the time period considered a growing attention to qualified relationships with suppliers has been found, with increasingly strict regulations in terms of control and selection of the supplier portfolio and the development of companies' standards requiring high levels of efficiency.

As for consumer protection, product safety emerges as a primary commitment to consumers, and during the years, retailers have placed their focus on developing innovative and sustainable packaging.

Considering communication policies, the time period 2012–2018 showed the important development of social media as a tool that changed the way in which brands and consumers interact, giving greater importance to consumers' opinions.

Evaluating companies' social commitment, it has been noted that charity and awareness initiatives implemented by retailers had increased considerably, showing the attitude of retailers to be responsible businesses.

Finally, also the environmental commitment of companies seems strongly reinforced during the time period analyzed, with a stronger commitment of retailers to reduce environmental impact through initiatives such as energy efficiency, waste management, electricity savings, and recycling.

The main limitation of the study is the difficulty of measuring the results. The return typically generated by CSR policies is reputational and, therefore, intangible. Since intangible assets are the main element of value creation in many cases, it would be appropriate to conduct an analysis on the perceptions of consumers. All companies, by interfacing with their interlocutors, adopt behaviors that lead stakeholders to formulate value judgments, which impact each company's reputation.

The adoption of social responsibility through self-regulation represents the essence of CSR by allowing companies to better adhere to the typical demands of sustainability in their business. In the past, building trust with consumers was simpler: providing quality products when and where consumers needed them was

enough. Today, the challenges have increased exponentially, and issues such as authenticity, community building, and data security have become fundamental pillars of trust.

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Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility and Job Satisfaction in the Retail Industry: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda

Sandro Castaldo, Andrea Ciacci, and Lara Penco

Abstract This study aims to investigate the relationship between employees' perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) and job satisfaction (JS) in the retail industry. The systematic literature review establishes an overall positive relationship between perceived CSR and JS, but this relationship in the retail sector still needs to be explored. The analysed contributions underline that research focusing on the relationship between CSR and JS in the retail sector does not exist. This systematic literature review demonstrates that perceived CSR positively impacts JS, often with the mediation of organisational constructs. Moreover, addressing the service management literature, the authors present a conceptual model that inserts CSR, JS, customer satisfaction and performance in the same framework. Through this model, we aim to offer a more complete picture of the system of relationships existing between stakeholder-related concepts (e.g. employees' perception of CSR, their job satisfaction and customer satisfaction) and organisation-level factors (e.g. performance).

Keywords Corporate social responsibility · Job satisfaction · Customer satisfaction · Store performance · Store productivity · Store business

1 Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) contributes to the organisation's competitive advantage, creating value for the shareholders and influencing stakeholders' conduct (El Akremi et al., 2018). Many efforts have been made to study CSR in the retail sector (Barone et al., 2007; Castaldo et al., 2009; Vadakkepatt et al., 2021).

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33

However, only a small number of contributions have studied CSR at the individual level in the retail sector. Specifically, few studies have focused on retail from the employees' perspective. In this regard, researchers have directed their interest towards micro CSR—i.e. study of the influence of CSR on employees' attitudes and behaviours (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Zhou et al., 2017). Precisely, this perspective indicates "the study of the effects and experiences of CSR on individuals as examined at the individual level of analysis" (Rupp & Mallory, 2015, p. 216). It assumes that employees' perceptions of organisational activities can affect employee outcomes (Hur et al., 2018).

Employees are considered major internal stakeholders (Aguilera et al., 2007; Liu et al., 2010; Potdar et al., 2020). They are crucial to spreading corporate social values in the working environment. Through their behaviours, they can have a deep impact on organisations' CSR assimilation (El Akremi et al., 2018; Lee & Ha-Brookshire, 2020). The literature focused on employees' perceptions of CSR is still scant. Specifically, some authors have highlighted the need to test models including employees' perceptions of CSR and employee's job-related outcomes (e.g. job satisfaction) (Aguilera et al., 2007; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

To fill this gap, we propose a systematic literature review on CSR and job satisfaction, considering both studies focused on retailing and papers with no reference to the industry. Moreover, addressing the service management literature, the authors present a conceptual model that inserts CSR, job satisfaction, customer satisfaction and performance in the same framework. Through this model, we aim to offer a more complete picture of the system of relationships existing between stakeholder-related concepts (e.g. employees' perception of CSR, their job satisfaction and customer satisfaction) and organisation-level factors (e.g. performance).

2 Retail Industry in the CSR Framework

Following Aguinis' (2011, p. 855) definition, CSR is a set of "context-specific organisational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance". CSR indicates a self-regulating mechanism through which a business adopts responsible behaviours in its processes towards all external and internal stakeholders (Castaldo et al., 2009; Freeman, 2011). Concerning the employees' perspective, many organisations consider CSR as an incentive to attract and retain qualified employees (Bhattacharya et al., 2009). However, the literature shows that CSR does not only affect the perceptions of the potential employees, but it also changes the job-related perceptions of the current employees (Chiang, 2010).

For instance, El Akremi et al.'s (2018) analysis showed the significant indirect effects of employees' CSR perceptions on job satisfaction, mediated by organisational pride. Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017) provided evidence of a direct effect connecting CSR to job satisfaction and organisational commitment in the higher education sector. Other research has supported their findings (Valentine &

Fleischman, 2008; Valentine et al., 2011) by suggesting that an ethical organisation triggers increased job satisfaction. Before them, Gavin and Maynard (1975) found a direct relationship between the extent to which an organisation meets its social obligations and the employees' job satisfaction. Other analyses show that positive CSR perceptions enhance employees' commitment to the organisation (Vlachos et al., 2014), the organisation's attractiveness for people searching for employment (Jones et al., 2014), organisational citizenship behaviours (Aguilera et al., 2007), the quality of (working) life (Kim et al., 2018), the employees' involvement in protecting the organisation as a common good (Potdar et al., 2020), and, as a consequence, the employees' loyalty (Bartels et al., 2015). Aguilera et al. (2007) argued that building a CSR tailor-made working environment is beneficial for employees. A fair working environment positively affects employees' wellbeing in terms of, for example, job satisfaction, stress, health, happiness and emotions. At the same time, an organisation promoting CSR is a context characterised by higher levels of job performance, citizenship behaviour and counter productivity, and lower degrees of turnover and absenteeism. Paruzel et al. (2021) performed a meta-analysis to assess the impact of perceived CSR on the multiple employee-related outcomes identified in the literature. They showed that perceived CSR influences many employee outcomes, such as commitment, job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour, particularly when the relationship is mediated by identification. From these examples, it emerges that an organisation's responsible behaviour positively impacts employees' perceptions.

Beyond this established general trend, CSR achievements may depend on the type of industry (e.g. retail) (Vadakkepatt et al., 2021). Specific industries can show specific characteristics and modes of implementing CSR practices, as well as varying results in terms of outcome. In addition, CSR being a multidimensional construct (El Akremi et al., 2018; Turker, 2009), the various CSR sub-dimensions can produce different effects on diverse constructs' multiple components. For instance, relative to the CSR-job satisfaction relationship, Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017) found that the organisation's economic responsibilities have a stronger impact on career opportunities than workload or any other job satisfaction components. Tamm et al. (2010) showed that career opportunities are comparatively less significant than workload, supervisor and working conditions in defining job satisfaction. These differences could imply that the deep reason for CSR effects is context specific. This is why we believe it is crucial to focus attention on a specific industry to capture the true meaning of the results obtained.

Retailers' position is in the middle of the supply chain. This centrality can partially explain the relevance of the retail sector in studying CSR dynamics. Retailers can leverage the central position among manufacturers, wholesalers, customers and consumers to sustain long-term benefits for society, stakeholders, the environment and the government (Vadakkepatt et al., 2021). Retailers can exploit centrality in the supply chain by partnering with providers defending human rights advocacy and occupational wellbeing. They can also contribute to challenging modern slavery (Bales, 2016) by intelligently managing their supply chain partners to encourage values like sustainability, stakeholders' wellbeing and balanced

economic growth. In the extrema ratio, retailers could stop relationships with supply chain partners that perpetuate human rights violations (Vadakkepatt et al., 2021). In summary, retailers can exploit their pivotal position in the supply chain to legitimise a focus on specific (environmental and social) issues across the supply chain. Yet we note that no contribution exclusively focuses on employees' perceived CSR in the retail industry. This is a relevant gap in the current literature considering the centrality of retailers in driving attention towards CSR issues (Vadakkepatt et al., 2021, p. 63). For this reason, our research aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Is employees' perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) positively related to job satisfaction (JS) in the retail industry?

RQ2: Is the CSR-JS relationship part of a wider model, also including customer satisfaction and company performance?

3   Methodology

To address our research questions, we conducted a systematic literature review focused on the relationship between CSR and JS to investigate if this relationship is part of a more extensive framework that includes the impact of CSR on customer satisfaction and the firm's performance. The search and analysis of the relevant literature have been performed with a threefold aim:

- To assess the conceptual and empirical studies focused on the relationship between employees' perceived CSR and the JS.
- To develop an integrative framework that considers the interface between CSR-JS and other external performance profiles.
- To identify knowledge gaps for future research.

To perform the systematic literature review, we followed a three-step procedure (represented in Fig. 1).

Step 1 consists of identifying the papers to be sampled. We searched by using the Scopus database for scientific papers containing in the title, keywords or abstract the words "corporate social responsibility" or "CSR" combined with the term "job satisfaction". The authors limited the research field to management to preserve consistency with the main topic, and focused on English written articles. The authors did not insert a time filter: therefore, the review includes papers published in all years, from the most dated to the most recent. The authors fixed exclusion criteria to narrow the population to articles published in highly ranked journals (Debellis et al., 2021). Concentrating on the most relevant international management journals enhances the scientific value of the review. The exclusion criterion was that only papers ranked as 2 or above in the ABS Academic Journal Quality Guide were considered.

Fig. 1 The research process

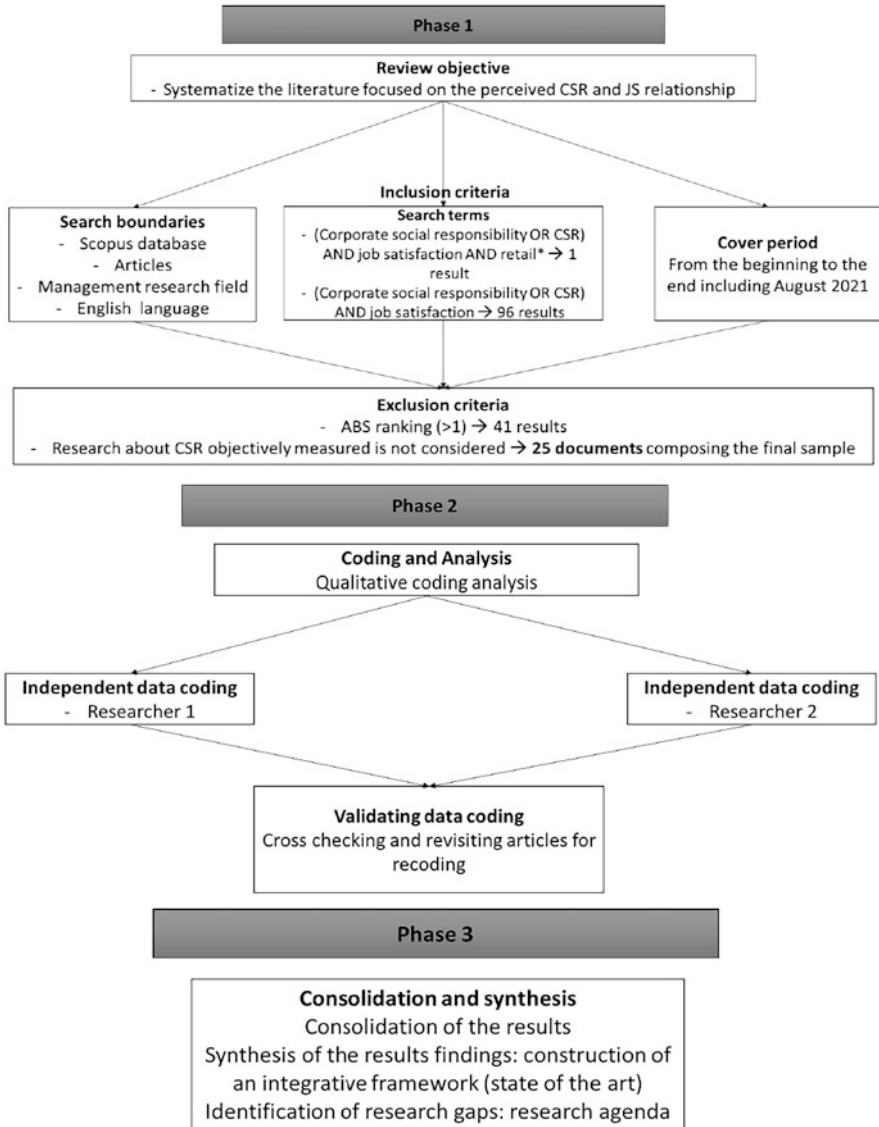Step 2 regards the coding. We performed a qualitative content analysis, paying attention to the content and arguments provided by each contribution. Specifically, we adopted a manual approach through a coding sheet in Excel. The coding of the articles was theory-driven (Debellis et al., 2021; Schilke et al., 2018). Mainly, the authors searched for antecedents, mediators and outcomes of the perceived CSR-JS

relationship to define a more comprehensive path. We also coded the operationalization for each construct and the context of analysis. For each paper, the authors identified the element of interest and filled the specific column of the coding sheet. Two of the authors refined the final coding, independently analysing each article. Any disagreements were resolved after discussion among the three co-authors.

Step 3 regards consolidation and analysis of the most important insights deriving from the contributions.

4   Results

The first search—search string: ("corporate social responsibility" OR CSR) AND "job satisfaction" AND retail*—found only one contribution. This contribution was not published in an ABS 2, 3, 4 or 4* journal. To expand the research boundaries, we removed the keyword "retail*". The search with the new code generated 96 results. Of these, 41 documents met the ABS ranking-based selection criterion, while the other 55 were excluded. Subsequently, we assessed the consistency with respect to our study objectives. Downstream of the assessment, we maintained 25 documents that definitively composed the final sample.

Researchers have recently started to investigate this relationship with a certain regularity. Statistics on publication available on Scopus provide us with some information. Among the articles matching the inclusion criteria, the first was published in 2008 (Valentine & Fleischman, 2008). Subsequently, the publication frequency steadily grew from 2012 to reach two peaks, the first in 2014, when four articles focused on perceived CSR-JS were published, the second in 2020–2021, when five articles per year were published (see Fig. 2). The only year we did not obtain any papers was 2019. This is because our exclusion criteria are strict: while scholarship uninterruptedly continued to study perceived CSR and job satisfaction, taken alone or associated with other concepts, no papers published in 2019 focused mainly on the relationship between perceived CSR and JS. Overall, these descriptive statistics depict a phenomenon to which literature is devoting growing attention.
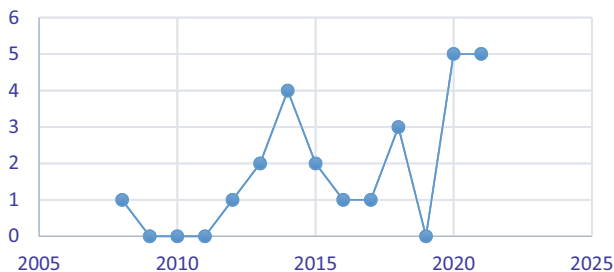

Fig. 2   Frequency of publications on perceived CSR-JS per year

From the descriptive statistics, we can observe that many papers focus on employees as a unit of analysis. Comprehension of the employees' CSR perception-JS relationship has carved out a relevant space in CSR literature. CSR literature demonstrates that employees are assuming a pivotal role in driving the decision-making inside the organisation. Understanding their perception and satisfaction is a priority for corporate management. This growing focus is evidence that employees are an integral part of any decision-making process. At the same time, given the high number of studies focusing on employees' perceptions, future studies may aim to increase the level of pervasiveness. In other words, researchers could concentrate on different levels of employment (e.g. frontline employees, low ranking, executives) to investigate whether rank in the company is a significant moderator in the relationship between perceived CSR and JS.

The following Sects. 4.1 and 4.2 focus on analysing the relationship between perceived CSR and JS as it is conceived in the literature. Our main findings are as follows:

- The perceived CSR-JS relationship has been conceived as both a direct and an indirect one.
- When indirect, trust, organisational justice and identification in the organisation's values are some of the most effective mediators to drive the perceived CSR effect on JS.
- CSR is commonly operationalized as a multidimensional and higher-order construct, while JS is mainly conceived as a unidimensional (single-item) construct.
- The literature currently lacks qualitative contributions.
- Further works should concentrate on the most under-investigated industries (e.g. retail) and countries (e.g. Italy) to uncover context-specific effects due to localised factors (e.g. culture).
- Cross-country, cross-industry, and cross-organisational studies could help scholars to increase their knowledge about the generalizability of the perceived CSR-JS relationship.

4.1 The Relationship Between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Job Satisfaction (JS)

The perceived CSR-JS relationship has been investigated with relatively high frequency in South Korea, which is a very sensitive context to the CSR issues in specific sectors. Europe-based studies are frequent, but empirical evidence is still lacking for several relevant countries. The country of analysis raises important issues about the generalizability of many studies. In general, the results may be influenced by the culture of the reference country. Searching for the effects of different national cultures on the same organisation type is a promising way forward for future research. Cross-country analysis is not the only design to increase the level of generalizability of a work: cross-organisational studies, for example, may help to

strengthen the reliability of the findings. Our review finds that scholars have conceived the perceived CSR-JS relationship as both direct and indirect. In terms of a direct relationship, perceived CSR is an antecedent of JS. Under this perspective, perceived CSR has a direct and positive effect on JS. The extent to which perceived CSR determines an increase of JS depends on multiple factors, such as the industry, the organisation type and the multiple dimensions of the constructs. Another conceptual perspective sees the perceived CSR and JS relationship mediated by specific factors. For example, El Akremi et al. (2018) found that organisational pride is an effective mediator (see also Hyun et al., 2021). Contributions demonstrate that the quality of working life mediates the perceived CSR-JS relationship (Kim et al., 2018, 2020). Trust and identification in the organisation's values are found to be mediators between perceived CSR and JS, along with organisational justice (De Roeck et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2022). Authors also find that CSR initiatives perceived by employees can result in beneficial employee-related outcomes in terms of JS and reduced turnover intention. Specifically, this happens when the organisation fulfils most employees' ideological and developmental job needs (Du et al., 2015). In one case, it has been found that JS is a valid moderator in the organisational citizenship behaviour and CSR relationship (Vizcaíno et al., 2021). Despite many relevant and recent contributions theorising that a direct link bonds CSR and JS, other articles invite researchers to look at this relationship in more depth with the objective of uncovering the remaining hidden elements. This can be done by considering intermediate elements that can alter the perceived CSR-JS relationship or make its existence possible.

4.2   Construct Operationalization, Context and Moderators

Concerning the construct operationalization, researchers build the CSR construct as a multidimensional entity or a unidimensional one through a single item (Golob & Podnar, 2021). The different CSR dimensions can influence JS dimensions with varying strength (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2012). Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017) have demonstrated that the magnitude of influence of perceived CSR can vary depending on facets of JS. This indicates that an analysis of perceived CSR and JS should plumb the depths of these constructs in more detail.

Regarding the context of analysis, several authors seek cross-industry results validation (e.g. Golob & Podnar, 2021; Valentine & Fleischman, 2008; Zhao et al., 2022). Other works focus on the hotel (e.g. Kim et al., 2018, 2020; Zientara et al., 2015) and casino (e.g. Hyun et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2013; Youn et al., 2018). The latter is classified into controversial issues generating responses of distaste, disgust and offence (Wilson & West, 1981) among stakeholders, including customers, investors and employees (Lee et al., 2018). The main causes of distress are gambling, family abuse, embezzlement and other crimes (Song et al., 2013). This is why the association between the casino industry and adoption of CSR practices is so close. The casino represents an environment where CSR initiatives aim at reducing the

consumption of natural resources and compensating the poorly paid, insecure, stressful job, as well as better balancing the work-life rhythms (Zientara et al., 2015, p. 860). However, we note that no contribution exclusively focuses on the retail industry. This is a gap in the current literature if we think about the centrality of retailers in driving attention towards CSR issues (Vadakkepatt et al., 2021, p. 63).

Perceived CSR and JS are two constructs that can be measured using specific scales. Research has led to relevant conclusions about the causal link between the two constructs. This research approach has led to strong theoretical development. However, the literature currently lacks qualitative contributions. Our Scopus search yielded no qualitative contributions analysing the perceived CSR and JS relationship. The most significant problem in this regard is that without the support of qualitative inquiry, the literature may lack attention to the micro and dynamic dimensions of the perceived CSR-JS relationship. This omission can give rise to a disconnect between the empirical findings and the practical implications in the managerial field. How do strong/weak employees' perceptions of CSR materialise in terms of JS? What are the consequences for the firm? What can be done to stimulate the perception of CSR inside and outside the company once socially responsible practices have been adopted? These basic questions represent missing pieces to which research has not yet been able to provide answers. To establish strong roots that lay the groundwork, more attention should be paid to case studies. The analysis, including comparative analysis, of organisations with different characteristics can represent a further qualitative leap in the knowledge developed so far (Table 1).

Figure 3 summarises all the elements influencing the relationship between perceived CSR and JS. They are antecedents of perceived CSR, mediators and outcomes directly impacted by JS. They do not act simultaneously and have not been tested together. This raises a possible future research question. For instance, researchers may test a model involving different configurations of elements compared to those that have been studied until now. In this way, they may check for interdependence in the configurations of elements generating specific results. The right methodological approach to make it possible is the fuzzy qualitative comparative analysis (FQCA) (Nair & Gibbert, 2016), which would allow verification of which elements are more valuable in stimulating and mediating the perceived CSR-JS relationship.

One thing that should be noted is that no moderators in this relationship have been tested. Moderators are variables that systematically affect either the form and/or intensity of a relationship between two constructs (e.g. dependent and independent variables) (Sharma et al., 1981). This represents an issue for further research, as specific moderators may not only influence the relationship between perceived CRS and JS, but also the effects of mediation. In addition, while several mediators have been studied, only two perceived CSR antecedents (ethics programmes and organisational citizenship behaviour) have been tested. This is a significant issue, revealing a gap for future work. In terms of how it concerns the final outcomes of the perceived CRS-JS relationship, the state of the art highlights that only subjective factors have been tested. As raised by other relevant contributions (Aguilera et al.,

Table 1 CSR-JS relationship characteristics in the analysed papers

Authors	Context	CSR-JS Relationship	CSR construct	JS construct	Results
Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017)	University	Direct	Multidimensional	Multidimensional	Different CSR dimensions influence the JS dimensions with varying strength and direction
El Akremi et al. (2018)	Utility	Indirect	Higher-order and reflective	Unidimensional	The CSR construct positively and directly relates to organisational pride and perceived organisational support, as well as positively and indirectly to organisational identification, job satisfaction and affective commitment
Kim et al. (2018)	Hotel	Indirect	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	Not all the CSR dimensions influence the quality of work life (QWL) in a significant and equal way. QWL has a positive influence on JS. JS has a positive influence on the overall quality of life (QoL). Finally, QWL has a positive influence on the overall QoL
Valentine and Fleischman (2008)	Cross-industry	Direct	Unidimensional	Unidimensional	Perceived CSR plays a mediating role in the relationship between ethics programmes and job satisfaction
Golob and Podnar (2021)	Cross-industry	Direct	Unidimensional	Unidimensional	The authors found a positive and significant relationship between perceived internal CSR and JS. The path between perceived internal CSR and life satisfaction was not significant
Hyun et al. (2021)	Casino	Indirect	Unidimensional	Unidimensional	Pride in membership completely mediates the CSR-JS relationship. Other results indicate that CSR affects the ethical climate. The ethical climate positively influences pride in membership, which enhances casino dealers' JS and turnover intentions. Internally motivated enjoyment has a moderating effect on the ethical climate-pride in membership relationship; externally motivated needs moderate the CSR-pride in membership relationship

Chatzopoulou et al. (2021)	Cross-organisation	Direct	Higher-order and reflective	Unidimensional	Perceived CSR shows a significant and positive association with JS, which positively relates to both attitudinal and behavioural commitment
Vizcaíno et al. (2021)	Cross-industry	Indirect	Unidimensional	Unidimensional	In the low JS group, the relationship between organisational citizenship behaviour and CSR indicates no moderation. In the high JS group, the same relationship is positive and significant
Wang et al. (2020)	International hotel chains	Direct	Higher-order and reflective	Unidimensional	Perceived CSR is significantly and positively related to employees' JS
Kim et al. (2020)	Hotel	Indirect	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	Employees' perceptions of instrumental CSR positively influence employees' basic QWL needs. Perceptions of voluntary CSR have a positive influence on employees' QWL
Zhao et al. (2022)	Cross-industry	Direct and indirect	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	Meta-analyses find that while all three mechanisms within the parallel mediation model are equally significant in mediating the effect of perceived CSR on organisational commitment and JS, organisational identification is superior to organisational justice and organisational trust in mediating the effect of CSR perceptions on organisational citizenship behaviour and turnover intention
Youn et al. (2018)	Casino	Direct	Unidimensional	Unidimensional	Perceived CSR was found to be positively related to organisational commitment. The mediating role of JS between perceived CSR and organisational commitment was found to be significant. For those employees who have highly positive perceptions of the industry, the results showed an indirect effect of perceived CSR on organisational commitment through JS. However, for those employees with low or moderate levels of positive perceptions of the industry, the indirect effect did not exist

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Authors	Context	CSR-JS Relationship	CSR construct	JS construct	Results
Du et al. (2015)	Cross-industry	Indirect	Unidimensional	Unidimensional	The authors identified three heterogeneous employee segments that vary in their multi-faceted job needs and demand for organisational CSR. They also found that an organisation's CSR programmes generate beneficial employee-related outcomes, such as JS and reduced turnover intention
Zientara et al. (2015)	Hotel	Direct	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	Self-related CSR experiences was positively associated with commitment, and other related CSR experiences with satisfaction and commitment. Likewise, organisational commitment, unlike JS, was linked to work engagement
Vlachos et al. (2014)	Cross-industry	Direct	Unidimensional	Unidimensional	Results revealed a complex interplay between CSR perceptions and the two facets of JS, and showed that national context is likely to moderate the contingent effects of CSR perceptions on customer-facing employees' behavioural outcomes
Glavas and Kelley (2014)	Cross-industry	Direct and indirect	Higher-order and reflective; multidimensional	Unidimensional	Employees' perceptions of CSR are positively related to the organisational commitment, the relationship being partially mediated by work meaningfulness and perceived organisational support. JS with work meaningfulness partially mediates this relationship
de Roeck et al. (2014)	Hospital	Direct and indirect	–	–	The findings indicated that perceived CSR relates positively to JS through its effects on overall justice perceptions and organisational identification

Vlachos et al. (2013)	Manufacturing	Direct	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	Employees thinking that their manager possesses charismatic leadership qualities tend to attribute the organisation's motives for engaging in CSR activities to intrinsic values, which are positively associated with JS. CSR-induced extrinsic attributions are not explained by charismatic leadership; nor do they predict JS
Lee et al. (2013)	Casino	Indirect	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	Results indicated that legal CSR and supplementary responsible gambling (RG) have a positive effect on organisational trust, whereas compulsory RG strategies have a negative effect on organisational trust. Organisational trust positively influences JS, which in turn has a positive effect on customer orientation
Lee et al. (2012)	Franchised foodservice enterprises	Direct	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	The findings of the study showed that not all dimensions of CSR have the same effect on relationship quality. While economic and philanthropic dimensions have a significant influence on organisational trust, only the ethical dimension has a positive effect on JS
Murshed et al. (2021)	US context	Indirect	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	Employees' perceptions of a firm's CSR commitment (social and environmental CSR) influence JS, mediated by the importance employees ascribe to CSR. This mediation effect varies according to the level of procedural justice
Mascarenhas et al. (2020)	High education	Direct	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	CSR is strongly associated with work engagement, JS, identification with the organisation, and perceived organisational support
Schaefer et al. (2020)	Energy	Indirect	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	CSR evaluation influences JS, organisational pride and word-of-mouth in all CSR domains, with some domain-related differences

Table 1 (continued)

Authors	Context	CSR-JS Relationship	CSR construct	JS construct	Results
Boddy and Taplin (2016)	Cross-industry	Direct	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	Organisational constraints and CSR are significant predictors of JS even after psychopathy is included
Raub and Blunschi (2014)	Hotel	Indirect	Multidimensional	Unidimensional	Employees' awareness of CSR activities is positively related to JS, engagement in helping and voice behaviour, and personal initiative, and CSR awareness is negatively related to emotional exhaustion
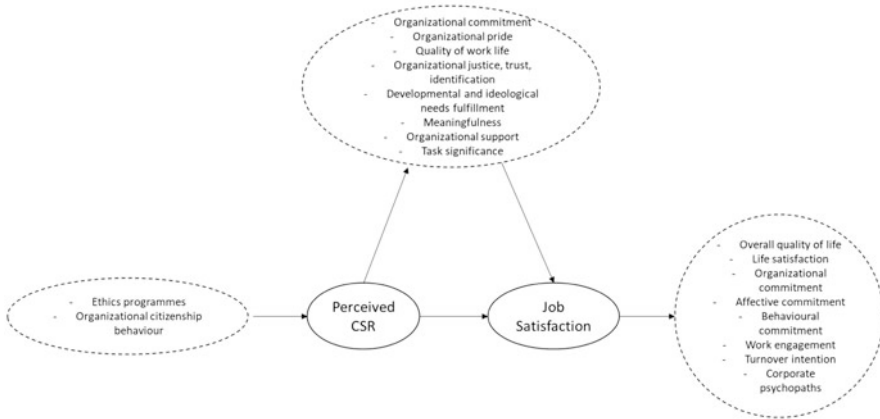
Fig. 3 The integrative framework: antecedents, mediators and outcomes affecting the CSR-JS relationship

2007), this is additional evidence that firm-level (objective) factors should be linked to the model to evaluate the effects of the perceived CSR-JS relationship on the firm. Economic/financial performance is an example.

The perceived CSR-JS relationship could produce different effects depending on the context (e.g. industry, organisational culture). To better understand the context-dependent effects (e.g. contingency), researchers could focus on the specific characteristics of each context. A relevant future research issue may concern the identification of context specificity affecting the perceived CSR-JS relationship. For example, an interesting research question could be: What are the contextual factors that mainly trigger the relationship between perceived CSR and JS?

5 Linking Employees' Perceived CSR to the Service Profit Chain in the Retail Industry

The systematic literature review establishes an overall positive relationship between perceived CSR and JS, but this relationship in the retail sector still needs to be explored. The analysed contributions have underlined that research focusing on the relationship between CSR and JS in the retail sector does not exist. It is not possible to directly answer the first research question ("Is employees' perceived CSR positively related to JS in the retail industry?"). The literature focused on the relationship between CSR and JS without any reference to the industry demonstrates that CSR positively impacts JS, but the relationship is rarely direct: it tends to be mediated by other organisational constructs. Moreover, JS influences some job-related attitudes regarding, in particular, personal wellbeing and behavioural commitment or

engagement. Perceived CSR and JS are inserted in models (Fig. 3) that present an internal organisational perspective.

Based on the systematic literature review performed, the findings demonstrate that researchers have not yet developed an overarching conceptual framework for assessing the relationship between perceived CSR and JS and other variables, such as customer satisfaction and performance. Thus, the answer to the RQ2 ("Is the CSR-JS relationship part of a wider model also including customer satisfaction and company performance?") is negative. To explore the relationship between perceived CSR and JS and other variables, we decided to analyse the service-profit chain (SPC) that brings together the employees' perspective, the customer perspective, and the objective profile of performance. The SPC refers to a causal chain linking JS to firms' financial performance through mediating constructs such as customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Heskett et al., 1994, 2003). The conventional SPC presents the following relationships: job satisfaction → customer satisfaction → customer outcomes (e.g. loyalty, willingness to pay) → firm's financial performance. JS depends on the quality of internal services and policies that enable employees to deliver results to customers. JS stimulates a positive attitude and performance that determines customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, which leads to profitability and growth.

This conventional SPC logic is mainstream within the service management literature. Recent meta-analytic reviews have generally found that the SPC stands as a widely accepted element of current management wisdom, especially in contexts in which employee–customer interactions occur (Hogreve et al., 2017). Several studies provided empirical support for this model; most have demonstrated the existence of a relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, loyalty and financial performance (for instance, Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Over time, researchers have tested developed versions of the SPC, inserting different constructs. For instance, Homburg et al. (2009) built a complementary SPC based on a conventional path and a social identity-based path. To our knowledge, no studies have inserted the CSR profiles in this framework.

The SPC path centrally builds on the customer-company and employee-company identification as a core construct: the relationship between JS and customer satisfaction depends on the fact that when employees are satisfied, they are likely to deliver a high-quality service, enhancing customer satisfaction (Brown & Lam, 2008; Whitman et al., 2010). The service management literature has supported this relationship, advocating the "satisfaction mirror" effect—i.e. the assumption that the employee's JS and loyalty reflect customer satisfaction and loyalty, with a positive effect on the firm's performance.

Applications of the SPC to retail contexts have returned mixed findings, especially regarding the relationship between JS and customer satisfaction. There has been a great deal of debate in the retail literature as to whether this "satisfaction mirror" actually exists, with results on both sides of the argument (Brown & Lam, 2008; Grandey et al., 2011; Keiningham et al., 2006; Silvestro & Cross, 2000). Empirical and meta-analysis research support the classical "mirror" view of customer and employee satisfaction (Brown & Lam, 2008; Evanschitzky et al., 2012).

Evanschitzky et al. (2012) have empirically demonstrated in a longitudinal study that satisfied employees deliver better services to customers and enhance customer satisfaction, but it takes time before customers respond positively to an increase in service levels. In contrary, Ryan et al. (1996) and Keiningham et al. (2006) could not establish a direct correlation. Recently, Briggs et al. (2020) developed a conceptual model based on the SPC framework that suggests that employees' satisfaction and customer relationship performance (i.e. customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and store image building) serve as intermediate steps linking service orientation to retailer profitability. The relationship between employee satisfaction and customer relationship performance is not supported.

The analysis of other empirical studies focused on retailing demonstrates an inverse correlation between employees' satisfaction and measures of productivity, efficiency and profitability, so that the most profitable stores are those in which employees are least satisfied (Silvestro, 2002). Employee satisfaction has been negatively and significantly correlated with both store profit margin and labour productivity indicator (contribution per staff hour). The study by Pritchard and Silvestro (2005) revealed many links between variables that are not aligned in the SPC model, finding a negative correlation between labour productivity and JS, in line with the research by Silvestro (2002), and between labour productivity and service value. In particular, productivity in terms of sales per square foot is negatively related to employees' and customers' satisfaction. Moreover, employees' and customers' satisfaction are not significantly related.

Grandey et al. (2011) found that the impact of employees' satisfaction on both responsive service and customer satisfaction depends on the store context. In particular, the store busyness (i.e. average sales transactions, controlling for store size) changes the functional relationship between JS and customer satisfaction through both affective and performance mechanisms. Thus, the traditional measures of the retailer's performance at the store represent part of the business organisational context in this model. Pritchard and Silvestro (2005), Silvestro (2002) and Grandey et al. (2011) indicate a need for more research to be conducted on these relationships in the retail context. In line with the mainstream literature found in the systematic literature review focused on perceived CSR-JS and with the analysis of the SPC in the retail industry, we propose a conceptual model that brings together in a single model the key concepts of CSR, JS, customer satisfaction and performance. Related hypotheses are to be tested in future works.

H1. Employees' perceived CSR is positively related to JS.

H2. JS is positively related to customer satisfaction.

H3. Customer satisfaction is positively related to the store performance (store profit margin).

H4: Store busyness (n transactions) have a negative impact on JS.

H5: Space productivity (sales per sqm) (a) and labour productivity (sales per staff hour) (b) have a negative impact on JS.

H6: Space productivity (sales per sqm) (a) and labour productivity (sales per staff hour) (b) are positively related to the store performance (store profit margin).
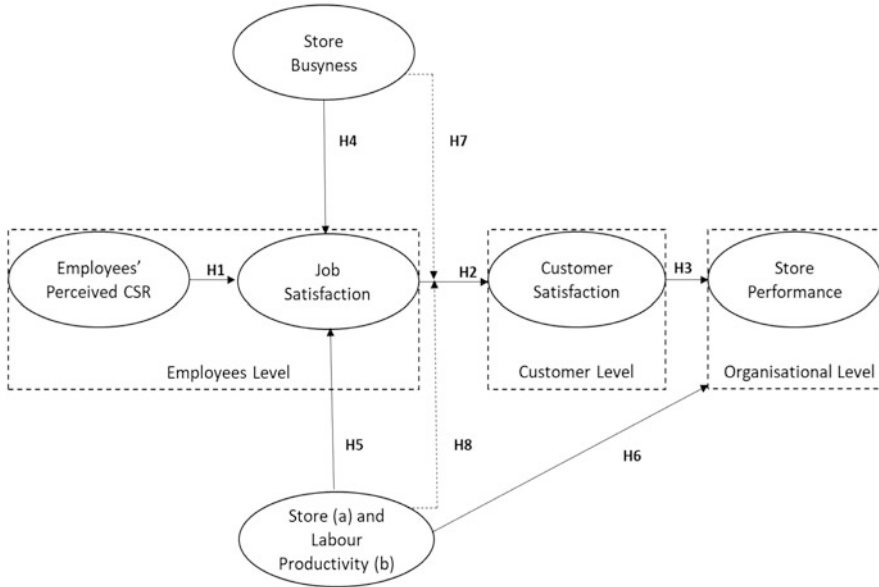
Fig. 4 The conceptual model

H7: Store busyness (*n* transactions) moderate the relationship between store-level JS and customer satisfaction such that the positive relationship is stronger in slower stores than busier stores.

H8: Space productivity (sales per sqm) (a) and labour productivity (sales per staff hour) (b) moderate the relationship between store-level JS and customer satisfaction such that the positive relationship is stronger in slower stores than busier stores.

Figure 4 shows the conceptual framework and hypotheses development.

6 Some Elements for Discussion and Conclusion

Through this work, we have tried to understand the specificity of the retail context, looking at the relationship between employees' perceived CSR and JS, and analysing the consequences in terms of customer satisfaction and store performance. Despite the literature having verified the positive relationship between CSR and JS in a direct or mediated mode, specific contributions pertaining to the retail sector do not exist. This should stimulate the academic debate, since the retail industry is a pivotal node within the consumer group industry.

In a first step, we conducted a systematic literature review to address existing gaps and systematise the state of the art. In a further step, we integrated the findings by providing a conceptual framework focused on peculiarities of the retail sector. We

worked on multiple levels to create a comprehensive framework involving employees, customers and firm-level factors. Therefore, we obtained a picture bridging elements of the literature that are usually discussed separately. We highlighted how these elements influence one another reciprocally, forming parts of an extensive relationships chain.

Overall, these findings nurture the ethics literature and provide practical implications. For instance, managers should strengthen ethical imprinting and culture by promoting ethical codes, training and CSR activity. These elements can provide major confidence in the responsible activities undertaken by the organisation, and develop a working environment characterised by high commitment and a spirit of solidarity. Literature provides evidence that employees' participation in CSR planning, coordination and decision-making is positive, favouring both personal and organisational growth (Aguilera et al., 2007). The next step in the literature should be to add customer satisfaction and store performance to the previous system of relationships. This would allow full interpretation of the different analytical steps from antecedents to consequences by using specific mediators and moderators. In this way, the boundaries of issues related to the CSR-JS relationship may be expanded by revealing the implications in terms of economic/financial performance and strategy on multiple levels, from individual to collective, from internal to external. This approach would help provide new evidence in the field of strategic management. A future research avenue that we are currently carrying out consists in empirical research based on a survey of a wider sample of salespersons working for a large Italian retailer. The applied method is a structural equation model (SEM) that helps to detect latent variables and more complex relationships.

The relevance of multilevel framework involving multiple actors and different levels of analysis lies in the fact that the adoption of CSR practices is an intricate process (Aguilera et al., 2007). This process implies the interactions among different groups of actors. They act internally and externally to the organisation to pressure it to assume responsible conduct. Many CSR antecedents can be identified outside the organisation, and different effects (e.g. social change) overflow beyond the boundaries of the organisation. This is why future research should include multilevel elements. Future studies may evaluate this system of relationships by considering different leadership styles as potential moderating elements (Valentine & Fleischman, 2008).

In general, almost all the contributions analyse the relationship between perceived CSR and JS at a given point in time (e.g. cross-sectional studies). However, this approach does not guarantee capturing the robustness of causal relationships. Therefore, to establish more robust causality, researchers could employ longitudinal designs to assess future models. In fact, there could be disruptive events that suddenly change a specific relationship: such events may compromise the stakeholders' perceptions of CSR within the organisation. It is beneficial to develop the literature with contributions testing the magnitude of the perceived CSR-JS relationship over time. A longitudinal design reinforces causal links. In addition, longitudinal studies could be supported by data collection from multiple informants, allowing researchers to validate the obtained results definitively.

In addition, prominent future research issues aim to capture the intrinsic complexity of each construct (e.g. CSR and JS). It has been demonstrated that different facets of the same construct can influence the sub-dimensions of another construct differently. This implies that researchers should not neglect the depth of multidimensional concepts and analyses of their interrelationships. In turn, qualitative contributions represent a relevant gap in the current literature. Evidence from case studies may bring elements for new theory building. In addition, quantitative research captures static evidence but not dynamic events or evolving phenomena. Longitudinal qualitative studies seem to be an ideal approach to enhance the literature on perceived CSR and its multilevel outcomes.

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Corporate Social Responsibility in the Banking Industry: An Overview

Antonella Angelini and Federica Nieri

Abstract Currently, the business field is based on common ground, engaging in pro-social and environmental behaviour is therefore essential. The pressures to do so have enforced a trade-off between the adoption of corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies and the corporate financial performance. In this regard, several case studies show that it is possible "to do well while doing good", for example, in terms of reputation, image, trust and resources. This is particularly important in the banking industry, given that the reputation and growth of banks' non-performing loans have suffered in many developed countries. Currently, banks are therefore strongly committed to CSR in order to regain their corporate reputation and image, as well as a positive financial performance over time. But what exactly do CSR practices mean? We address this question in the context of the banking industry since its answer is of crucial importance for the industry's economic development and plays a key role in its sustainable development.

Keywords Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) · Sustainable development · Banking industry.

1 Introduction

Currently, the international market space has become increasingly globalised and competitive. This has led to accountability pressures on internationalised companies to realise activities with desired outcomes other than merely maximising their financial performances (Kolk, 2016). Stakeholder pressures as well as pressure to increase firm's performance, enhance corporate's reputation and avoid legal

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penalties drive these activities (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). Firms therefore engage voluntarily in improving public health and education, in preventing homelessness, in protecting human rights and engaging in many other social and political responsibilities (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008). Nonetheless, the global economy is changing rapidly, forcing firms to continue investing in corporate social responsibility (CSR) in order to remain legitimate in their stakeholders' eyes (Marano & Kostova, 2016), since they will be criticised for any social and environmental damage that their supply chain activities might cause (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). CSR is assumed to be the way firms usually establish better practices, create wealth and improve society by responsibly and transparently integrating social, economic and environmental issues into firms' decision-making, culture, strategy and operations (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

Companies' CSR initiative are aimed at achieving significant results in terms of creating value for their internal and external stakeholders (Doh et al., 2010; Hillman & Keim, 2001), which, in turn, will not only improve their reputation greatly (Brammer & Millington, 2005; Janney & Gove, 2011), but also their financial performance (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Surroca et al., 2010). All of these achievements are essential for companies' competitiveness in a dynamic international economic landscape. Consequently, companies engage increasingly in CSR activities and adjust their initiatives in response to actual situations. For instance, the current COVID-19 crisis has forced global firms to revise their CSR initiatives in order to stimulate social, environmental and economic transformation, thereby obtaining increased stakeholder value.[1] Adjusting their CSR during these extraordinary circumstances was a suitable strategy with which firms could maintain their reputation and remain legitimate in terms of their environment (Marano et al., 2017). Given these companies' growing impact on society, their strategy was also particularly important for banks (Esteban-Sanchez et al., 2017), especially in the light of the 2008 financial crisis. The latter led to industry stakeholders losing their trust in banks' credibility due to their lack of socially responsible practices, particularly that of large and internationalised banks (Esteban-Sanchez et al., 2017). Moreover, corporate scandals, such as the recent ING Bank money laundering case (Financial Times, 2018), led to the firm's role in our society being rethought and debated (Kolk, 2016), therefore promoting the idea that businesses should accept and meet environmental, social and economic expectations (Kolk & van Tulder, 2010). Such scandals and financial crises saw CSR becoming the topmost issue on the agendas of banks' top management in an effort to improve their corporate reputation and re-engage with their stakeholders (McDonald, 2015).

In this chapter, we provide an overview of this topic, focussing on the benefits of companies' CSR activities in general and those of banks in particular. Thereafter, we discuss the most common CSR policies that the banking industry adopted (e.g., publication of CSR reports, adherence to the Global Reporting Initiative, the United

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[1] https://www.financierworldwide.com/creating-change-through-corporate-social-responsibility#.YTnB550zY2x last accessed 30 August, 2021.

Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative, the United Nations Global Compact and adoption of the Equator Principles) and a sample of 178 banks' rate of adoption from 2000 to 2020.

2   Corporate Social Responsibility in the Banking Industry

Although socially responsible banking is a relatively recent topic, the link between CSR and banks goes back to the basis of banking activities (McDonald, 2015). Finance in general, and banks in particular, are considered to play a significant role in sustainable economic and social development (Scholtens, 2009). Nonetheless, the interest of academics, practitioners and society at large in socially responsible banking only developed over the past decade, specifically in response to the 2008 financial crisis (McDonald, 2015). Like other society members, banks need to act appropriately, while their objectives and values need to be consistent with those of society as a whole.

Despite several definitions have been proposed in the literature (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Dahlsrud, 2008), their bottom line is that banks' responsibility should go beyond making profits and complying with the law. Banks also have a responsibility towards society and should know that their actions have social and environmental consequences (Matten & Moon, 2008). In this vein, banks voluntarily commit to behaving correctly from a legal, ethical and social point of view (Carroll, 1979). Given stakeholders' growing attention to global issues like climate changes, poverty and human rights violations (Kolk & van Tulder, 2010), which engendered new business expectations and fuelled schools of thought oriented towards the simultaneous realisation of social, environmental and economic goals (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001), banks' social and environmental commitment translates directly into the strengthening their credibility in the eyes of their stakeholders (Kotler & Lee, 2005) and, consequently, enhances their performance (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013), establishing an important source of long-term competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

The different definitions in the literature translate—as we will see later in this chapter—into a panacea of possible practices banks could adopt, such as ethical codes of conduct set by international standards (e.g., United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative), principle-based initiatives (e.g., UN Global Compact and Equator Principles) and socio-environmental reporting standards (e.g., CSR reports and Global Reporting Initiative).

2.1 From the Shareholder Theory to the Stakeholder Theory Perspective

The idea of companies in general and banks in particular adopting CSR policies in order to contribute positively to society at large is a topic that has divided economists and management scholars for decades. Historically, one of the most critical voices on the subject was that of Milton Friedman, who published an article in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1970 in which he argued that, in a free society, companies' only social responsibility is to maximise shareholders' profits. Since shareholders provide companies with the resources to run organisational activities, managers are expected to spend these resources in ways of which these shareholders would approve. Banks should therefore only use their resources for activities that efficiently transform input into output in order to generate value for their shareholders. From this perspective, philanthropic activities and all activities that banks generally initiate in favour of different stakeholders divert resources from the main business activity. In this vein, investments in CSR activities are therefore not justified unless they pertain to the managers' personal sphere, since they could contribute privately to various social causes. At the same time, Friedman suggested that business activities should be carried out "without deception or fraud", which assumes that banks always respect the law and the main social norms of the context in which they operate (Friedman, 1970).

Over the years, Friedman's position has contributed to the consolidation of a critical perspective on CSR, known as shareholder value maximisation, which has been subject to numerous criticisms. In 1984, the philosopher Edward Freeman, in a book entitled *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, proposed the well-known stakeholder theory. The two perspectives—shareholder value maximisation on the one hand and the stakeholder theory on the other—have long opposed each other. They also represent two profoundly different intellectual positions regarding the role that companies should play in society. More specifically, Freeman claimed that firms would only create value in the long run—and therefore surviving—by maintaining positive relationships with multiple stakeholder groups, such as shareholders, customers, employees, suppliers, governments and communities. Stakeholder theory is about creating a good environment for the firm and those who interact with it in order for it to grow and gain a competitive advantage (Freeman, 1984). Like shareholders, other stakeholders put pressure on banks in order to provide them with societal legitimacy. Banks have to address these pressures, or they could face negative confrontations with such stakeholder groups, which could lead to diminishing financial returns (Freeman, 1984). In this vein, CSR is generally conceived as a set of voluntary activities that banks undertake in order to benefit their key stakeholders (Gilbert et al., 2011). This perspective was inevitably contrasted with Friedman's thinking, since he believed that the bank should learn to manage and accept all stakeholders' legitimate requests, without prioritising their economic interests. Contrary to the shareholder theory, the stakeholder theory positions

shareholders as one of many stakeholder groups that managers should consider in their decision-making process (Freeman, 1984).

2.2 Why Do Banks Adopt Corporate Social Responsibility Policies?

In the current societal context, banks play a financial intermediary role in the sense that they value and price financial assets, manage financial risks, monitor borrowers, and organise the payment system (Greenbaum & Thakor, 2015). Consequently, these functions lead to banks having a major influence on society. In line with this, banks need to build strategies that take the wider societal interests emerging from their business activities into account (Decker, 2004). In other words, if a bank acts in a socially responsible way, it creates the basis for developing its long-term presence on the market by incorporating CSR initiatives into the business model and, subsequently, combining social, environmental and economic profitability (see also Chap. 1).

Traditionally, a common answer to the question "why do banks adopt CSR policies?" is related to the positive financial externalities that CSR policies' adoption engenders. Several scientific articles reviewing the literature's state of the art, have, in fact, highlighted that social and environmental policies' adoption influences corporate financial performance positively (Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Orlitzky, 2008; Vishwanathan et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2016). Prior research has indeed shown that the adoption of CSR policies leads to banks experiencing multiple positive externalities. For example, it could influence citizenship performance (Peterson, 2004) which in turn affects bank's financial performance positively (Gangi et al., 2019). Prior research has also found that CSR adoption increases the net interest margin (Ho et al., 2019), the share prices (especially immediately after the CSR initiative's public announcement) (Ramchander et al., 2012), its competitiveness (Eccles et al., 2014), market value (Aguilera et al., 2007) and reputation (Brammer & Pavelin, 2005). Furthermore, some studies have shown that initiatives related to CSR's adoption lead to a smoother policymaking process (Hawn, 2021), and a reduction of banks' financial risk (in terms of the earnings' expected volatility) (Kölbel et al., 2017), and non-performing loans (Ho et al., 2019).

These findings are in line with the instrumental stakeholder theory (Jones, 1995), an important stream within the stakeholder theory suggesting that positive financial outcomes are related to CSR policies' adoption. This theory proposes that banks view their stakeholders as part of a business environment that needs to be organised to ensure the stakeholder profits, income and, ultimately, earnings. According to this theory, appropriate stakeholder relationship management—a central CSR element—contributes strongly to the financial performance (Wang et al., 2016). For example, certain CSR dimensions might lead to improved labour relations (Kim et al., 2010), which could in turn increase the employee retention rates and, therefore, decrease the

labour costs (Greening & Turban, 2000). Additionally, in terms of revenue, good stakeholders relationships could attract new customers and new business opportunities (Barnett, 2007). According to a 2017 Reputation Institute survey, 91.4% of the respondents were willing to buy from an organisation with an outstanding CSR programme. While CSR is not always directly related to a bank's products and services, it does have a direct effect on people's willingness to purchase and (re)-purchase from, work for and invest in a given bank (Melo & Garrido-Morgado, 2012). CSR, for example, gives consumers the opportunity to identify themselves with a particular bank (e.g., consumer-company identification) (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Consequently, consumers develop a deeper identification with a firm that engages in CSR initiatives that overlap with their self-concepts and are more likely to support such a firm (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

By addressing and balancing multiple stakeholders' demands, banks could therefore increase their business' efficiency and rely on these stakeholders to develop the required resources for their continuity and development (Orlitzky et al., 2011). In this vein, stakeholder theory argues that to realise favourable relationships with stakeholders requires first managing their perception of a firm. The latter is due to a firm's propitious perception resulting in positive future stakeholder behaviour towards and relations with this firm (Scott & Lane, 2000). Moreover, a good relationship with stakeholders provides banks with important effects regarding their competitiveness, positioning, stakeholder loyalty, media relations and operation legitimacy. In this vein, CSR forms part of a dialogue between a bank and its stakeholders that creates awareness, understanding and appreciation of a firm's strategic goals (Doh et al., 2010). Furthermore, this dialogue provides transparency and could help banks legitimise their behaviour (Marano & Kostova, 2016), which could in turn contribute to enhancing their reputation.

For the above-named reasons, stakeholders' perception of a firm's CSR initiatives and its ability to meet social and environmental values as well as stakeholders' expectations is very important for such a firm's corporate reputation. Consequently, CSR might affect stakeholders' perception and contribute to a bank realising the maximum earning potential from its corporate reputation (Unerman, 2000).

In sum, recognising that a bank has contracts with multiple stakeholders is essential for understanding the relationship between CSR and financial performance (Decker, 2004). In fact, stakeholder theory acknowledges that social relations are important for financial performance (Barnett & Salomon, 2006). Used as an instrument for effective stakeholder engagement that decreases agency costs, CSR could create financial value for a firm, which explains its growing importance in international business and corporate strategy literatures.

Although banks often shoulder social initiatives' direct and agency costs, CSR is considered to be of particular importance in the banking industry for the following reasons (Wang et al., 2016). First, CSR engagement compensates for banks' exploitation of substantial societal resources whose efficient allocation and deployment could enhance the corporate culture, structure and social goals (Branco & Rodrigues, 2006). Second, banking's specific nature further explains its increasing CSR adoption as a strategic issue. That is, CSR is a way to enhance a bank's reputation, to gain

more stakeholder trust (McDonald, 2015), to improve relations with its investors and, therefore, facilitate access to capital (Spicer, 1978), and to attract better employees (Greening & Turban, 2000), which could in turn improve the firm performance. Moreover, CSR enables banks to answer the growing demand for socially responsible financial products, such as social investments (Decker, 2004). Third, bank lending influences industries' growth, including that of unethical industries (e.g., casinos, the gun industry), which relies on bank funding. However, multinational banks that adopt the Equator Principles are prohibited from funding unethical industries and are, instead, required to fund businesses that reflect social responsibility and reliable environmental management practices. Finally, the 2008 financial crisis and people subsequently losing their trust in financial services stimulated CSR's growing importance in the banking industry (Scholtens, 2009). Trust and reputation are particularly important for banks, because they sell intangible (financial) products to individuals often without financial knowledge, and these products typically last for more than a year (Shen et al., 2016).

In this context, the implementation of CSR strategies, policies and initiatives is perceived as banks' way of re-establishing financial services' reputation, consumers' confidence in these services, of improving relations with different stakeholders and ultimately increasing banks' financial performance.

Certain scholars have also focussed on the temporal cohort of positive outcomes related to CSR, suggesting that they should not be used to pursue short-term results, but to create long-term value (Henderson, 2015). To this end, by focussing solely on CSR's environmental dimension, Rebecca Henderson of Harvard University envisages that this scenario is possible under three conditions: (1) the greater empowerment of consumers who, by organising themselves, could push for more socially responsible business conduct; (2) a change in the institutional system through the approval of laws that regulate certain salient aspects of business behaviour and (3) the presence of efficient green technologies that allow a drastic reduction in environmental impacts and could also reduce production costs.

3 An Explorative Analysis

3.1 Sample

In order to analyse the adoption of CSR policies in the banking industry, we relied on a sample of 178 large banks from 27 countries on six continents, thereby covering a wide range of international contexts. We built the sample by proceeding as follows: first, we selected a sample of banks based in an emerging economy from the Fortune 2000 rank of the 2000 most prominent firms in the world. We considered eight emerging economies, namely Brazil, China, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Russia, South Africa and Thailand, that are among the largest and fastest growing developing economies (UNCTAD, 2014). We considered large public banks due to their prominence domestically and internationally, and their potentially significant impact

Table 1 Number of banks included in the sample by country of origin

Home Country	Number of banks
Austria	2
Belgium	1
Brazil	6
China	16
Denmark	3
Finland	1
France	2
Germany	4
Greece	5
Hungary	1
India	14
Ireland	2
Italy	10
Malaysia	6
Mexico	2
Netherlands	2
Norway	1
Poland	2
Portugal	1
Russia	2
South Africa	5
Spain	6
Sweden	3
Switzerland	11
Thailand	5
UK	6
USA	59
Total	**178**

on society. Large banks have the resources and capacities to invest in CSR (Strike et al., 2006) and generally enjoy more visibility. Thereafter, we applied a propensity score method aimed at defining a sample of banks based in advanced economies that we could compare with the emerging market sample. We applied the propensity score matching approach by considering the following series of variables: the bank's return on equity (ROE), its return on investments (ROI), its primary capital (common equity), its net profit, its net sales and its total assets. The final match resulted in 178 banks of which 123 were from advanced economies. More specifically, the banks in the sample are incorporated in Europe (36%), North America (33%), Asia-Pacific (24%), Central America (1%), South America (3%) and Africa (3%). Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample across countries. This sample is appropriate for the present study because it includes banks in both emerging and advanced economies with international experience in multiple countries. They have therefore

experienced significant exposure to institutional and stakeholder pressures regarding their CSR engagement (Fiaschi et al., 2015). Each company was observed from 2000 to 2020.

3.2 Best Corporate Social Responsibility Practices in the Banking Industry

We considered five of the most common policies through which banks show their engagement with society and the environment.

1. *CSR Reporting.* We first considered CSR disclosure in the form of a separate report, or as a section in its annual report. CSR reports are one of the most effective instrumental tools that companies can use to communicate their CSR policies and activities to their stakeholders (Seele & Lock, 2015). These reports are independent and discrete corporate editorial works containing valid information about their social and environmental policies (Corciolani et al., 2020). Despite non-financial reporting activities sometime being criticised for allowing firms to show only the good side of their activities (Marano et al., 2017), they are nevertheless considered a very important strategic tool that firms use "to apologise, explain, justify, or blame others for its actions, thereby helping to maintain legitimacy" (Bansal & Kistruck, 2006, p. 167). To collect data on each firm in the sample's CSR activity, we downloaded their CSR reports (or the annual report with a CSR section) from the corporate website.

2. *Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).* Beside a CSR report (or a specific CSR section within the annual report) on the company website, we also considered a company's adherence to an international standardised framework for non-financial reporting. The GRI is an international non-governmental organisation founded in 1997 in order to help companies, governments and other organisations assess and communicate their impacts on social and environmental issues.[2] More specifically, the GRI provides an international standardised framework for non-financial reporting that is similar to generally accepted accounting principles for financial reporting (Gilbert et al., 2011). In this case, we collected information on the years during which the firm produced an accountability report in line with the GRI guidelines by consulting both the GRI and corporate websites.

3. *United Nations Global Compact (UNGC).* We subsequently analysed companies' adherence to a "principle-based policy", which is the UNGC (Fiaschi et al., 2015). The UNGC was launched in 2000 by the then United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and is considered the first international initiative on responsible business conduct with a focus on human rights. It is a voluntary regulatory

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[2]For more details on the initiative, see https://www.globalreporting.org/ last accessed on 6 December, 2021.

initiative involving commitment to aligning operations and strategies through ten universally accepted principles related to human rights, labour rights, environmental sustainability and anti-corruption.[3] To date, the initiative has more than 14,000 signatory organisations in 162 countries and is often regarded as the most successful CSR standard worldwide (Kell, 2005, 2013). Only 244 of the participants operate in the banking industry. In order to join the initiative, companies are required to submit a Communication on Progress (COP) that highlights the initiatives undertaken with reference to the UNGC's ten principles during a specific year. Since companies can be delisted from the initiative after failing to send their COP for two years, we collected information on the UNGC's official website about the years in which a COP was submitted. In our sample, three companies were delisted due to failure to communicate within the expected deadline.

4. *Equator Principles (EPs).* We also considered the EPs, an international risk management framework with which to determine, assess and manage environmental and social risks when companies evaluate a given project's funding. It is primarily aimed at providing a minimum due diligence and monitoring standard to support financial institutions' responsible risk decision-making. The EPs were formally launched in 2003, applying globally to all industry sectors and to five financial products, namely project finance advisory services, project finance, project-related corporate loans, bridge loans and project-related refinance as well as project-related acquisition finance. This framework includes ten principles that generally require attention and focus on social standards and responsibility, including robust standards for indigenous peoples, labour standards, and consultation with locally affected communities within the project finance market. The ten principles are updated periodically to build on implementation expertise in order to reflect changes in the evolving operating environment and emerging good practices. Firms commit to implementing the EPs in their internal environmental and social policies, procedures and standards for financing projects and will not finance projects where the client cannot, or is unable to, comply with these principles.[4] Currently 118 financial institutions in 37 countries have

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[3]The UNGC's ten principles are: (1) Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; (2) businesses should make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses; (3) businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; (4) businesses should uphold the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour; (5) businesses should uphold the effective abolition of child labour; (6) businesses should uphold the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation; (7) businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges; (8) businesses should undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; (9) businesses should encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies; (10) businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery. For more details on the initiative, see https://www.unglobalcompact.org/ last accessed on 6 December, 2021.

[4]The ten EPs cover the following topics: (1) Review and categorization; (2) environmental and social assessment; (3) applicable environmental and social standards; (4) environmental and social

officially adopted the EPs, therefore covering most of international project finance debt in developed and emerging countries (Wright & Rwabizambuga, 2006). We collected information on the years during which the firms in our sample adhered to the initiative.

5. *United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEPFI).* Finally, we considered the UNEPFI, which is a partnership between UNEP and the global financial sector. The initiative was established in 1992 and has more than 400 members from financial institutions and 100 supporting institutions. It was introduced to increase private sector finance sensibility regarding social and environmental issues and to make it aware of its role in promoting and stimulating sustainable development. The initiative's mission is indeed "to inspire, inform and enable financial institutions to improve people's quality of life without compromising that of future generations".[5] Over the years, UNEPFI has promoted three frameworks, namely:

- *Principles for Sustainable Insurance* (PSI), established in 2012 and currently applied by a quarter of the world's insurers.
- *Principles for Responsible Banking* (PRB), launched in 2019 and currently has more than 230 banks adhering to the framework.
- *Principles for Responsible Investment* (PRI), which UNEP FI and the UN Global Compact introduced in 2006 and currently applied by half of the world's institutional investors.

These frameworks are intended to establish the norms for sustainable finance, banking and investment. They provide the basis for standard-setting and help ensure that private finance fulfils its potential role by contributing to the pursuing of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[6] and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.[7]

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management system and equator principles action plan; (5) stakeholder engagement; (6) grievance mechanism; (7) independent review; (8) covenants principle; (9) independent monitoring and reporting and (10) reporting and transparency. For more information about the initiative, see https://equator-principles.com/ last accessed on 6 December, 2021.

[5] For more information about the initiative, see https://www.unepfi.org last accessed on 6 December, 2021.

[6] In 2015, the United Nations launched the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and identified 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that all of the United Nations' 193 parties must achieve by 2030. The SDGs are organised into 169 targets that establish quantitative and qualitative goals through sustainable development's environmental, economic and social dimensions. Through the targets that the 2030 Agenda proposes to reach, it seeks to remedy a wide range of environmental, economic and social development issues related to global concerns, including poverty, hunger, the right to health and education, social and gender equality, access to water and energy, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, urbanisation, responsible production and consumption, climate change and environmental protection, justice and peace. More information about the Agenda can be found at https://sdgs.un.org/ last accessed on 6 December, 2021.

[7] The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change, adopted by 196 parties at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in Paris and entered
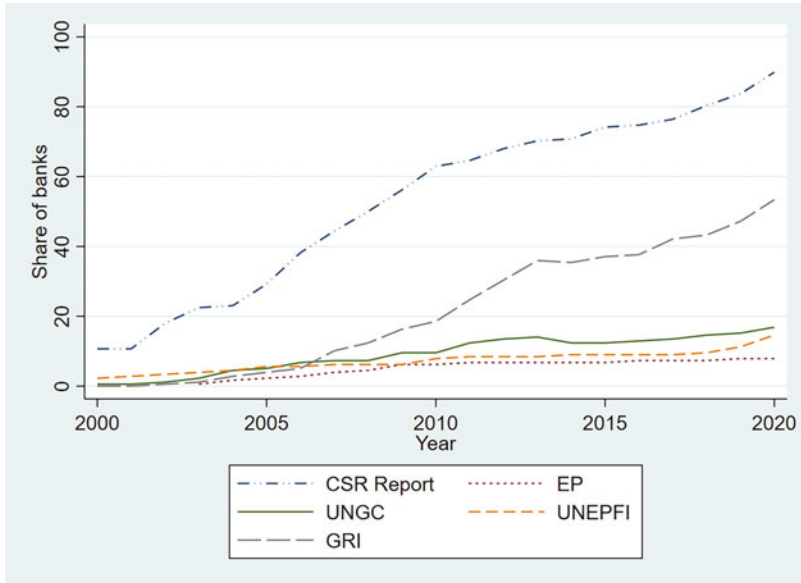
Fig. 1 Share of banks that adopted CSR initiatives by year. Source: Authors' own elaboration

Moreover, UNEPFI supports the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative launched in 2012 with UNCTAD, UN Global Compact and the PRI, which currently involves 90 stock exchanges accounting for almost all publicly listed capital markets. We collected information on the years in which the firms in our sample adhered to the initiative in order to analyse this initiative's adoption by the banks in our sample.

3.3 How Widespread are Corporate Social Responsibility Practices in the Banking Industry?

Figure 1 shows the share of banks in the sample that adopted a specific CSR initiative in each year. As expected, we see an overall positive trend in the adoption of all the five CSR initiatives considered, although the trend is still in its infancy in respect of some policies. The publication of a CSR report (or annual report with a CSR section) is the initiative with the highest rate of adoption. At the end of the period considered, about 90% of the considered banks had disclosed their CSR

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into force in 2016. It is the first global binding agreement at the global level that pushes nations to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effect. For more details, see https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement last accessed on 6 December, 2021.

initiatives through their corporate website, which has become an important tool for companies to communicate with their stakeholders (Marano et al., 2017). We note a relevant increase regarding adherence to the GRI, given that when the cohort was first analysed, none of the companies did so. Conversely, more than the 50% of them mentioned following the GRI guidelines in their 2020 CSR disclosure. In line with this evidence, we also see an increase in the adoption of both the UNGC and EPs, although at a lower rate (respectively, 17% and 15% of the companies in the sample adopted the initiative in 2020). The UNEPFI initiative has the lowest rate of adoption by the banks in our sample and the lowest increase in the considered period, given that only the 8% of the banks adopted this specific framework.

4   Conclusions

In light of this evidence, we conclude that banks are increasingly involved in CSR initiatives and CSR is no longer a phenomenon limited to a few benevolent initiatives as was understood until a few decades ago (Carroll, 2008), nor is it a private matter of those occupying top positions in a company, which Milton Friedman presumed. CSR applies to all business functions and has become a different way of thinking about business activity, which even affects business strategies. Indeed, a growing number of banks have included CSR policies in their companies' strategic planification and operational activities. The positive trend in banks' adoption of CRS activities appears even more important in recent scenarios with new players, such as fully digital banks, entering and increasing the competitive pressure on the market affecting banks' traditional business model. Within the established new model, CSR initiatives have become a particularly relevant and an important strategic tool to reinforce banks' relationships with their stakeholders, thereby possibly generating a positive effect on these relationships' duration and, consequently, on firms' reputation and financial performance. In terms of a company's employees, for instance, the adoption of worker-related CSR policies could increase employees' retention rates and decrease the labour costs (Greening & Turban, 2000), while also attracting talents, who, through their skills and knowledge, could allow the company to execute successful strategies (for further details on the relationship between CSR and employees satisfaction, see Chap. 2).

Increased competitive pressures have led banks to accelerate their digital transformation in order to introduce new services with high digital content, and to communicate and interact more efficiently and transparently with internal and external stakeholders (Bernini et al., 2022). As described above, the banking sector is currently engaged in a process of transformation and the recovery of trust. CSR initiatives play a critical role in this regard and must be correctly communicated to banks' stakeholders in order to achieve the aforementioned benefits. In order to do so, banks could use various communications tools to convey their global communication strategy/plan, which their top management teams share. Among the latter tools, the company website has become increasingly important because the internet

has become a powerful business tool. Its correct use requires continuous updates (e.g., a new report must immediately be made available on the website for updated information to circulate quickly among stakeholders in the virtual and physical space) and constant monitoring to quickly modify something (content, interface, etc.) if required. Consequently, it is currently essential that banks invest in CSR initiatives and inform their stakeholders about their efforts in this area, which will help achieve the desired results. In this chapter, we showed that most banks disclose information on environmental management and socio-economic programmes on their websites related to their support of education, corruption prevention, workers' welfare, corporate ethics and of codes of conduct.

Despite growing attention to the pro-social and environmental activities that banks implement, a growing number of scholars question the outcomes for society (Barnett et al., 2020). Prior research focussed mostly on building the "business case" for CSR (Orlitzky, 2008), highlighting that it is possible to "do well by doing good" (Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Far less attention has been paid to investigating whether CSR policies' growing adoption means better socio-environmental behaviour. Margolis and Walsh already suggested in 2003 that it would not make much sense to study the relationship between CSR and financial performance if CSR does not help alleviate "human misery". The literature on decoupling finding that companies promote certain CSR policies for purely symbolic purposes, seemed to confirm this scepticism. In other words, they use these policies to increase their reputation in the market and their activities and products' perceived value, without having really implemented them (Bromley & Powell, 2012). A telling example occurred during the COP26 summit in Glasgow when Barclays, one of the main British banks that had proclaimed itself committed to investing exclusively in sustainable projects with zero emissions by 2050, was denounced for having invested approximately $5.6 billion in new fossil fuel projects in 2021, an investment that was larger than that of all other UK banks (The Guardian, 2021). Despite the growing anecdotal evidence of banks not transforming their CSR policies into practice, just a few studies have examined this relationship rigorously to date.

In this context, some authors have pointed out that overemphasising CSR activities might lead banks to incur excessive expenses and therefore financial shortfalls and loss of competitiveness in the market (Tasnia et al., 2021). In other words, banks have to avoid falling into the merely symbolic practices and engage substantially in social and environmental practices that might benefit the society at large.

It is therefore important that companies do not just conceive CSR as an external legitimation instrument aimed at creating (or restoring) their reputations. It is important that they should be aware of their role in the pursuit of sustainable development. The latter is necessary since governments cannot wholly manage the negative externalities or adverse impacts that business operations generate, because political changes can be slow, even in developed institutional contexts, while they are extremely complex in institutionally weaker countries, such as developing countries (Fiaschi et al., 2017; Nieri & Giuliani, 2018). Companies should therefore take on certain responsibilities by sometimes compensating for governments' and their institutional bodies' inefficiencies (Rathert, 2016). The latter view is also very

widespread in the study of business ethics, which considers large companies "political" actors, due to the de facto role they play in influencing policy makers' agenda and decision-making sphere (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008).

Based on all these considerations and despite the increasing attention banks have paid to social and environmental issues, we conclude that, as a way of truly contributing to sustainable development worldwide, CSR is still far from mature. In recent years, international organisations such as the United Nations have pushed companies—especially multinationals—to align themselves with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Consequently, being socially responsible today also means committing oneself to "avoiding or minimising the negative impacts" of business activity on the environment and society at large, instead of just communicating one's engagement in pro-social and environmental behaviour.

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The World of Changes: COVID-19's Impact on the Retail Path Towards Sustainability

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Abstract Management literature states that a type of external shock, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerates innovation processes at organisational and societal levels. Furthermore, recent studies stress that this exogenous shock spurred new policies and forced heterogeneous actors of diverse business sectors to reflect on sustainability practices. In this study, the authors concentrate on a specific business industry, such as retail, and overview the main changes during the mentioned pandemic. An appropriate starting point to understand these changes has been to conduct an analysis of the literature, searching for links between the concepts of retail, COVID-19 and sustainability. This research thus provides a snapshot of the latest academic advancements that address issues like the policy framework to recover from COVID-19, retailers' approach to overcoming this crisis and their approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR). Finally, this chapter lists potential research directions that scholars may consider for a deeper analysis of COVID-19's impact on retail sustainability practices.

Keywords Retail · Resilience · COVID-19 pandemic · Sustainability · Corporate social responsibility

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1   Introduction

The year 2020 was supposed to be the "super year" (UN, 2020) for action on sustainability as the United Nations (UN) Secretary stated at the beginning of that same year: "a year of strengthening global actions to accelerate the transformations required for achieving the 2030 agenda" (UN, 2020).

The unexpected global spread of the SARS-Cov-2 virus—specifically a corona-virus disease (hereafter COVID-19)—has caused widespread social and economic threats and challenged healthcare systems, consequently changing people's lives and creating an impact on the global economy (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). This pandemic represents one of the century's exogenous shocks, "which could poten-tially have a profound impact on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), consumer ethics, and basic marketing philosophy" (He & Harris, 2020, p. 176).

While the World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises this virus as the global challenge of this century and invites proactive, collaborative and strategic partner-ships to overcome this virus outbreak, researchers call COVID-19 a "catalyst of change", which opens new opportunities for business and society (Mention et al., 2020; Swaithes et al., 2020). Since the early beginning of its spread worldwide, COVID-19 has accelerated innovations dramatically due to disturbances across the retail industry. COVID-19 spurred a remarkable transition in searching and testing new sales channels and manners to reach customers, particularly during the lock-down periods set up in almost all countries worldwide. In parallel, COVID-19 fostered retailers' interest in the promotion of sustainability in their company's agenda. Furthermore, internal organisational changes were noticed within the pan-demic, thus stimulating more active debates on CSR (Aguinis et al., 2020).

This is a partial outcome of the previously raised consumers' sensitivity to the environmental friendliness of offerings (Wiese et al., 2012), which was increased due to the COVID-19 crisis. This pandemic gave consumers time to reflect on the meaning of consumption and its impact on their behaviour, on society and on the environment in general (He & Harris, 2020).

During the pandemic, studies on consumers showed the consumers increased interest in sustainability issues (Brydges et al., 2020), which fostered new customer behaviour trends during the lockdown period. For example, according to Kohli et al. (2021), ". . .65 percent of German and UK consumers now say they will buy more high-quality items that last longer, and 64 percent of Chinese consumers will consider more environmentally friendly products". Analysis conducted by Twitter on customers' declaration shows that ". . . 77% of consumers say that, in the face of a global health emergency, they feel more positive about brands trying to support the community. 80% expressed a desire to know how brands support employees; 89% say brands should communicate reliable information; 70% still expect brands to provide prompt customer service" (Kalscheur, 2021).

Such a sustainable behaviour became a new norm both for retailers and cus-tomers, which may be aligned in the future with governmental recovery plans for the pandemic. In Europe, for example, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)

instrument—which is strongly dedicated to minimising the pandemic's impact on the European Union (EU) society—can be partially considered as a transition path towards a more sustainable economy. Sharma et al. (2021) highlight that a post-COVID-19 environment represents a period of challenges and changes for all business actors. The changes that emerged in the social environment and patterns in consumers' purchasing actions stimulated a rethinking of organisational strategies—consequently, a redesign of business operations to match the "new normal" environmental need (Sharma et al., 2021, p. 20). Since the retail industry represents the primary link between society and business, retailers' position allows them to promote awareness and sustainability initiatives through their partnerships with their suppliers and through their daily interactions with sometimes millions of customers (EC, 2009; Durieu, 2003). For example, the retailers could significantly influence changes in production processes since they can exert pressure on producers in favour of more sustainable choices. Furthermore, the retailers can also adjust the consumption patterns, given their direct relationship with their customers. "Accordingly, understanding what the retail industry is doing is critical to global policy, governance and sustainability generally" (Rahdari et al., 2020).

Consequently, 2020 has been a super year for sustainability, even if unexpectedly, where retailers showed to be a central actor in all three pillars of sustainable development: economic, environmental and social. Monitoring the retail industry's response to a pandemic therefore provides insights not only into the industry's agility, adaptability and resilience to such an exogenous shock but also into the industry's particular link with the stakeholders and its visioning of sustainability. This chapter analyses the literature published in the academic landscape during the pandemic, aiming to understand the shock's impact on the retail industry through the sustainability components. The results show that there is a notable global change in retail fostered by (1) policy frameworks, (2) structural relationships between business actors and external stakeholders, and finally (3) inter-organisational and intra-organisational dynamics. All of these promote and strongly support all three pillars (economic, environmental and social) of sustainability.

2　Novelties in the EU Policy Framework to Recover from COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was identified in China (Wuhan) in 2019. In a short period, this disease became a global concern. In March 2020, the WHO declared a pandemic at a worldwide level. This situation stimulated lockdowns in different countries. The governments took various measures to prevent this virus. These measures represented a list of rapid changes in the global market based on new regulations and restrictions, increasingly stricter hygiene practices, changing consumer preferences and other factors. Many countries experienced rapid changes in social behaviour, which significantly impacted the rapid contraction of consumers'

activity (Kim et al., 2021). Even facing challenges with inventory, supply chain management, delivery and new safety regulations, retailers of essential goods (food, groceries and healthcare business) met a rising demand for serving customers at home. Meanwhile, retailers of other sectors that were considered not essential (e.g. apparel, footwear and others), were forced to close their physical stores and faced significant sales drops that pushed them to adopt new selling strategies in reaching customers (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020).

This outbreak accelerated not only consumers' need in sustainable markets but also fast organisational adaptation to the policy framework, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production. Knowing that sustainable development requires policy support and a transition period, this pandemic represents an essential turning point towards sustainability. The policy framework developed by the European Commission (EC) to react to the pandemic supports new sustainable practices and promotes existing ones. At present, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) instrument supports the EU Green Deal, sustainable growth strategies, EU circular economy action plans and other sustainability policies and instruments. A proposal was made to minimise the pandemic's impact on the EU society. The RRF supports EU countries in implementing their recovery and resilience plans that present their reforms and public investment projects. These plans can be considered as a transition path towards a new sustainable economy. As Fig. 1 demonstrates, most countries envision a solid orientation to green, climate and environmental spending.

These investments should strongly support the faster implementation of sustainability elements in retail due to the retail industry's vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, analysing the details of the plans, the authors acknowledge that the plans do not provide a clear vision for the retailers on how to reconfigure processes for sustainability. This is surprising because retailers, given their local presence, have been identified as key actors in the recovery of local/urban regions (Appel & Hardaker, 2021). Retail constitutes a significant economic contribution and has substantial societal and functional importance at the local level. Retail resilience can therefore be considered as an essential component for regional recovery during and after crises (Martinelli et al., 2018). In the next section, the authors focus on examples revealed from the analysed literature on how retailers adapted to the pandemic situation moving towards sustainability.

3   The Time of the Pandemic for Retail Sustainability Turnover

According to Wiese et al. (2012) and Ruiz-Real et al. (2019), the academic literature demonstrates that the interest in sustainability in retail practice has grown progressively since early 2000. Ruiz-Real et al. (2019) highlight that sustainable development may be an essential component for competitive advantage in retail.
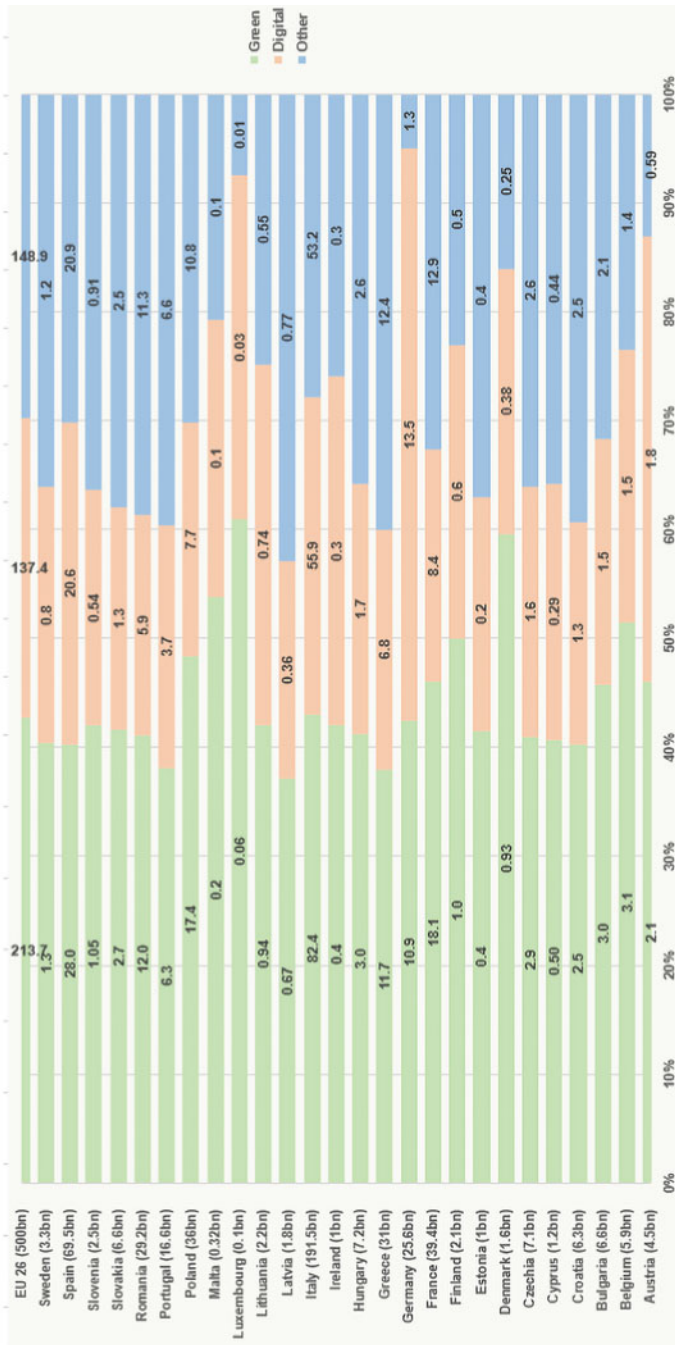
Fig. 1 Overall resource allocation in national recovery and resilience plans (%) of total and € billions (BRUEGEL dataset, 2021). Note: "the numbers in brackets after the country names indicate the total € amount of the plan to be financed by the Recovery and Resilience Facility, while the numbers over the bars show the € value of the components (in billions). For Italy, both RRF grants and loans are included. Note there is some overlap between green and digital spending, but the level of detail in most national plans does not allow us to properly account for these overlaps. This figure reports the headline green and digital numbers and does not consider their overlaps". (Source: BRUEGEL datasets, 2021, https://www.bruegel.org/publications/datasets/european-union-countries-recovery-and-resilience-plans/)
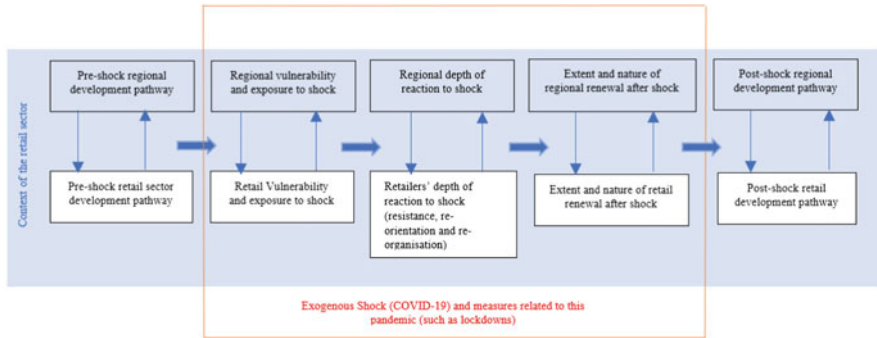
Fig. 2 Regional and retail resilience during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (based on Appel & Hardaker, 2021)

Specifically, Lehner's (2015) study demonstrated that aiming to reach sustainability in the Sweden market, "retailers are willing to forget short-term benefits to achieve long-term results" (p. 396). Moreover, "stores can play a significant role in the process of 'fine-tuning' sustainability messages to local contexts" (p. 397) and take the role of the change agents in promoting sustainability and supporting the sensemaking process.

For decades, retail represented an open system operated by heterogeneous actors, which faced intense innovation and changes characterised by specific adaptations (Salgueiro & Erkip, 2014). The pandemic has, however, changed the entire supply chain (sourcing, procuring, manufacturing and delivering systems) and accelerated the learning and acting capacities of the retail supply chains managers (Sharma et al., 2021). Appel and Hardaker (2021) highlight that those entrepreneurs themselves appear to be an essential source of resilience. Especially, resilience strongly depends on networks, such as commercial networks, in which the relationship is based on two elements, namely reciprocation and trust (Martinelli et al., 2018). As such, resilience, under those conditions, represents both the organisational and individual responses to the changing environment (Bhamra et al., 2011). Roggeveen and Sethuraman (2020) thus highlight that it is ". . . critical to understand how and why changes made by retailers [..] are successful or not successful and if there are moderating factors that impact that outcome" (p. 169).

Appel and Hardaker (2021) acknowledge that this crisis was highly challenging for retailers focusing on specific services (e.g. personal customer advisory, tailoring, manufacturing of unique products, others). The mentioned authors investigate retailers' resilience during the pandemic in the urban context, developing a model (Fig. 2) based on three main steps: (1) the analysis of vulnerability and exposure to the shock, (2) the depth of reaction and (3) the nature of regional renewal after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study shows that the first and other (ongoing) lockdowns had a different impact on retailers. The first lockdown appeared as a sudden shock. The second lockdown was probably more expected, but it prolonged the financial crisis for several companies that had to close their stores again. Resilience strategies

of the retailers in such conditions were double: A few showed the willingness to return to a former stage and to follow a pre-COVID-19 business strategy (resistance/resilience), while others interpreted this situation as an opportunity to create essential changes to their practices (re-orientation resilience), the most common being to strengthen their online strategy, which is a fundamental action to be able to reach customers if impacted by lockdown closures. This study proposes that retailers that adopted a re-orientation strategy to better fit changed customer habits outperformed those who adopted a resistance resilience strategy. Furthermore, an earlier study carried out by Martinelli et al. (2018) proposed that within the crisis phase, retail entrepreneurs' capability to respond to an exogenous shock (i.e. a disaster like an earthquake) depends on "a consolidated set of sensing and interpreting capabilities" (p. 1239), which is also true for the current situation. These retailers "have better chances to deploy these capabilities during the crucial post-disaster phase, when firms need to fine-tune or even turn around their strategies to tackle competitive discontinuities or react to unexpected customer changes" (Martinelli et al., 2018, p. 1239).

During the crisis, the critical element retailers had to adapt to their supply chain to face the uncertainty of the situation, the introduction of the safety measures and the loss of incomes. Based on a literature review, Sharma et al. (2021) investigated the main determinants for increasing retail business performance and overcoming the pandemic. Their results identify the supply chain "Collaboration Efficiency" as the primary criterion for accelerating the performance of the retail supply chains in a dynamic social environment impacted by a pandemic crisis. Furthermore, order fulfilment and supply chain digitalisation emerged as the most appropriate resilient business strategies to mitigate the long-term pandemic effects.

These results on the supply chain are coherent with Pieroni et al. (2019) argumentation on sustainable development. Their views invite the collaboration of heterogeneous actors. According to the above-mentioned authors, sustainability is based more on an organisational network-centric operational logic than on a firm-centric one. Developing new products, defining standards and changing operations based on collaboration and involvement with the government, customers and suppliers act as a background framework for sustainable solutions and prosperity over time (Kohli et al., 2021). Consequently, there appears to be a direct correlation between sustainability and the firm's stakeholder network (Perrini & Castaldo, 2008). Being the intermediaries between consumers and producers, retailers play a crucial role in supply chains (Wiese et al., 2012) and business networks. This could drive the change towards the sustainability of larger communities instead of simply the sustainability of only their company.

With the pandemic, the retail industry was forced to react quickly to new dynamics and provide solutions to support customer satisfaction within the evolution of their consumption patterns. The authors run a literature review of studies reporting the main changes in the retail industry during the pandemic (Table 1). Since the topic is new, only a few studies focus on retail at present. These studies mainly focus on a specific sector and report how retailers adapted to the situation. This is coherent with the pandemic impact on the retail industry since retailers had faced different

Table 1 Main studies on retail adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic situation

Sector	Changes that emerged during the pandemic	Authors
Drugs retail	• A shift towards a *service-oriented business* in pharmacy • An adaptation of new methods of service delivery • New role of a pharmacist (telepharmacy), aiming to minimise direct contact with patients and compensation for counselling services	Cavicchi and Vagnoni (2020)
Food retail	• New business models were introduced, fostering a new business concept based on the *digitalisation of all business activities* and the shortening of the food supply chain. An example is the case of the Western Balkans region	Končar et al. (2021)
Food retail	• Application of restrictions in purchasing: such as limitations in both food availability and purchase items per consumer	Pantano et al., 2020
Textile retail	• Digitisation approach in all sector processes and structural changes, such as adaptation of the mandatory hygiene and safety concepts, slightly adjusted assortments, price reductions following the reopening of stores after the first lockdown to attract customers and clear out storage spaces. An example is the case of a German city—Würzburg	Appel and Hardaker (2021)
Fashion	• New digital technologies and retailing platforms support online shopping • Increased investment in upgrading workers' skills and technology in international garment manufacturing facilities, aiming to support new fashion buying and consumption behaviours and reduce the industry's dependence on discounting	Brydges et al. (2020)

government measures that conditioned their activities (closure or maintenance of their essential services).

Food and pharmacy retail had to adapt to the situation and sustain the consumers who faced the pandemic. In the food sector, priority was given to food safety and security (e.g. Končar et al., 2021) in adaptation to the restrictions that emerged from the beginning of the crisis. The adoption of stricter protocols throughout the whole supply chain, for example, export limitations, increased the costs of the entire system. Furthermore, a demand increase of certain items that showed a decreased availability and became out of stock in a number of cases, could have impacted the sell-out prices. A debate emerged in the literature (Pantano et al., 2020) on whether a price increase would be reasonable or not, while evidence from practice showed different managerial decisions. Certain retailers increased the prices of a few items due to the higher costs; other retailers renounced part of the profitability to serve the community. Overall, managers of the food industry appeared to be more focused on managing the emerging market shock than on more structural issues, such as energy saving in their operations during the pandemic (e.g. Končar et al., 2021). This result shows that the reaction of food retailers has been more short-term focused on the emergency and less focused on long-term sustainability.

Pharmacies had a turnaround towards service and healthcare systems. They moved from drug dispensers to key players in disease diffusion control (potentially testing patients) and prevention (acting as vaccine centres). They played a crucial

role in facing the pandemic, but a portion of their costs were raised as for food retailers, given the broader spectrum of services pharmacies started to provide. For pharmacy retail, this raised the need to find a sustainable business model combining (a) social well-being with (b) the economic performance of companies (Cavicchi & Vagnoni, 2020). In both sectors, a key role has been strengthened by the retailers' employees. Certain food retailers hired additional temporary salespeople who became essential workers in several countries (Pantano et al., 2020) to better support customer shopping. Food retailers' managers also agreed on the relevance of their employees' professionalism in satisfying customers' needs during the pandemic (e.g. Končar et al., 2021). Of course, pharmacists' key role in supporting patients during the pandemic has emerged in several countries. Pharmacists contributed to sustainable healthcare systems, acting as the key front end for a number of citizens' groups who could not be cared for by the medical health system focusing on severe cases. This was possible due to pharmacists' operative participation in an integrated care model (Cavicchi & Vagnoni, 2020).

According to the various studies implemented before the pandemic, online and offline outlets were considered as competitors (Gauri et al., 2021). Nowadays, e-commerce is an essential component of the retail strategy for the upcoming outbreak. Due to new regulations, restrictions and changing consumer preferences, businesses faced a more decisive shift to e-commerce. Fulfilment and delivery methods that emphasise a low amount of direct contact help retailers generate a plan that supports their flexibility and agility (Appel & Hardaker, 2021; Sharma et al., 2020; Kalscheur, 2021). Online retail can strongly support supply, but at the same time it drastically changes customers' behaviour; for example, online retail limits the visits to the physical stores and stimulates the purchase of less popular items (Gauri et al., 2021). Furthermore, e-commerce can hide a dark side: the last mile delivery at customers' houses, which has already in the past been evaluated as unsustainable on each of the three sustainability pillars—economic, environmental and social (Liu, 2014). Previous studies showed that when it pertains to e-buying, consumers are willing to make economic sacrifices if this leads to environmental and or social improvements (Ignat & Chankov, 2020). Consequently, e-customers prefer a more sustainable delivery due to its ecological and social impacts on society. These results show that potential issues on e-commerce sustainability can be overcome, allowing retailers to benefit from online and offline selling convergence to satisfy customers better.

Finally, the pandemic stimulated changes within the inter-organisational network and accelerated internal changes within the organisation. Combining the operational capabilities including social and environmental responsibility with the focus of the stakeholders' interests in this challenge represents a new pathway for retailers in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies that the authors address in the next paragraph.

4 Retailers' Approach to Corporate Social Responsibility

Addressing sustainability links to corporate social responsibility issues, it is essential to stress that retailers have different priorities linked to CSR at the global level (Rahdari et al., 2020). Amongst these priorities, location-specific factors emerge (Appel & Hardaker, 2021), such as governmental regulations, cultural differences (Pantano et al., 2021), global challenges and initiatives implemented by the territories, such as supporting local and national brands affected by the pandemic or a preference for buying domestic vs. foreign products (Brydges et al., 2020; He & Harris, 2020). To summarise, this new pandemic scenario stimulated firms to adopt and promote CSR strategies. These strategies address the needs of a society and of vulnerable groups better, primarily concentrating on the local environment and the societies' and vulnerable groups' countries of origin where these firms are usually more active and where they have a more prominent presence (García-Sánchez & García-Sánchez, 2020).

He and Harris (2020) have observed that many business actors "not only have resisted unethical business practice during this crisis but also have proactively engaged in various CSR activities, particularly those that can offer immediate help and assistance to the fight against the virus" (p.177). Pantano et al. (2020) provide a comprehensive list of similar examples: "Gucci has provided surgical masks and medical overalls to civil protection workers, Ralph Lauren has donated $10 million to the WHO, and other luxury retailers such as Armani and Ferragamo donated to Italian hospitals and charities. Burberry and Prada, among others, have even reconfigured their factories to produce medical garments. Bulgari switched production to hand sanitizers, while Ferrari and Dyson produced ventilators and other instruments for hospital patients (p. 211)". These are the lessons that business actors need to learn and apply in practice during COVID-19 and in the long-run perspective (He & Harris, 2020). Moreover, new and/or more robust collaboration practices with the third sector created a substantial added value in support of living conditions of citizens, specifically vulnerable groups of people (García-Sánchez & García-Sánchez, 2020; Raimo et al., 2021), for example, in food delivery, in the creation of safe spaces for homeless people, in the donation of information communication technology (ICT) tools for learning purposes or in the donation of sanitary material (Raimo et al., 2021).

The pandemic situation for the retailers highlighted that social, economic and environmental issues are strongly interdependent and should all be addressed together not only during the period of an exogenous change. An integration of sustainability in organisational practices should therefore be fostered to overcome this crisis. In these conditions, CSR is absolutely necessary for retailers. While Sheehy and Feaver (2015) emphasise that CSR focuses on restricting and encouraging the business environment to reduce specific negative impacts and promote the development of certain products, Rahdari et al. (2020) highlight that CSR in the retail industry is not a response to its direct practice but an answer to consumer pressure and its supply chain practice. If in the past CSR was studied based on two

questions, i.e. why and when business actors would like to engage in CSR, "for example, by examining a company's goal and senior management team's values (i.e., firm approach), as well as regulations, industry standards, and stakeholder pressures (i.e., institutional approach)" (Rahdari et al., 2020, p. 423), in the time of the (post) pandemic, an employee-centric conceptual framework should be firmly taken into consideration, as employees change internal dynamics and provide new recommendations for organisational practice (Aguinis et al., 2020; Mahmud et al., 2021). Moreover, Mahmud et al. (2021) refer to Deng et al. (2020), classifying CSR into internal and external. Internal CSR represents formal CSR actions where employees may engage and profit from developmental opportunities, demonstrating businesses' respect for their staff. External CSR, on the other hand, refers to efforts centred on stewardship towards the global community, the environment and the consumers. This classification is essential, as it helps systemise organisational measures for crisis management. For example, based on the research carried out, García-Sánchez and García-Sánchez (2020) outline actions taken by Spanish business actors during the pandemic and classify the business actors based on their influence on the specified stakeholders. This list represents seven main fields of interventions and reconfigurations that the most prominent Spanish companies implemented (p. 7):

- Investor commitment: economic measures
- Employee commitment: labour measures to ensure job security before COVID-19
- Customer commitment: commercial measures to ensure the continuity and quality of services
- Commitment to suppliers and partners: liquidity measures and guarantees of continuity
- Society commitment I: cooperative initiatives with public institutions to contribute to the fight against this pandemic
- Society commitment II: social collaboration programmes with different social agents
- Society commitment III: other programmes for society in general (for example, information campaigns in the media, etc.)

The above-mentioned authors therefore stress that the Spanish firms demonstrated three responsibility clusters linked to CSR during the pandemic: "(1) protecting only the interests of shareholders and investors; (2) favoring the well-being of the Spanish society in general and vulnerable groups in particular; and (3) combining the previous altruistic actions with commercial interests" (García-Sánchez & García-Sánchez, 2020, p. 126). Furthermore, it is widely noticeable that this crisis created new practices within the human resources (HR) practices: staff recruitment, training processes, working remotely, etc. A further transformation of organisational CSR in post-pandemic conditions is thus inevitable.

Moreover, Sharma et al. (2020) emphasise that business actors may not overcome the impacts of COVID-19 without a sustainable supply chain strategy. The authors state that the complexity of the crisis invites firms to search for solutions

collaboratively within the firm's supply network and with competitors, developing a strategy for a new age supply chain. In pandemic conditions, an openness to "look beyond profitability" (p. 449) is essential, as the well-being of employees and suppliers should be guaranteed at the outset (Sharma et al., 2020). However, it is notable that firms do not change their activities drastically with regard to the pandemic and the sector of operation, as they provide support in line with their core business (Raimo et al., 2021).

Presented examples demonstrate that CSR should be positioned firmly in organisational strategies and should be in line with sustainability practices. This is beneficial for a firm as, on the one hand, it supports the reputation and creates trust between a firm and its internal and external stakeholders. On the other hand, it establishes certain financial benefits and positioning in a market for a company.

5   Conclusions

The United Nations stress that the COVID-19 pandemic is an occasion for countries to develop recovery plans that "will reverse current trends and change our consumption and production patterns towards a more sustainable future (UN, 2020)". Knowing that retail represents a large part of the global economy (Rahdari et al., 2020) and that it may play a significant role in these plans, the authors emphasise the industry's fragility because of its business model, which is firmly integrated into society in the upstream value chain and the social environment (Rahdari et al., 2020). However, based on the research conducted, Appel and Hardaker (2021) highlight that the retail industry can recover quickly after external shocks because it provides necessities for everyday existence. The retail industry should therefore be closely linked to sustainability and deliver innovative practices to reach it. Nowadays, however, there is an intense debate between business actors on how to support a transition towards sustainability in retail and, finally, there is strong agreement between them that sustainability requires not only higher investments in green initiatives but also links to a circular economy and CSR.

This analysis of the literature showed that the COVID-19 pandemic fostered an integration of sustainability elements in the overall retail sector. These results also allow to provide a number of directions that the research community may consider for future investigation. Particularly, based on the results described in the previous pages we invite scholars to concentrate on:

- What is the retailers' role within the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility?
  The pandemic struck at the same time as other long-term crises such as climate change. Both of these crises create a significant social and economic impact worldwide. For reasons of resilience and sustainability of the EU economy, the mentioned political instrument provides a landscape in which to research the role of retailers in this context. Analysis of the retailers' investments in green, social and inclusive initiatives in comparison with proposed reforms may provide a map

for future changes for the retail sector in EU countries, which are worth to predict and invest in.

- Which organisational dynamics in online retail are stimulated by the challenges that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic?

  Noticing the changes in consumer shopping preferences (passing from stores to online sales) and expenses (such as wages, energy consumption and rent, for example), retailers learn new lessons. They boost new directions in strategic management, e-commerce, the management of human resources, knowledge management within the organisation and the application of new business practices. All these provide a new niche for researchers' reflection.

- How does COVID-19 change the marketing strategies for retailers?

  The pandemic spurred consumers to pass to online shopping, which was an obligatory and not a preferential choice. Retailers who have been proactive and innovative during COVID-19 times and who have created a friendly online shopping environment, became winners in the cross-channel shopping journey. However, do we notice these dynamics today? Do clients prefer this experience or a combination of online and face-to-face customer service supported by a safe customer experience? These are just initial questions that will help with a better understanding of the future dynamics in the marketing of the retail industry.

- What is the role of CSR in the post-pandemic situation for retailers?

  The authors' analysis demonstrates that this pandemic accelerated the importance of sustainable practices with business actors: Initiatives that support vulnerable group of people grow faster, employers are more productive and loyal if they are engaged in company dynamics and, finally, consumers make more attention and become more aware about business practices. Consequently, a sustainable business is no longer a single initiative of a single company or sector but a national priority that is based on collaboration practices with stakeholders, technology and green growth. CSR therefore plays a critical role in a future business development tendency.

- Finally, developing a network of retailers in post-pandemic conditions would be beneficial to elaborate a framework for sustainable innovations for this industry, aiming to minimise future potential risks.

This chapter provides a snapshot of the changes fostered by COVID-19 between retail and sustainability. Furthermore, it offers a map of issues that management scholars may address in the near future. We therefore trust that this research will bring retail and sustainability closer together to develop a better business environment and create a safer society.

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Online Shopping and Sustainability. Willingness to Pay a Contribution to Offset Environmental Pollution

Cristina Zerbini and Donata Tania Vergura

Abstract The growing development of e-commerce and the greater interest in environmental pollution issues have attracted more and more attention from researchers to study the environmental impact generated by online purchases. The present study proposed and tested a conceptual model to investigate consumers' propensity to pay a small voluntary monetary contribution to offset the pollution generated by e-shopping. An online survey with a sample of 391 consumers was conducted. The model was tested through structural equation modelling. Results showed a positive and direct effect of personal norms, sustainable behaviour, and attitude on intention to pay a contribution. In turn, personal norms were influenced only by awareness of consequences and not by the ascription of responsibility; sustainable behaviour was determined by consumers' attitude towards the environment and knowledge of environmental problems; attitude towards the contribution was positively or negatively affected by, respectively, positive or negative emotions.

The chapter provides valuable insights to online retailers to encourage the sustainable behaviour of their customers.

Keywords Sustainability · Online shopping · Monetary contribution · Environmental pollution · Public environmental goods

1 Introduction

In the last two decades, there has been an increasingly marked growth of e-commerce that has also recently undergone a strong acceleration due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The health crisis caused much damage to traditional trade, but "while many physical stores were closed down, digital retail sales soared by over 25% in a single year" (eMarketer.com, 2021). In 2020, the share of global online sales amounted to 17.8% of total retail sales (eMarketer.com, 2021).

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The success of e-commerce is the result of the many benefits it offers to the consumer: it is convenient and time saving, and offers a wide range of products and a wide range of prices that can be easily compared (Park et al., 2012; Bruce & Daly, 2010; Chen & Dubinsky, 2003). Moreover, systemic factors can drive e-commerce diffusion, such as a legal framework for consumer protection (Rodriguez-Ardura et al., 2008), an increase in trust towards online systems (Mouratidis & Cofta, 2010), and the possibility to adopt different payment systems (Mangiaracina & Perego, 2009). All these factors, together with the impossibility and/or fear of leaving home because of the pandemic, have increased the number of online shoppers and the amount of per capita e-commerce spending in this last year (Villa & Monzón, 2021).

The growing development of e-commerce and the increasing interest in sustainability have attracted more and more attention from researchers to the study of the environmental impact of this distribution channel (Mangiaracina et al., 2015). The reason is quite simple: on the one hand, a growth in online sales brings economic benefits, but, on the other hand, it generates negative consequences in terms of environmental impact. The number of trucks and vans on the road in urban areas is increasing due to the success of e-commerce and the desire for faster deliveries (Villa & Monzón, 2021; Savelsbergh & Van Woensel, 2016). In addition, the large number of small deliveries and of consumer returns entails extra warehousing operations and an increase in the complexity of sorting and packaging activities, thus using more materials and resources compared to the physical store-based business model (Matthews et al., 2002). Tertiary packaging stands out because of its negative contribution to the environmental impact of e-commerce: each product sent to the customer has an individual protective packaging necessary to deliver it by express courier (Borggren et al., 2011; Van Loon et al., 2014).

The increasing sensitivity of consumers and companies, including online operators, to the health of the planet has led to the development of several sustainability initiatives: the inclusion of sustainable clothing/goods in the range of products, sustainable and reusable packaging, and reduction in the use of plastic. Among the various actions promoted by Zalando (Europe's leading online fashion retailer) in recent years to protect the environment, was its decision to ask shoppers for their support in the fight against pollution by asking them to make a small voluntary contribution to offset the carbon emissions produced by the delivery, packaging, and possible return of a product order. The amount collected is devoted to financing projects with a high environmental impact, for example the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions.

In receiving a request for a voluntary contribution, consumers are faced with the environmental outcome of their purchasing behaviour but, at the same time, are given an opportunity to compensate for the negative effects generated by their online orders. This kind of pro-environmental action has never been explored by the literature and deserves to be studied. More specifically, the present study intends to investigate the propensity of individuals to remedy, through an economic contribution, the environmental impact of their purchasing choices, and to identify the factors that can favour or hinder this behaviour. Starting from the norm activation model (NAM; Schwartz, 1977), it proposes a causal model in which several

environmental concern-related and consciousness-related variables impact personal norms, sustainable behaviours, and attitudes towards the contribution, which in turn are expected to influence the consumers' propensity to pay a small voluntary contribution to offset the environmental impact generated by their online purchases. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to investigate the hypothesised relationships. The results will deepen knowledge about consumers' pro-environmental conduct in the e-commerce context, with significant theoretical and managerial implications.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section reviews the theoretical framework and proposes a conceptual model. Then, the methodology and the results of the study are presented. Conclusions and theoretical and managerial implications are highlighted in Sect. 5. Limitations and future research directions are discussed in the last section.

2 Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model

Clean air, unpolluted water, and biodiversity are classified as public environmental goods. Their value is commonly determined by responses to questions in surveys and contingent valuation (CV) is one of the most applied techniques (Carson & Hanemann, 2005; Cummings et al., 1986; Mitchell & Carson, 1989). In a CV survey, respondents declare the maximum amount they would be willing to pay (WTP) for a public environmental good. The contribution that some retailers ask consumers to make to reduce the CO_2 emissions produced by the delivery and the packaging of online shopping—through the financing of pro-environmental projects—can be identified as a form of voluntary taxation. Therefore, the intention to pay the monetary contribution may represent the WTP for public environmental goods.

In the present chapter, the intention to pay the monetary contribution is investigated through the development of a predicted model based on the NAM framework, enriched with sustainable, environmental, emotional, and attitudinal drivers.

2.1 NAM

Schwartz's (1977) NAM was developed to study altruistic behaviours, like volunteering or blood donation, which require the sacrifice of one's own interests for the well-being of others. Over time, NAM has also been used to study other behaviours, such as pro-environmental actions: citizens' propensity to save electricity (e.g. Wang et al., 2018), recycling (e.g. Bratt, 1999; Schultz, 1999), and purchase of sustainable packaging (Thøgersen, 1999). Therefore, it appears a valid theoretical framework for explaining consumers' willingness to pay a contribution to offset the environmental impact of their online purchases.

Personal norms, the core of the model, are actively experienced "as feelings of moral obligation" (Schwartz, 1977, p. 227) to engage in a certain action. They are determined by the awareness of the consequences of a specific behaviour and the ascription of responsibility for the welfare of other people (Harland et al., 1999; Schwartz, 1977). According to NAM, the effect of personal norms on behaviour is not direct but mediated by the intention to act.

The present study applies and extends the NAM to the e-commerce and sustainability domain, assuming that an individual's moral obligation to reduce their individual environmental impact increases as awareness of the consequences of individual behaviours on the environment and a sense of responsibility towards environmental pollution increase. Finally, following the NAM framework, personal norms are thought to be one of the drivers of the intention to pay a contribution. More formally, the following hypotheses are stated:

H1 Ascription of responsibility positively influences personal norms.

H2 Awareness of consequences positively influences personal norms.

H3 Personal norms positively influence the intention to pay a contribution.

2.2 Sustainable and Environmental Drivers

Sustainable behaviour is defined by its impact: "the extent to which it changes the availability of materials or energy from the environment or alters the structure and dynamics of ecosystems or the biosphere itself" (Stern, 2000, p. 408).

Consumers can contribute significantly to environmental sustainability through their shopping conduct, such as buying green products and preferring recycled and recyclable packaging (Chaubey et al., 2011), and through their daily routines. In turn, sustainable behaviours depend on consumers' knowledge, values, and attitudes (Mansaray & Abijoye, 1998).

Attitude is part of the individual factors (i.e. variables) related to a specific subject resulting from personal life experiences and it is able to affect the self's decision-making process (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). Specifically, attitudes towards the environment "are rooted in a person's concept of self and the degree to which an individual perceives him or herself to be an integral part of the natural environment" (Zelezny & Schultz, 2000, p. 368). This is why consumers' sustainable behaviours are often based on their environmental attitudes. Therefore, based on the literature, it is assumed that the more positive an individual's attitude is towards the environment, the greater the likelihood of their implementing sustainable behaviours. Indeed, it is assumed that:

H4 A positive attitude towards the environment positively influences sustainable behaviours.

According to Laroche et al. (1996), an individual's knowledge of the characteristics of the environment and its problems plays a key role in their conduct. Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between the link that a person has with nature and their implementation of pro-environmental behaviours (Mayer et al., 2009). People with greater nature relatedness are more likely to act environmentally friendly than those who feel less connected. Furthermore, the degree of connection with nature can influence the extent to which an individual loves a certain place, thus determining their willingness to preserve it by implementing sustainable behaviours. Howell et al. (2011) argued that people who feel a high degree of emotional affinity with nature develop more positive life attitudes and engage in pro-environmental behaviours more frequently. Finally, several studies have shown that sustainable behaviours are positively affected by knowledge of climate change, depletion of water resources, and/or CO_2 emissions (e.g. Aertsens et al., 2011; De Magistris & Gracia, 2008; Teng & Wang, 2015; Thøgersen et al., 2010). In light of the evidence reported, it is hypothesised that knowledge of environmental problems increases the implementation of sustainable behaviours by individuals. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H5 Knowledge of environmental problems positively influences sustainable behaviours.

Thomas and Sharp (2013) carried out a review on recycling behaviour, analysing whether a sustainable behaviour, such as recycling, can have a positive spillover effect on environment-friendly behaviours. Indeed, in recent years, several authors have studied recycling behaviour in the broader context of environmental sustainability to understand if it can lead to people's adoption of other sustainable actions (Jackson, 2004; Thornton, 2009; Austin et al., 2011). The results of Thomas and Sharp's analysis showed that the mechanisms that generate the spillover are complex and, indeed, this is still a contested area. Thøgersen and Crompton (2009) found weak support for a link between common pro-environmental actions and the adoption of more sustainable lifestyles. Thøgersen and Olander (2003) found weak spillover effects. Furthermore, it is not clear whether some pro-environmental behaviours are carried out simultaneously, if one influences the others, or whether they are influenced by other factors. Gatersleben et al. (2014) argued that a positive spillover effect occurs primarily with people who have environment-friendly norms and values. In summary, it is yet to be proved that the implementation of a specific sustainable behaviour acts as a stimulus to implement other similar choices in one's behaviour. The current research tackles this question while expecting that the implementation of sustainable behaviours determines the intention to pay a contribution for projects in favour of the planet's health, since this is also a sustainable action. More formally, it is stated that:

H6 The implementation of sustainable behaviours positively influences the intention to pay a contribution.

2.3 Emotional and Attitudinal Drivers

Some paradigms, such as Construal Level Theory (Trope et al., 2007) and Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), assume that human conduct is influenced by cognitive biases and emotions (Mullainathan & Thaler, 2000). The interest in the influence of emotions on consumer behaviour began about three decades ago: the literature started to study the emotions evoked by marketing stimuli (e.g. brand, product, advertising, and their impact on the decision-making process (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

Emotions are "mental states of readiness that arise from appraisals of events or one's own thoughts" (Bagozzi et al., 1999, p. 184). Emotions are intense, brief, and focused on a referent (King & Meiselman, 2010). They are directed towards a specific stimulus, cause psychological reactions (Levenson et al., 1990), generate facial expressions (Ekman, 1993), prepare for action (Roseman et al., 1994), motivate consumers (Andrade & Cohen, 2007), and influence attitudes (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Dubé et al., 2003).

As Damasio (1994) stated, human beings are not thinking machines that feel; rather, they are feeling machines that think. This is why emotions shape all the behaviours of individuals. It must be said that emotions can be both positive (pleasant emotions) and negative (unpleasant emotions) (Solomon, 1980). Regardless of the sign of the relationship, all emotions contribute to the growth and well-being of an individual and influence their decision-making process. However, negative emotions can have different effects than positive ones (Gardner, 1985; Thomas & Diener, 1990): both have an impact on attitude, but in a different direction (Zablocki et al., 2019). The present study assumes that the emotions generated by a request for a contribution have an effect on the attitude towards the payment (positive for positive emotions and negative for negative ones). More formally, it is assumed that:

H7 Positive emotions positively influence the attitude towards contribution.

H8 Negative emotions negatively influence the attitude towards contribution.

According to Ajzen (1991) and his Theory of Planned Behaviour, attitude is a major influencer of behaviour, and the relationship between attitude and behaviour is mediated by intentions to act. The attitude–intention link has been applied and validated for various behaviours (e.g. Nystrand & Olsen, 2020; Kasilingam, 2020; Park et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2014), including sustainable ones (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021; Si et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2020). Therefore, it is an established relationship, one that could also be valid for the intention to implement eco-friendly behaviour, such as the payment of a monetary donation to preserve the environment: the more positive the attitude towards the payment of a contribution, the greater the intention to pay it. This idea forms the basis of the next hypothesis:

H9 A positive attitude towards contribution positively influences the intention to pay a monetary donation.
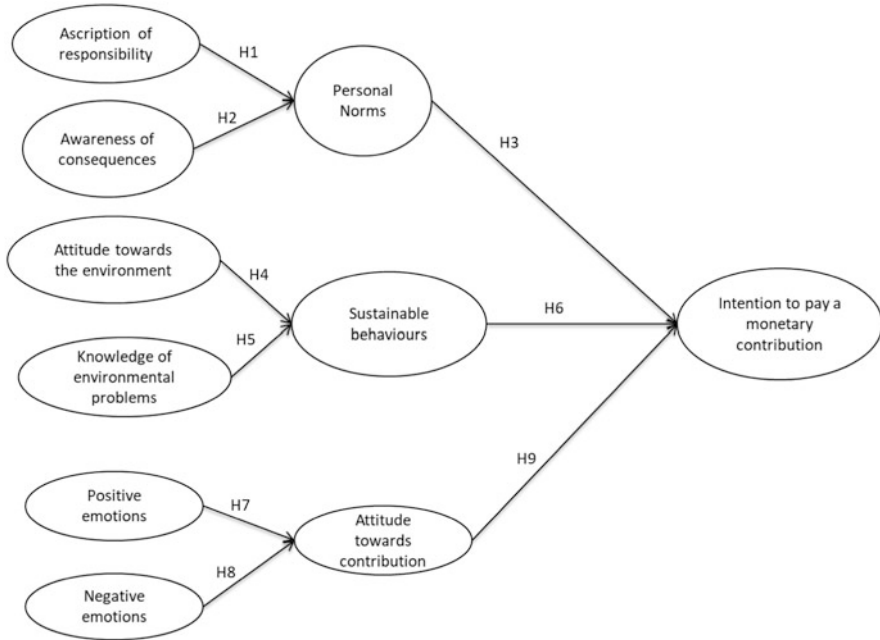
Fig. 1 Conceptual model

In summary, based on the hypotheses discussed above, the conceptual model illustrated in Fig. 1 is proposed.

3 Methodology

To test the model, an empirical study was conducted via an online survey. An invitation to participate in a survey was posted on social networks, such as Facebook, with the URL link to the questionnaire; participation was voluntary and non-incentivised. The distribution of the survey among the target population was facilitated through a snowball sampling procedure. In total, 391 complete responses from Italian online shoppers were collected. Of the survey participants, 71.1% were female and 28.9% male, with a mean age of 38.4 (min = 18; max = 70). The respondents were well-educated: 52% graduated or post-graduated while 41% completed high school; the remaining 7% left school after the secondary level.

In addition to collecting socio-demographic data, the questionnaire included measurement items from the established literature, adapted to fit the present research context, which represented the research variables. Awareness of consequence was assessed with five items adapted from Landon et al. (2018). Ascription of responsibility and personal norms were measured through, respectively, the 3-item and the 5-item scales proposed by Steg and de Groot (2010). The 6-items scale for attitude

towards the contribution was derived from Sánchez et al. (2018), while sustainable behaviour was operationalised with the 8-item scale by Taufique et al. (2017). The three items for environmental knowledge were adapted from Darnall et al. (2018). The concept of attitude towards the environment was assessed using the six items proposed by Grunert and Juhl (1995). To measure the emotions felt by the consumer in response to the request for the monetary contribution, the positive and negative affect schedule (Watson et al., 1988) was used, consisting of 10 items for positive emotions and 10 items for negative emotions. Finally, three items adapted from Alleyne and Lavine (2013) were used to assess the intention to pay a monetary contribution. All items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

For the analysis of the measurement model and of the conceptual model, SEM was performed using IBM SPSS statistical software (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL; release 27.0) and the LISREL software (release 8.80), employing the maximum likelihood method.

4   Results

4.1   *Measurement Model*

The data were analysed using SEM in a two-step approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Firstly, the measurement model and then the structural one were examined. As the skew and kurtosis statistics showed that the normality assumption was violated ($\chi^2 = 4184.777$, $p < 0.001$), the model was estimated using the Satorra–Bentler method (Satorra & Bentler, 1994). After examining the reliability of each of the constructs, the measurement model showed a good fit: Satorra–Bentler scaled $\chi^2 = 3517.819$, df = 1550, $p = 0.000$; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.971; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.057; non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.969; and standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.067. All the fit indices exceeded the recommended threshold (CFI > 0.95, RMSEA <0.06, NNFI >0.95, SRMR <0.08) cut-off values (Hu & Bentler, 1995; Hooper et al., 2008).

The significant factor loadings (>0.50), the high composite reliability (>0.70), the high average variance extracted (>0.50), and Cronbach's alpha (>0.70) demonstrated the convergent validity of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Cronbach, 1951; Steenkamp & Van Trijp, 1991). Table 1 shows the psychometric properties of all the scales and the items used.

Table 1 Measurement scales and reliability indices

Variables	Items (1 = completely disagree; 7 = completely agree)	CR	AVE	Cronbach's alpha
Ascription of responsibility (Steg & de Groot, 2010)	– It is my responsibility to minimise my impacts on the environment as an online consumer. – I feel jointly responsible for the impacts of online commerce on the environment. – Minimising my impacts of my online purchases on the environment is in part my responsibility.	0.779	0.542	0.781
Awareness of consequences (Landon et al., 2018)	To what extent do you think that the following phenomena are problems created by people's behaviour? – Carbon emissions from transportation (airplanes, cars, etc.). – Pollution of local environments. – Destruction of native species' habitats. – Waste (trash, sewage, etc.) coming from tourists. – Water security and overuse.	0.912	0.676	0.911
Personal norms (Steg & de Groot, 2010)	– As an online consumer, I feel morally obligated to do whatever I can to minimise my environmental impact. – As an online consumer, I would feel guilty if I were responsible for damage to the environment. – Minimising my impact on the environment is the right thing to do. – I am obligated to do my part to reduce my impact on the environment as a tourist. – People like me should do what they can to minimise their impact on the environment when shopping online.	0.849	0.532	0.836
Attitude towards the environment (Grunert & Juhl, 1995)	– I would donate a day's pay to a foundation to help improve the environment. – I think the government is doing enough to control pollution. – I would be willing to stop buying products from companies guilty of polluting the environment, even though it might be inconvenient for me. – I often discuss environmental issues with my friends. – I become incensed when I think about the harm being done to plant and animal life by pollution. – When I think of the ways industries are polluting the environment, I get frustrated and angry.	0.838	0.500	0.762

Table 1 (continued)

Variables	Items (1 = completely disagree; 7 = completely agree)	CR	AVE	Cronbach's alpha
Knowledge of environmental problems (Darnall et al., 2018)	Indicate your degree of information regarding the following topics: – Climate change – Exhaustion of water resources – CO_2 emissions	0.946	0.853	0.946
Sustainable behaviours (Taufique et al., 2017)	– When there is a choice, I always choose the product that contributes to the least amount of pollution. – I use a recycling centre or in some way recycle some of my household trash – I make every effort to buy paper products made from recycled paper – Whenever possible, I buy products packaged in reusable containers. – I buy toilet paper made from recycled paper – I try only to buy products that can be recycled – I do not buy household products that harm the environment. – I try to buy energy efficient household appliances.	0.909	0.560	0.906
Positive emotions (Watson et al., 1988)	– Interested – Excited – Upset – Strong – Enthusiastic – Proud – Inspired – Determined – Attentive – Active	0.947	0.645	0.947
Negative emotions (Watson et al., 1988)	– Distressed – Guilty – Scared – Irritable – Alert – Ashamed – Nervous – Jittery – Afraid	0.915	0.526	0.907
Attitude towards contribution (Sánchez et al., 2018)	– I think the idea of paying a small contribution to support a reforestation project to offset the environmental impact generated by my online purchases is brilliant. – I think the idea of paying a small contribution to support a reforestation project to offset the environmental impact generated	0.968	0.858	0.967

Table 1 (continued)

| Variables	Items (1 = completely disagree; 7 = completely agree)	CR	AVE	Cronbach's alpha
	by my online purchases is very responsible. – I think the idea of paying a small contribution to support a reforestation project to offset the environmental impact generated by my online purchases is very intelligent. – I think the idea of paying a small contribution to support a reforestation project to offset the environmental impact generated by my online purchases is very useful. – I think the idea of paying a small contribution to support a reforestation project to offset the environmental impact generated by my online purchases is very ecological.			
Intention to pay a monetary contribution (Alleyne & Lavine, 2013)	– I intend to pay a small contribution to support a reforestation project to offset the environmental impact generated by my online purchases whenever I have the opportunity. – I intend to pay a small contribution to support a reforestation project to offset the environmental impact generated by my online purchases whenever necessary. – To the extent possible, I would pay a small contribution to support a reforestation project to offset the environmental impact generated by my online purchases frequently.	0.917	0.787	0.918

4.2 Structural Model

In the second step of analysis, the structural model consisting of all the hypothesised relationships among variables was assessed. The results indicated an acceptable fit: Satorra–Bentler scaled χ^2 = 3685.586, df = 1571, p = 0.000; CFI = 0.969; RMSEA = 0.059; NNFI = 0.967; and SRMR = 0.075. The model explained 50% of variance for intention to pay the contribution. Path coefficients and levels of significance are displayed in Fig. 2.

Results from the data were found to support all hypotheses, except H1. In particular, the impacts of personal norms (β = 0.151, p = 0.000), sustainable behaviour (β = 0.176, p = 0.000), and attitude towards the contribution (β = 0.554, p = 0.001) on intention to pay a monetary contribution were positive and significant, supporting H3, H6, and H9. Considering the antecedents of personal norms, only the awareness of consequences exerted a positive and significant effect (γ = 0.937, p = 0.000), supporting H2, whereas the ascription of responsibility effect was not significant, therefore, H1 cannot be accepted (γ = 0.046, p > 0.05). The level of sustainable behaviour increased as environmental knowledge
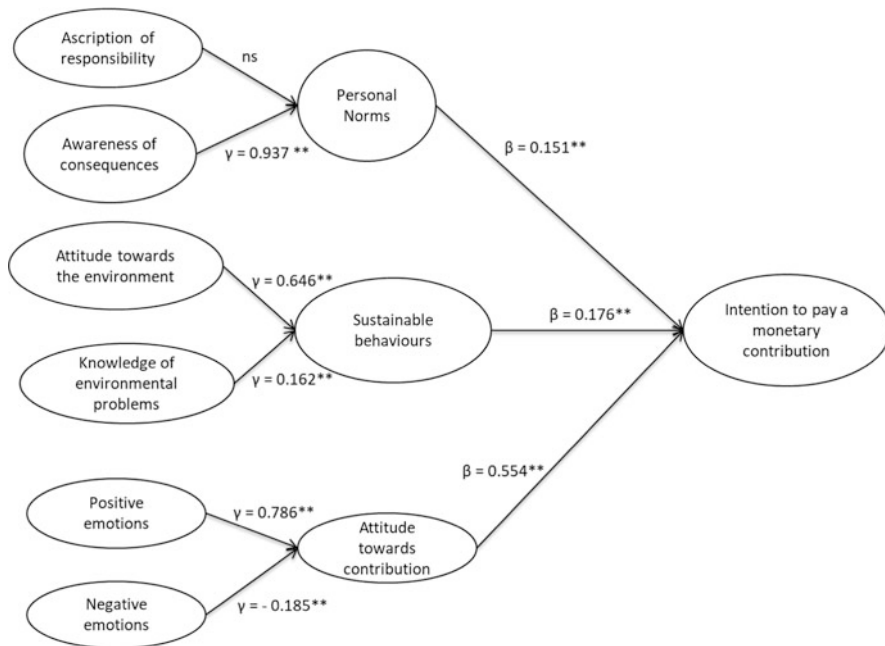
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Fig. 2 Structural model with standardised coefficients. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

($\gamma = 0.162$, $p = 0.000$) and attitude towards the environment ($\gamma = 0.646$, $p = 0.000$) increased, supporting H5 and H4. Finally, attitude towards the contribution was significantly influenced by emotions both in a positive and negative way (positive emotions $\gamma = 0.786$, $p = 0.000$; negative emotions $\gamma = -0.185$, $p = 0.000$), thus supporting H7 and H8.

5   Conclusions and Implications

In the last few years, the scientific community's interest in the environmental impact of e-commerce has grown (Mangiaracina et al., 2015). Transport for deliveries and returns and the packaging material used are among the main causes of the environmental pollution generated by online shopping (Matthews et al., 2002; Borggren et al., 2011; Van Loon et al., 2014; Savelsbergh & Van Woensel, 2016; Villa & Monzón, 2021).

Among the various initiatives promoted by online operators, the idea of asking shoppers to pay a small voluntary monetary donation to offset the pollution generated by their online purchase appears interesting and new. Despite the large amount of research conducted in recent years on online shopping, this pro-environmental

behaviour has never been investigated in the literature. The present study proposes and tests a conceptual model in order to fill this gap and identify the factors that favour or hinder a consumer's willingness to provide a monetary contribution.

Results from the proposed structural model highlight the validity of the theoretical framework and the positive and significant impact of all the three direct predictors of the intention to pay a contribution: personal norms, sustainable behaviours, and attitude towards payment. In particular, attitude exerts the greatest effect on behavioural intention, confirming the assumption based on Ajzen's (1991) theory and the results of several studies conducted on sustainable behaviours (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021; Si et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2020). Therefore, attitude towards a behaviour plays a key role with reference to the payment of a voluntary monetary contribution to support the environment.

Study results partially confirmed the NAM's relationships (Schwartz, 1977): only awareness of consequences exerts a positive, significant, and strong impact on personal norms; by contrast, the effect of ascription of responsibility is not supported by the data. This result reinforces the existence of a controversial relationship between this variable and personal norms (De Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000).

In relation to the antecedents of sustainable behaviours, the findings suggest that the more positive the attitude towards the environment and the greater the knowledge of environmental issues, the higher the probability that people will implement behaviours in support of the environment. This means that awareness of the problems that put strains on the planet's health is a strong incentive to behave in a more careful and sustainable way.

Finally, the relationships between attitude towards the contribution and emotions appear significant. Specifically, the emotions generated by the request for a contribution have a dual effect on attitude: positive emotions contribute to strengthen it, while negative emotions contribute to weaken it. These findings are in line with studies supporting the role played by emotions in consumers' decision-making processes (e.g. Gardner, 1985; Thomas & Diener, 1990; Zablocki et al., 2019).

The proposed conceptual model has significant theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretically, it explains a specific environment-friendly behaviour never investigated in the literature, deepening knowledge on this topic in the e-commerce context. While the model does not offer full support to NAM, it widens the field of investigation to sustainable, environmental, emotional, and attitudinal drivers. In so doing, the study offers a wider and solid conceptual framework to understand individuals' intention to implement eco-friendly conduct. Furthermore, the model contributes to the enrichment of the literature in the field of public environmental goods. Managerially, the study provides several implications for online operators. More and more retailers are addressing the increasingly sensitive issue of environmental sustainability through the promotion of several initiatives, such as the offer of sustainable products, reduction in packaging, and the use of recycled and recyclable materials. Some of them, like Zalando, stand out by asking shoppers to actively participate in environmental sustainability through the payment of a small voluntary contribution to invest in planet protection projects. The findings suggest that to encourage such conduct, a positive attitude towards paying the contribution must be

developed. In turn, the emotions generated by the request for the monetary contribution are a key factor that strengthens towards making a contribution. This is why retailers must pay close attention to the formulation of the contribution request because it must be able to arouse positive (and not negative) emotions in the shopper. Therefore, when constructing the message, retailers should choose images, colours, and terms that will generate positive feelings. According to the study results, the intention to pay the contribution increases if shoppers already implement sustainable behaviours, which in turn depend on their sensitivity towards the environment and its health. To leverage these behaviours and sensitivity, online operators have to work to raise customers' awareness of the consequences of their actions on the environment and their knowledge of planet health. This is a simple task because they just have to leverage on communication and information, as it is not necessary to trigger regret and guilt feelings in consumers. On e-commerce sites, for example, retailers could create sections dedicated to environmental sustainability, with news regarding problems and causes of pollution, the impact generated by everyday routines and with suggestions of pro-environmental behaviours that could be easily implemented. This informative activity would increase awareness of the consequences deriving from the implementation of sustainable behaviour, which is an essential condition for strengthening moral obligation. At the same time, information and sensitisation can also be useful for strengthening moral obligation towards minimising their own environmental impact as it acts as a significant predictor of behavioural intention.

Knowing the factors that affect consumers' propensity to adopt sustainable online purchasing behaviours is useful to identify further virtuous behaviours, in addition to paying a contribution, that consumers could be incentivised to adopt, for example, the single delivery of multiple products purchased from the same online retailer, rather than delivery at different times.

6   Limitations and Future Research

Although the present chapter offers several literature and managerial contributions, there are some limits and related research directions that can be considered. First, the proposed framework does not take into consideration consumers' knowledge about the actual impact of e-commerce on the environment. In a future research perspective, this factor could enrich the conceptual framework as a direct antecedent of intention and as a moderator of the relation between drivers and intention. Second, the model considers only the intention to pay a contribution and not the actual behaviour. Therefore, further research is recommended in order to investigate whether behavioural intentions actually turn into actual behaviour. The payment of a contribution could also be measured through a field experiment. Developing an experimental design in collaboration with an online retailer would allow for precise observation and measurement of users' behaviour. Third, the research was carried out using only one type of message for the contribution request. Given the

importance of the emotions generated by the message to behavioural intention, it would be interesting to test different types of communication to identify the most effective one.

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Small Retailers in Small Towns: An Explorative Study on Shopping Behaviour for Improving Social Sustainability in an Urban Centre

Gabriele Qualizza and Patrizia de Luca

Abstract Nomadism and social sustainability are becoming central phenomena in understanding the new shopping models. Small local shops are a key space in the life of neighbourhoods, both in terms of what happens in them and their relationship with other spaces in which daily life takes place. They are, therefore, fundamental spaces for socialising and supporting the community, with a view to social sustainability. Urban areas and physical shops have changed radically in recent years. We aim to contribute to the knowledge of the urban retailing context from the perspective of social sustainability, especially as regards the quality of life. The lack of research on the issues of social sustainability of retailing and, more generally, of urban community social sustainability is widely highlighted. This is a gap that this study aims to fill, introducing through field research on a historic town centre the consideration that every visit to an urban centre—for shopping or other purposes—can be read in terms of a social sustainability experience. The knowledge of various shopping profiles could help to develop platforms of opportunities based on communities of place in a socially sustainable perspective.

Keywords Retailing · Social sustainability · Quality of life · Small towns · Small retailers · Shopping behaviour

1 Introduction

In contemporary retail, the themes of nomadism and sustainability are becoming central phenomena in the understanding of new shopping models. The concept of nomadism, which expresses the continuous fluctuation between products, brands, places of purchase and physical and virtual windows, allows us to summarise the preference for transitional lifestyles and consumption in the name of discovery, excitement and novelty (Pomodoro, 2012b; Qualizza, 2006). The consumer makes

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choices based on opportunities that arise from time to time, in a condition of permanent mobility. For that consumer, it is relevant to feel ready to leave and change at any time (Levy, 1998; Dagnino, 1996). These existential metaphors have a significant impact on everyday life and on the different paths of consumption, online and offline. This can refer to both the physical dimension, for example in large shopping malls and urban centres, and the digital dimension, where the user/consumer can navigate from one place to another, chasing value offers through an increasingly experientially rich customer journey. Nomadism also underlies the phenomena of out-shopping and cross-border shopping (Castaño et al., 2010; Wong & Lam, 2016), driven by digital opportunities even in the critical period of the pandemic; while physical mobility has decreased, there has been an increase in online mobility (Bettiol et al., 2021; Koch et al., 2020). This phenomenon leads to several consequences for sustainability, in which a key area is sustainable consumption and production (UNESCO, 2015).

The concept of sustainability, with its economic, environmental and social dimensions, has been widely studied in the field of purchasing and consumption (Bălan, 2021). Social sustainability is one of the most critical issues facing retailers (Erez, 2019; Vadakkepatt et al., 2021; Widlitz, 2020; Wiese et al., 2015; Wilson, 2015). The literature engages with some issues about the deterioration of downtowns and neighbourhoods, rapid mall development and expansion to the suburbs, the death of older malls and the redevelopment of grey areas. The potential impacts of commercial developments and revitalisation on urban resilience, however, have been less studied (Dixon, 2005; Moreno, 2019; Ozuduru & Guldmann, 2013; Simó et al., 2018; Warnaby et al., 2005). In urban centres, small retailers can contribute significantly to supporting social sustainability. In addition to contributing to job creation (de Wit & de Kok, 2014), small stores play a significant role in ongoing urban regeneration. They are relevant for the life of neighbourhoods, both in terms of what happens inside them and their relationship to other spaces for daily life. Stores are key spaces for developing social life and supporting the community.

However, the role of urban space and the physical store itself is changing radically. Not only large post-industrial metropolises but also smaller towns evoke the image of a stratified city (Semprini, 1999). The traditional city made up of houses, streets and squares, where people meet daily and share meaningful experiences, is intersected by the dense network of infrastructures, both physical and virtual, that connect the urban centre to large global networks and flows. It is necessary to understand this dual dimension, because interaction with the urban environment expands beyond traditional space-time limits, thanks to the plurality of technological devices available to the consumer.

Many researchers have pointed out the lack of research on these issues, especially from the point of view of sustainable marketing (Castilhos, 2015; Rasouli & Kumarasuriyar, 2016). This is a gap that the present study aims to help fill, introducing—through qualitative research, based on a narrative method—the proposition that every shopping visit to an urban centre can be read in terms of an experience of social sustainability.
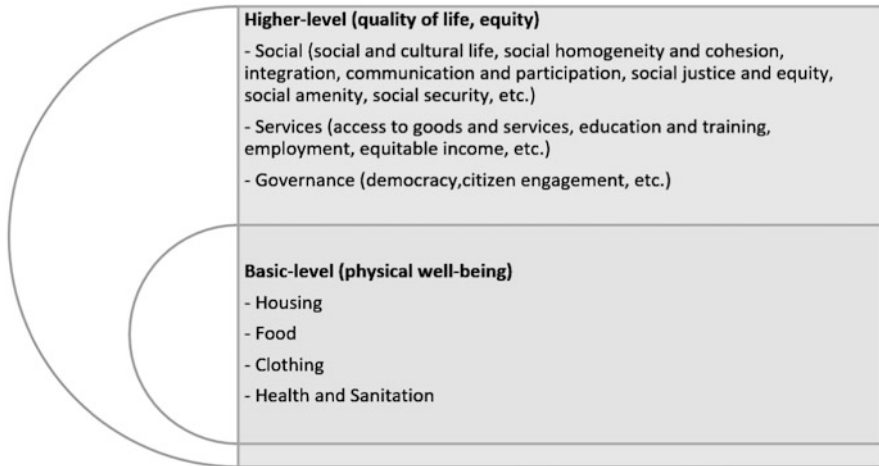
Fig. 1 Main themes of social sustainability

This study[1] was carried out with the following objectives. First, it sought to study how people experience urban centre spaces, giving them different and personal meanings, including traditional and digital shopping activities. Secondly, an attempt was made to describe the role of retailers in enhancing the social dimension of sustainability. In this sense, we aimed to identify opportunities for integration between commerce, tourism and creative crafts, able to contribute—also through specific initiatives promoted by local institutions—to the regeneration of the urban centre, spreading the economic benefits of these activities among the operators directly involved and throughout the whole territory and its production system.

2   Retailing and Social Sustainability

Within the broad framework of sustainability studies, this chapter focuses on the social dimension of sustainability in an urban retailing context (Dempsey et al., 2011; Hafez & Elakkad, 2020; Mehan et al., 2017).

Social sustainability has been defined in various ways and it is a rather complex, multi-dimensional and dynamic concept (Dempsey et al., 2011; Hafez & Elakkad, 2020). In general, social sustainability can be achieved by meeting basic human needs for current and future generations (Littig & Grießler, 2005). Rasouli and Kumarasuriyar (2016) mainly divided the key concepts of social sustainability into macro and micro levels. We propose an adaptation of this classification (Fig. 1),

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[1]This work is the result of a shared effort. However, the authors divide it by attributing paragraphs 1 and 2 to Patrizia de Luca, and 3 and 4 to Gabriele Qualizza.

presenting some themes of basic level and higher level. The basic level refers to the physical well-being and basic needs of people, such as housing, food and clothing. The higher level refers to quality of life and equity regarding different aspects of social life, services and governance. The classification, here not exhaustive, is a complex issue, as it can vary in time and space.

In this chapter, the focus is on the role retailers could play in the sustainability of the community at the higher level of quality of life in an urban centre.

Sustainable communities can be defined as "places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all" (ODPM, 2006, p. 12). Many factors can contribute to the social sustainability of the urban community: physical factors, such as the quality of the local environment, accessibility and the elements that attract visitors and customers, and non-physical factors related to social relations and interactions (Dempsey et al., 2011).

Retailers can contribute to community sustainability by responding to the needs of current and future residents and visitors in a variety of ways at the basic and higher levels of social sustainability factors. They can respond mainly in terms of employment, the provision of goods and services, social interaction and the creation of shopping experiences, both at the level of the individual shop and at the level of the overall retail system. Retailing, even small-scale retail, contributes significantly to job creation (de Wit & de Kok, 2014). Small shops also play a very important role in the city and its ongoing regeneration, helping to slow down the trend towards urban desertification. There is no city without commerce, as it strengthens the urban structure and the social structure of the city. The loss of retailing activity is one of the most significant indicators of the decline of urban centres. Small local shops are a key space in the life of neighbourhoods, both in terms of what happens in them and their relationship with other spaces in which daily life takes place. They are, therefore, fundamental spaces for socialising and supporting the community, with a view to social sustainability (Delgado-de Miguel et al., 2019).

The urban scenario has changed profoundly in recent years: not only the large post-industrial conurbations, but also the smaller centres, evoke the image of a stratified city on many levels. Castells (1996) and Semprini (1999) speak in this regard of a space of flows and a space of places: the terrestrial city, made up of houses, streets and pavements, and squares where people meet every day, sharing experiences rich in meaning (space of places), flanked and superimposed by the dense web of infrastructures—physical and virtual—that connect the individual urban centre to the simultaneous and timeless horizon of the great global networks (space of flows). The need to establish a physical and conceptual bridge between these two dimensions is increasingly felt in the awareness that today's interaction with the urban environment expands beyond the traditional space-time limits, thanks to the plurality of technological devices available to the consumer.

In this context, the concept of consumer nomadism fits in well, expressing the continuous flitting between products, brands, places of purchase and physical and

virtual showcases, and allowing us to summarise the preference for "transitory" lifestyles and consumption, under the banner of discovery, entertainment and novelty (Pomodoro, 2012b; Qualizza, 2006). This phenomenon is in line with experience research (Hirschman, 1984) and with the motivational theories underlying shopping behaviour, which can be traced essentially to the theories of stimulation (environmental attributes), affiliation (social interaction) and cognition (learning on new trends and innovations) (Jarratt, 2000).

The nomadic consumer, who makes his or her choices based on the situations and purchasing opportunities that arise from time to time, is in a condition of permanent mobility, understood as a willingness to cross different realities, to immerse oneself in the continuous flow of information and to be here and elsewhere at all times. For this consumer, it is important to feel ready at all times to leave and to change (Dagnino, 1996; Levy, 1998). These are mental states and existential metaphors that have a strong impact on everyday life, as the logic of crossing over guides the consumer in his or her online and offline consumption patterns. This can happen both in the physical dimension, for example, in the large shopping malls and within urban centres, which are increasingly being likened to "show cities", characterised by the incessant offer of innovations and variations capable of arousing a surprise effect in visitors (Codeluppi, 2007, p. 74), and in the digital dimension, where the user/consumer can navigate from one site to another, chasing valuable offers through a customer journey that is increasingly curated and enriched from an experiential point of view.

The nomadic nature of the consumer encourages out-shopping, defined as the purchase of products outside the consumers' local shopping area. Marketing studies on out-shopping (Guo & Wang, 2009; Jarratt, 1998, 2000), a phenomenon that has been studied for a long time and influenced in recent years by the considerable increase in online shopping, have identified several reasons that seem to push people to shop outside their area or country (cross-border shopping), connecting with other communities and retailers. These consumers appear to be looking for better quality and assortment of products, higher quality of personal service, a more pleasant shopping atmosphere and more competitive prices. This search can manifest itself in the physical or digital dimension, resulting in out-shopping and cross-border shopping, including digital shopping, as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic period (Bettiol et al., 2021; Koch et al., 2020).

The lack of research on the issues of social sustainability of retailing and, more generally, of urban community social sustainability is widely lamented in the marketing literature, both from an experiential and sustainable point of view. According to some scholars, the knowledge gap is partially explained by the lack of attention paid to the study of cognitive and behavioural mechanisms that characterise the relationship between consumers and the urban environment (Castilhos, 2015; De Nisco, 2010; Puccinelli et al., 2009; Turley & Millman, 2000). This study aims to fill that gap, introducing through field research the consideration that every visit to an urban centre—for shopping or other purposes—can be read in terms of a social sustainability experience.

3   An Exploratory Study in a Small Italian Town

In the present study, the following research objectives were pursued from the perspective of enhancing the social dimension of shopping in small urban communities:

- Firstly, it sought to study how people "appropriate" the spaces of the urban centre, giving them different and personal meanings, from the perspective of traditional and digital shopping activities. In this area we try to discover consumer profiles through which to interpret the shopping experience, in accordance with the social sustainability of the territory.
- Secondly, it sought to analyse retailers' perception of consumption behaviours in the urban centre and find out how retailers think about possible initiatives to improve the social dimension of sustainability.

3.1   Theoretical Approaches

To develop the research, reference was made to three different theoretical approaches—anthropological, symbolic-interpretative and experiential—which can help to explain, from different points of view, the support of retailing to community social sustainability.

The first strand comes from the socio-anthropological reflection on the concepts of "space" and "place" (Gans, 2002; Gieryn, 2000; Tuan, 1974; Urry, 2001). In the face of the extensive literature on "non-places" (Augé, 1992) and on the "mcdonaldisation" of consumption (Ritzer, 1993), the place persists as a constitutive element of social life and historical change (Friedland & Boden, 1994). In this regard, it may be useful to distinguish between two different declinations of localness: the first focuses on the concept of space, that is, space as a set of mobility and trajectories, defined by the physical coordinates of time, speed and direction; the second emphasises the concept of place, understood as a lived and narrated place, an environment constructed through the attribution of meanings, which vary according to the subjects that interact with it (Tuan, 1974). We can therefore speak of a plurivocal relationship between the actors of the experience and the space they occupy (Visconti et al., 2010). The relationship between places and social practices is always circular: if on the one hand the interpretation and organisation of space depend on the actions of the individuals who move within it, on the other hand, the actions of the same individuals are influenced by how this space is organised (Becchis & Genova, 2010, p. 137; Higgins & Hamilton, 2012). In the light of these considerations, we can recognise that places are not necessarily static and immutable (Massey, 1994, pp. 136–7), but involve a multiplicity of processes, in which relational networks and flows merge, interconnect and fragment (Urry, 2001; Castilhos, 2015). In other words, the space of "staying" is constantly crossed by the territories of "going": living in a place always implies the tension between the sense

of belonging to that specific territory and the desire to find another place as a possible field of action (Careri, 2006). In this sense, it is the act of walking that, by culturally modifying the meaning of space and thus the space itself, transforms it into a place: "Walking produces places" (Careri, 2006). It is the bodily activity that creates and is created *by* and *in* space. We are therefore talking about an embodied spatial experience (Yakhlef, 2015).

The symbolic-interpretative approach to the study of spatial practices and the meanings attributed to shopping activity takes its cue from the distinction between the *convenience shopper*, guided by utilitarian motivations, and the *recreational shopper*, oriented towards enhancing the playful and emotional components of the purchasing process (Bellenger et al., 1977). Over the years, there has been a proliferation of proposals for classifying consumer behaviour in retail spaces (Lesser & Hughes, 1986; Bloch et al., 1994; Finn et al., 1994; Kuruvilla & Joshi, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2002; Sandicki & Holt, 1998). In particular, Ruiz et al. (2004), in a questionnaire survey, have identified four groups of consumers in a shopping mall—recreational shoppers, full experience shoppers, browsers and mission shoppers—characterised by significant differences in activity patterns, socio-demographic variables, psychographic variables and atmospheric perceptions. Recently, Gilboa et al. (2016) empirically identified and validated four types of mall experience: seductive, social, recreational and functional. However, these studies have focused on the variables within the store environment and have paid little attention to spatial patterns of consumption and purchase—considering the whole store network—in the city shopping streets (Petruzzellis & Falcone, 2005) and to the relationship between consumers and the urban environment (De Nisco, 2010). The exploration of the reciprocal interaction that is created between the consumer and the shopping spaces, according to a symbolic-interpretative approach (Bonnin, 2003; Carù & Cova, 2003; Ferraresi & Parmiggiani, 2007; Floch, 1989, 1990; Laaksonen et al., 2008; Pomodoro, 2012a; Michaud Trévinal, 2013; Weijo et al., 2018; Yakhlef, 2015), is oriented to consider the environment from a different angle: no longer as a physical stimulus, but as the object of a process of "appropriation" (Aubert-Gamet, 1996; Bonnin, 2006; Carù & Cova, 2003, 2006) or "domestication" (Bradford & Sherry Jr., 2015) by the consumer, which can lead to the attribution of different and personal meanings. In other words, there is a need for research on shopping environments to include people as active components (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999), with the awareness that human beings produce space by inhabiting it. However, the studies that move in this direction (Floch, 1990; Pomodoro, 2012a) mainly make use of ethnographic approaches, with the limitations of the small samples observed (monitoring generally refers to a few dozen cases) and the exclusively qualitative nature of the survey instruments used.

Lastly, the study was intended to propose a reinterpretation in "narrative" terms of the shopping experience (Arnould & Price, 1993; Arnould et al., 2002; Fontana, 2014; Moisio & Arnould, 2005; Rahmanian, 2021), with a focus on what occurs in an urban context (Keskin et al., 2016). This is an interpretative key that is consistent with the most advanced research trends, which today emphasise the active role of consumers both in the co-generation of the product/service and in the elaboration of

the meanings that give meaning to the moment of consumption (Vargo & Lush, 2004, 2008). The reference to storytelling makes it possible to enhance a different cognitive mode (Bruner, 1991; Fisher, 1984), which feeds on symbols, myths, metaphors and analogies, dealing with what turns a simple behaviour into human action, endowed with intentions and meanings (Czarniawska, 1997). On the other hand, a narrative plot can never be reduced to a simple monologue (Boje, 1995), but presupposes an interweaving of full and empty spaces (Jenkins, 2006): openings for multiple passages, capable of stimulating the active participation of the interlocutors. In other words, storytelling can never be separated from story-listening (Scholes & Clutterbuck, 1998), that is, from a careful recognition of the personal experiences and sense attribution processes implemented by consumers (Qualizza, 2009).

3.2 The Context: A Small Italian Town and its Retailing

This study focused on the town of Sacile, a quaint urban centre with about 20,000 inhabitants (ISTAT, 2022), located in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, a region in north-eastern Italy. The present-day town, which developed from the fifteenth century onwards, dates back to the flourishing period of the Venetian Republic.[2] It was born on two islands in the bed of a river, along which ancient buildings and gardens lie, and it has bridges, "calli" and "campielli". That is why the city is called "Little Venice" or "Garden of the Serenissima".

In the last decades, the area of Sacile has seen phenomena of urban and territorial transformation, such as the settlement of large commercial fields, the development of relevant infrastructures (motorway junctions, reopening of the Sacile-Gemona rail-way line, etc.) and the integration into the social fabric of people coming from different European and non-European countries. The combination of these events is transforming Sacile and the surrounding area into a hyper location that can become a catalyst for the flows of goods and people (Agnoletto et al., 2007), capable of enhancing its potential as a tourist destination and as a meeting place for relations.

From the retailing point of view, the territory of Sacile presents significant differences between the historic centre and the peripheral area. The historic centre has more than 120 active commercial spaces (of the total 150, about 30 are currently inactive or closed). The retailing offering mainly concerns clothing, furniture, wellness, personal care, jewellery shops, art galleries, bars and cafés. Various services are also present, such as banks, insurance companies, professional offices and public offices. With this kind of offering, Sacile can be defined as an "open-air shopping centre".

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[2]In: comune.sacile.pn.it, published 9/4/2021—History of Sacile

3.3   Research in the Historic Centre

In accordance with the theoretical framework presented in Sect. 3.1, the present study intends to enhance the meta-theory of the "hero's journey", used by Vogler (1992) as a guide to the analysis of the basic structure of film scripts. The idea behind Vogler's study is that all narratives resort to "topoi" or permanent patterns (Propp, 1928; Campbell, 1949): vectors of meaning through which human cultures construct life experiences (Fontana, 2009). Regarding shopping places, it can be hypothesised that—in the light of Vogler's scheme—each visit experience is divided into four phases (Fontana, 2014): from the "threshold crossing", stimulated by elements and messages of attraction (shop windows, signs, advertising, etc.) to the "emotional co-optation" of the visitor within a world perceived as different from that of everyday life, but with which the consumer is prepared to familiarise themself; and from the "central challenge", a moment in which the subject's anxieties and desires are measured against a series of constraints and limitations (budget, available time, breadth and depth of the offer, etc.) until the exit from the shopping area and the "return to habitual life".

In turn, this scheme can be declined in a multiplicity of variations and contents, according to the different meanings ("core stories" or "main narratives") attributed by the subjects to the experiences in which they are protagonists (Welte et al., 2021). In this regard, as suggested by Fontana (2014, 2016), personal events, encounters and events that one is confronted with in everyday life can be traced back to certain "founding myths" that is, "archetypes", basic scripts, to which correspond as many narrative lines and as many spatial practices: "myths of strength" (tales of power and security); "myths of care" (tales of healing and protection); "myths of escape" (tales of fun and discovery); and "myths of salvation" (tales of liberation and rebirth). In practice, each of these scripts offers the subject the opportunity to live a transformation experience and to enter "a qualitatively different state of consciousness" (Sturm, 2000).

The research process consists of two parallel phases, addressed to actual and potential visitors/consumers of the retailers in the historic centre. The analysis considers, beyond the customer, also the simple visitor, who moves for the necessity of acquaintance and comparison before proceeding to the purchase, and the frequenter, who interprets the place of purchase like an occasion of relaxation and socialisation (Bäckström, 2006). In fact, shopping venues lend themselves to an activity that is not directed solely at purchasing, but also concerns documenting or even contemplating the merchandise in its elective place. For some it may be enjoyable to walk around the place, to look, to consider the products; these are behaviours relatively independent of the immediate purchase (Carmagnola & Ferraresi, 1999).

Even visitors who do not purchase, but are nevertheless subjected to the commercial offer, can benefit from the commercial service through shop windows, a visit to the point of sale, direct information provided by the sales staff, etc. In addition, this analysis may include potential consumers who, although not belonging to the

specific community, pass through the city centre, appreciating it for business, tourism or shopping reasons.

This study, carried out in the period January 2020–January 2021—a long period due to the forced interruptions induced by the COVID-19 health emergency—was divided into two main phases:

- The desk research, dedicated to the literature review concerning both the processes of symbolic "appropriation" of the urban centre and the themes of socially sustainable innovation in the retail sector.
- The field research, for the collection and analysis of primary data, which were acquired in two different ways: a naturalistic observation of the activities carried out by the different users during the surveys developed in the historic centre of Sacile; in-depth interviews with nine qualified witnesses, owners of commercial activities located on-site, interpreted as the dual role of regular users of the centre and potential protagonists of initiatives and projects aimed at improving its sustainability.

Naturalistic observation, which was used during this study, is a "non-intrusive" technique that allows the examination of a phenomenon that is still little explored (Delli Zotti, 2004). The observer is not identified as such by the subjects observed, who therefore feel free to move and behave without being conditioned and without feeling the need to justify their behaviour. In the course of the observations, two survey instruments were used: an outline for the micro-narrative and a structured form. Based on the outline, the surveyor drafted a text in the form of a "micro-narrative" concerning the path and the activities in which the subjects observed were engaged. This avoided breaking down complex consumption practices of a processual nature into a mechanical sequence of artificially disconnected gestures and behaviours. The urban route is thus translated into a "narrative text", capable of acquiring meaning in the eyes of the observer, regardless of what might be the declared intentions of the subject. The structured form was used for the analytical description of the cases (composition, age group, relationship, etc.) and the activities observed (walking, telephoning, window shopping, entering a shop, etc.), for which a survey form was used as a basis, organised in the form of a closed-ended questionnaire.

The in-depth interviews to collect the comments and testimonies of the retailers were carried out based on an outline of questions to guide the route, but leaving the respondent free to answer and tell his or her own story. The outline, used as a basis for the topics to be dealt with and the questions to be proposed, was enriched during every single interview to stimulate the spontaneous narration by the interviewee. For this work, the interpretative keys offered by the interviewees are relevant to explain the peculiar characteristics of the shopping experience in the centre of Sacile.

On the visitor/consumer side, 249 field observations were collected. The survey units consisted of individuals, but also couples, family groups and groups of friends. This choice is dictated by the fact that, as pointed out in the literature (Enghel et al., 1990; Cova, 2003; Miller, 1998), the purchase of a good never takes place "in a social vacuum, without structure, without group dimensions, at the mercy of

advertising suggestions alone", but always "within a social relationship" (Cova, 2003, pp. 133–35), which contributes to giving meaning to the purchase itself. Shopping does not involve individual "monads" in movement, self-sufficient and isolated from the rest of the world, but involves—even physically—a plurality of actors, with different roles and responsibilities, who can be likened as a whole—as "consumption units"—to multi-cellular aggregates.

Within the framework of this qualitative research, data collected from field observation and audio-recorded interviews were faithfully transcribed and subsequently examined, making use of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Langdridge, 2004). According to this approach, the researcher never loses sight of the meaning of the conversation as a whole (Breidbach et al., 2014; Thomsen et al., 1998), encoding significant portions of text capable of expressing an articulated concept (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis of the empirical material constituted by the texts derived from the "micro-narratives" and in-depth interviews was developed with a symbolic-interpretive approach, concerning three different levels of investigation (Pomodoro, 2012a; Michaud Trévinal, 2013):

- Interaction with the physical space and the social environment (rhythm, trajectory, consumption behaviour, modes of relating between subjects, etc.)
- Recurring themes traced back to the narrative pattern traceable in the behaviours implemented by the users (elements of recall, objects of desire, challenges and rewards, etc.)
- The axiological dimension, with specific regard to the meanings attributed to the spaces of the city centre.

3.4   Main Findings

A first analysis, purely descriptive, highlights the wide range of activities in which those who frequent the historic centre of Sacile are involved. Visits to one or more shops and the classic "window shopping" do not seem to be interesting. More relevant—on the whole—are the behaviours linked to the leisure sphere, presumably connected to the search for a slow lifestyle: for example, going for a walk, allowing oneself to stop now and then, even for the simple purpose of enjoying the panoramas. Activities linked to socialisation and meeting people are also of great importance: frequenting the city centre appears to be characterised by a relevant relational component. In most cases, people walk around in company or meet face-to-face with other people along the way.

The analysed data suggest a plurality of paths, complex forms of interaction with the urban environment, with different meanings each time. Qualitative observations suggest the opportunity to trace the micro-narratives developed during the surveys to five consumption profiles, in each of which the urban environment acquires meaning based on a specific narrative analysis (Fontana, 2014, 2016).

The shopping profiles identified were named as follows: the passer-by, the strategist, the explorer, the convivial, the collector of experience. The description of the different profiles is presented in Table 1.

Regarding the second objective, retailers' perception of user behaviour in terms of shopping and visiting the centre was analysed, and the set of proposals launched by retailers on possible initiatives to improve the social sustainability of the urban community was explored.

For the retailers interviewed, the strategist model prevails. The typical customer is usually a high-wages person, fond of the traditional concept of assisted selling, who enters the store without even glancing at the shop window, to make pre-programmed purchases, claiming the convenience of parking and location. Respondents are aware of the opportunities this offers, particularly the possibility of a solid base of loyal customers and a higher conversion rate. However, some respondents also perceive the risks and limitations of this approach: focusing only on "old" and high-spending customers effectively alienates a large proportion of the public who shop in other nearby "marketplaces".

There are three types of explanations for this behaviour:

- First of all, it should be noted that the commercial offer system in the centre of Sacile is characterised by the presence of specialised shops, usually high-profile, which interface with a medium-high level target: exclusive prestigious brands, emerging designers, limited series and, sometimes, unique pieces constitute the core of the product offer. Proposals and assortments are constantly being renewed. The customers who enter such a space are more select—and more determined to buy—than those who usually frequent the fast fashion brands available in a shopping centre.
- Secondly, there is the influence of the pervasive spread of digital communication tools. The triumph of the web, in particular, has led consumers to adopt a webrooming logic, whereby entry to the physical shop is preceded by a long phase of online research of data and information relating to the product to be purchased. The choice is, therefore, more conscious: once the purchase decision has been made, it is difficult for the consumer to deviate from the destination or let him/herself be diverted by stimuli and suggestions of various kinds encountered along the way.
- Thirdly, the "habitual" character of those who frequent the centre of Sacile is underlined: the search for fixed points and reassurance seems to prevail among users, so they prefer not to move too far from consolidated behavioural patterns. Even the visit pathway seems to conform to a logic of this type.

Aware of the advantages, but also the risks, that such an approach entails, some of those interviewed suggest working on some levers: greater care for the shop windows to transform them into real communication tools; but also a redefinition of the philosophy of the sales point, which should increasingly be likened to a concept store, that is, a multi-functional space, built around a key idea, to be declined in a variety of ways: areas dedicated to the presentation of products, refreshment points, exhibitions, events, etc. An environment of this kind, rich in sensory stimuli, would

Table 1 Main shopping profiles and characteristics

Shopping profiles	Main characteristics
The passer-by	He/she simply walks through the historical Centre, following a linear trajectory and without interacting with the stimuli along the way. He/she usually moves alone, usually at a fast pace. While walking, he/she sometimes uses his/her smartphone or other technological device, abstracting him/herself from the surrounding context, conceived exclusively as a transit space. In this case, we can speak of a kind of "zero-degree" of storytelling: Urban space is configured as a white page, as a gateway to "narratives" that will develop their senses elsewhere. At first glance, it seems difficult to talk about "social sustainability" in this case. However, we are still dealing with actors on stage, trajectories in motion, bodies meeting other bodies, basic needs to be satisfied, such as ease of transit and freedom of access (e.g. free Wi-Fi hotspots) to the physical or virtual destination of one's pathways.
The strategist	He/she comes to the city Centre to make "programmed" purchases, following a planned route and trying to optimise time. The gaze appears direct, focused on the goal to be reached, with a linear trajectory. In this case we can speak of a narrative of power and strength, which presupposes a performative approach to the urban environment, understood as a purchasing space and conceived as an opportunity to exercise actions aimed at improving personal performance, through the reassuring exercise of forms of control over the external environment. In this case it is important that the commercial offer enables the efficient execution of a "shopping task". We can therefore speak of "social sustainability" in terms of response to the basic needs of people, such as food and clothing or health and sanitation.
The explorer	He/she frequents the city centre to enjoy the free time, ready to be intrigued by all the stimuli he/she encounters along the way. He/she walks slowly and turns most of the time in company, often following a diagonal trajectory. His/her gaze is wide and receptive. In practice, he/she carries out a window shopping activity, guided by exploratory and recreational motivations and not aimed at buying. In this case we can speak of a care story: The urban environment—Understood as a window space, or rather as a mirror onto which to project dreams and desires—Performs a "therapeutic" function, that is, it is argued as being a device capable of restoring to the subject a condition of well-being, linked to the acquisition of new knowledge and the overcoming of the anxieties and uncertainties that characterise daily life. We can therefore speak of "social sustainability" in terms of response to higher-level needs linked to quality of life, such as self-care, psychological Well-being, easy access to various amenities and cultural life.
The convivial	He/she interprets the centre as a space for relations, where friends and acquaintances can meet. They are open-minded and curious about their environment, usually lingering for a long time at the tables of a bar, a café or a pastry shop. In this respect, we can speak of a narrative of escape, where the urban environment is "appropriated" as a space for relationships, an opportunity to respond to a need for leisure and entertainment. Consumers seeking a social experience go to the city centre to immerse themselves with, and among, others and to feel a sense of belonging to the local community. In this case, social sustainability is defined in relation to non-physical factors (social cohesion, integration), connected to human relations and interactions.

Table 1 (continued)

Shopping profiles	Main characteristics
The experience collector	He/she is a hybrid subject who uses a plurality of strategies during the same visit. For example, he/she will head at a steady pace to a selected shop, where he/she will make planned purchases. After this phase, he/she transforms, wandering around, making unplanned purchases, going in and out of shops. Or, vice versa, he/she inserts the purchase of a basic necessity in the context of an exploratory visit. We are therefore faced with a story of liberation and rebirth, where the urban environment is re-signified as a multi-functional space, a battleground between opposing inner tensions: Here the subject has the opportunity to transition from the limiting role of convenience shopper to the gratifying condition of recreational shopper. In this case, social sustainability should be understood as a holistic experience, able to involve body and mind, referring both to basic and to higher-level needs. The city centre plays the role of energy catalyst (e.g. participation, civic engagement), that is, a place where people want to live and work, now and in the future.

be able to act as a pole of attraction for explorers and experience collectors, driven by recreational and playful needs, ready to be surprised by novelties and original proposals. Also important is the idea that the point of sale should expand its boundaries, entering into dialogue—through participation in trade fairs, events and conventions of various kinds—with the potential buyer in the places and contexts in which they live their interests and passions.

This need is accompanied by the propensity to broaden one's horizons, to grasp the characteristics of the urban context in which the point of sale is located. This kind of approach implies synergies with other players, such as retailers, local authorities, trade associations, etc., with a view to social sustainability. In this large context, it is possible to identify opportunities for integration between commerce, tourism and creative crafts, able to contribute—also through specific initiatives promoted by local institutions—to the regeneration of the urban fabric, spreading the economic benefits of these activities not only among the operators directly involved but also over the whole territory and its production system.

A summary of the relevant themes from the retailer interviews is schematically represented in Fig. 2.

4 Conclusions

Since this is a purely qualitative and exploratory survey, the results collected are obviously not generalisable, but can still offer some indications—immediately translatable into operational implications—with respect to the two research questions that are the basis of this contribution.

With regard to the practices of spatial appropriation, and further in the perspective of traditional and digital shopping activities, the survey highlights the wide range of
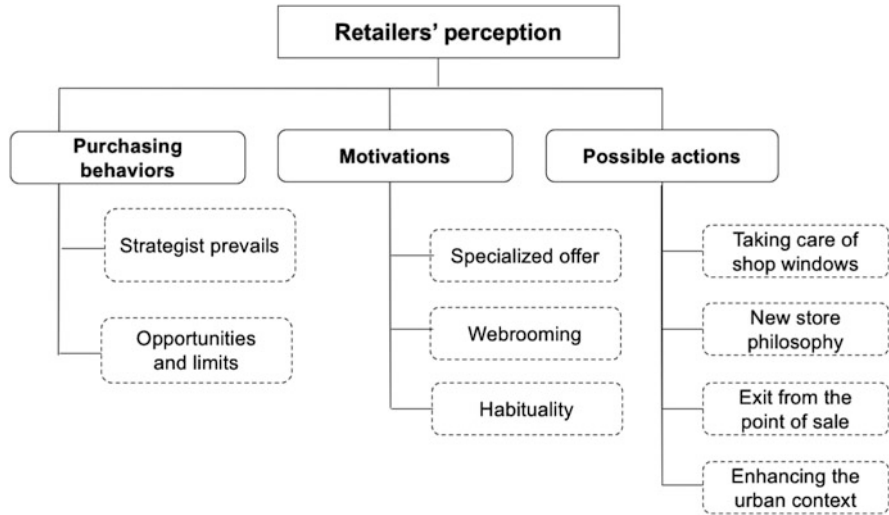
Fig. 2 Retailers' perception of the shopping experience

instances that guide users, oriented to move according to changing and diversified paths. On this basis, it is possible to identify narrative lines, existential themes, anxieties to be overcome, ideal "treasures" and rewards of which consumers go in search. In particular, this study highlights that the goal of desire is not as much the material possession of a product, as the possibility of responding to a set of needs and motivations of a profound nature, which operate as mediators of the link between the environment, perceptions and behaviours of consumers. In addition, an additional figure (the passer-by) emerges who was not adequately considered in previous surveys (Gilboa et al., 2016; Ruiz et al., 2004): a subject who apparently abstracts himself or herself from the urban context, but who could also play the role of mediator between physical and virtual spaces.

In the light of these considerations, the urban centre seems to be called upon to better define its own mission, also from the point of view of social sustainability, proposing itself not only as an alternative to the cold and anonymous system of large commercial structures and e-commerce platforms, but also as an area in which to recover the ancient idea of commerce as a moment of socialisation.

With regard to the role of retailers in improving the social dimension of sustainability, what emerges from the interviews is the need to develop a public space with mixed and shared use. To this end, it will not be sufficient to return the streets of the centre to the people, eliminating vehicular traffic, but it will be necessary to transform streets and squares into "platforms of opportunity", where a plurality of initiatives can be developed, such as play areas for children, places for events and concerts, meeting spaces and gardens (Manzini, 2021; Moreno, 2019). This project also requires the development of networks of relationships among a plurality of actors, oriented to generate "communities of place", active in issues that connect

environmental, economic and social dimensions. On the retail front, this implies a redefinition of the commercial offering, enhancing the possible synergies between complementary centres of interest. For example, a bistro, a record store and a clothing store could create, in collaboration with the public library, an initiative linked to a particular lifestyle. From this perspective, customers are no longer contested, but shared in the context of coherent paths of meaning.

Thinking about the opportunities for integration between commerce, tourism and creative craftsmanship that are capable of regenerating the urban fabric, there are interesting areas of opportunity capable of restoring vitality and excitement to the city's main shopping streets. In front of a consumer moved by recreational and playful instances, constantly looking for novelty and surprises, there is a significant presence of vacant stores in the centre. The solution could be to give space to a new generation of "craft stores", intercepting emerging phenomena, such as that of the makers and the circular economy: master goldsmiths, creators of Venetian masks, owners of ateliers dedicated to ethical fashion, creators of bags and accessories from waste materials, etc. Proposals of this type could make more attractive—also from a tourist point of view—urban centres of small dimensions, such as those examined in the present investigation.

We can even hypothesise that the rules of attraction, which push similar talents to meet in places with a different creative density, will solicit the formation of a small community of people interested in delocalising their activity in an urban context of particular suggestion, in which can be found a balance between personal and professional life.

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Exploring Augmented Reality Applications for Sustainable Retailing

Federica Caboni and Roberto Bruni

Abstract Many transformations have affected the retail scenario in the last few years. Digitalization and sustainability are the main challenges to consider for the further development of retailing. From the assumption of the acceleration of digital innovation, this chapter considers augmented reality (AR) a supportive technology that supports sustainable retailing. This chapter aims to explore the adoption of augmented reality for sustainable retailing, highlighting the opportunities and limitations in the application. As a first approach in understanding how augmented reality could be helpful for sustainable retailing, this work contributed to exploring the intersections between the actual knowledge on the AR role in the retail industry and the 3Ps (Planet, People, and Profit) principle for sustainability in the business context. Even commenting on specific AR applications in retail sustainability projects helps understanding the state of the art and expressing future perspectives in retail.

Keywords Augmented reality · Sustainable retailing · People · Profit · Planet

1 Introduction

In recent years, firms worldwide approached sustainable strategies in their business and the concept of sustainable retailing emerged (Vadakkepatt et al., 2021; Young et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2017; Wiese et al., 2012). In particular, firms' embracement of sustainable strategies appeared as a strategy to compete in the market, communicate sustainability efforts, engage customers in responsible choices, and satisfy sustainable consumption (Joerß et al., 2021; Seyfang, 2009).

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For example, the Swedish company H&M plans to use 100% renewable electricity by 2030 and develop 100% packaging from recycled or other sustainably sourced material, giving preference to recycled materials and using only 100% recycled or other sustainably sourced materials. Even Starbucks supports the work of farmers and their communities by improving their quality of life through a particular programme called Coffee and Farmer Equity (C.A.F.E). Companies across retail sectors are developing sustainability projects and robust communication to demonstrate to their customers' respect for the environment, assortments based on low environmental impact offerings, and recycled materials. For instance, one of the most sustainable retailers in Europe, IKEA, has set several sustainability goals by 2030. IKEA participates in sustainability strategies by creating products and services that inspire and support people to make positive lifestyle changes, transition to sustainable consumption, and seek a better quality of life. The principle of "making more from less" is becoming a pillar of IKEA's philosophy to use only renewable or recycled materials by 2030.

Digital transformation can support the sensitivity to sustainability in retail because it increases the use of technology both by consumers and retailers and between the relationships in this industry (Hagberg et al., 2016). Additionally, fast fashion retailers are adopting sustainable strategies, such as the use of chemical technology to reduce waste and the exploitation of interactive technology (Pantano, 2016), such as augmented reality (Azuma, 1997; Azuma et al., 2001; Caboni & Hagberg, 2019), to reduce production time by using specific features such as prototyping and sampling (Shankar et al., 2021). AR plays a positive role in retailers' business development (Caboni & Hagberg, 2019; Bruni & Piccarozzi, 2022). Retailers integrate their strategies with advanced AR features to communicate and engage customers during the customer journey (Pantano et al., 2017) but even cooperate with manufacturers to improve supply chain services and product development. AR can play an essential role in retailers' sustainability strategies and, in particular, in engaging partners and customers. For this reason, to explore the role, limitations, and opportunities of AR in sustainable retailing, this conceptual work explores the intersections between the actual knowledge about the AR role in the retail industry and the 3Ps (Planet, People, and Profit) principle for sustainability in the business context. Therefore, this work aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the role of AR in sustainable retailing?
RQ2: What are the limitations and opportunities of AR in sustainable retailing?

This chapter has the following structure. The first section is devoted to the literature background with a focus on the sustainability concept as applied to retailing. Second, a paragraph on the role of AR in sustainable retailing is presented. The work explores the limitations and opportunities of AR in sustainable retailing and concludes with conclusions, implications, and future research directions.

2   Literature Background

According to Winterich (2019), sustainability is a set of activities, processes, ideas, and behaviours that involve economic, environmental, and social spheres. For this reason, a sustainable business should be able to approach the 3Ps (Elkington, 1994), which refer to the economic performance of the company (Profits), the environmental impact of the company's activities (Planet), and the impact of the company on the social system involved in the activities (People) inside and outside the business. Every company's activity should be measured against the 3Ps and the retail industry if retailers and partners aim to become more sustainable. The retail industry can embrace this concept of sustainability, including engaged actors throughout the supply chain (Lubin & Esty, 2010; Vadakkepatt et al., 2021). Retailers are increasingly becoming sustainability experts, looking at the 3Ps (planet-people-profit) principle and considering long-term goals (Winterich, 2019).

For example, companies adopt several strategies using many tools and communication strategies to announce their involvement in sustainability and even engage customers. For instance, McDonald announced that its packaging will be 100% renewable by 2025. Calzedonia stores have had shopping bags made from 100% recycled paper since 2018 and even changed the packaging for socks and beachwear, which has helped inform customers about their involvement in practical sustainability activities towards sustainability. Related messages come from companies switching packaging from PVC to PET and, in general, companies reducing their use of natural resources and raw materials (Meherishi et al., 2019). This practice is based on the overall reduction of several elements used in the production phase, such as water, energy, resources, materials, and emissions (Yang et al., 2017).

Sustainable activities should directly encourage and engage customers, even young people. For this reason, some companies develop projects that can encourage customers to participate in the recycling process, sharing experiences, and utility. Nudie (a Swedish denim company) (Egels-Zandén et al., 2015; Schäfer, 2020) offers free denim repair in its twenty shops. For example, customers bring them in for repair instead of throwing away an old pair of jeans. In addition, the company promotes sustainable practices to teach its customers to repair a pair of jeans by sending them a repair kit and videos. Otherwise, when customers want to buy a new one, they can return the old jeans to the store and repurpose them to reduce waste and resell them. In addition, strong customer involvement in the use (recycling) of used products (e.g. clothing) such as H&M, for example, is a system of recycling strategies developed by various companies worldwide.

In recent years, the main challenge for companies in the global retail industry has been to implement digital technologies online and offline (Huang, 2019; Poushneh, 2018; Javornik, 2016a, b;) to enhance the shopping experience and customer communication (Dennis et al., 2007; Borges et al., 2010; Pantano & Viassone, 2015) and optimize retail profitability and customer engagement and satisfaction.

Among the available technologies, augmented reality (AR) is widely recognized as a valuable system of technology able to enhance the interaction between people

and companies. In particular, over the past decade, various definitions of AR as applied to the retail sector have been developed by the academic world (Carmignani & Furht, 2011; Sood, 2012; Olsson et al., 2013; Scholz & Smith, 2016; Javornik, 2016a, b; Grewal et al., 2017; Hwangbo et al., 2017; Pantano et al., 2017; Poushneh & Vasquez-Parraga, 2017; Rese et al., 2017; Ukwuani & Bashir, 2017; Lee & Leonas, 2018; Watson et al., 2018). The high potential of AR is based on the combination of natural environments and virtual elements enhancing real-time interaction between consumer, company, and content through objects reproduced in three dimensions (Azuma, 1997; Azuma et al., 2001).

Specifically, AR technology allows people to insert additional elements that users can interact with in real-life contexts in several sectors, such as retail (Caboni & Hagberg, 2019). More specifically, physical reality elements are combined with the "augmented" reality. Combining these two elements (physical and augmented) allows consumers to interact with virtual objects in the context of everyday life (Ramadan & Farah, 2017). The potential for the application of AR in the retail sector has emerged in markets that are actually saturated with technology (Shankar et al., 2021; Grewal et al., 2021).

3   Research Process

MacInnis (2011) suggested that it is possible to relate frameworks in conceptual papers to explore the intersections between them, and this work integrates two concepts: the first is the contribution of AR in retailing, and the second is the 3Ps (Planet-People-Profit) model to explain the sustainable and possible relation between business and the environment. Integrating the retailers' experience in fields using advanced technologies to manage sustainability strategies and research results from previous research (the role of AR in retailing and the 3Ps model), limits and opportunities in AR applications within sustainable retailing have been identified.

The research path is made using three steps: the first starts by creating a list of benefits that retailers can gain from AR applications selected by previous research (Caboni & Hagberg, 2019). The second step presents the link between AR benefits and the 3Ps satisfaction in retail with a comparative table integrating conceptual perspectives and practical experiences. Step number three presents opportunities and limitations in adopting AR technologies through the lens of the 3Ps, looking at the hypothetical role that AR could have in sustainable retailing.

4   The Role of AR in Sustainable Retailing

Retailers play an important role in facilitating sustainable company and customer behaviour because they are in the middle between suppliers and consumers, and for this reason, they can be a fundamental knowledge link in the supply chain (Grewal &

Levy, 2007). Retailers can engage customers in the supply process and directly share information with them. For this reason, retailers should follow sustainable strategies and even promote sustainability information. Retailers should encourage suppliers and customers to adopt a sustainable approach (Glock & Kim, 2015), encouraging them to reduce waste production and misuse of resources (de Moraes et al., 2020). Retailers can motivate and incentivize customers to reduce waste and pollution, even adopting sustainable purchase behaviour (Grewal et al., 2019).

Technology appears to be a valuable tool in supporting the social role of retailers in adopting and disseminating information about sustainable management and behaviour. In this sense, interactive technology (Pantano, 2016), such as AR (Azuma, 1997; Azuma et al., 2001), can adequately support retailer communication and customer engagement, even in the dissemination and development of sustainable behaviour between stakeholders and consumers.

AR can properly support sustainable strategies for companies that want to reach new levels of communication and interaction with their customers. Some English scholars conducted a pilot study on this problem at the University of Salford, UK (Coen et al., 2019) to demonstrate how AR can be a new way to both communicate sustainability strategies and teach sustainable practices to customers. This innovative study helps examine customer perception and, at the same time, examine the collective benefits that can be gained from using this immersive technology. Through this experiment, the foundations have been laid for understanding how technology such as AR can help in communicating and engaging customers on sustainability issues.

The AR benefits for retailers have been analysed, and the analysis of benefits could contribute to understanding the relations and the contribution that each benefit component can make to sustainable projects in retail. In this paragraph, Table 1 adapted by Caboni and Hagberg (2019) is presented to express the benefits that retailers can obtain by applying AR technology to advertising, to retail experience for customers, to the attraction, branding and communication strategies and, in general, to sales.

After the identification of AR benefits coming from the application of this technology to the retail industry, the research path suggests exploiting the AR benefits to achieve the goals suggested within the same 3Ps model. The following Table 2 with theoretical insights, experiences from other economic sectors, practical examples, and secondary data explains the contribution to sustainable retail management coming from the adoption of AR in the retail industry.

Although Table 2 provides separate contributions about the role of each AR benefit for retailers, it is necessary to consider the integrated effects of all elements of the AR retail application. Thus, each benefit element contributes to the creation of the full project result. Given the AR benefits highlighted in the table and the systemic result of their interaction, the role of AR in sustainable retailing can be explained by three main activities: (a) stimulation; (b) communication; and (c) interaction.

The sequence presented earlier should even characterize the three activities so that each element has its own value.

Table 1 The AR benefits for retailers

Keywords	Benefits generated by AR for retailers
Advertising	Regardless of the specific purpose of the project, AR always performs an advertising function in terms of communication, for instance, broadcasting the values of the retailer.
Experience	AR creates a specific and unique environment capable of creating experiential contexts during the customer interaction.
Attraction	Customer attraction (online and offline) is one of the main functions of AR applications. Regardless of the specific purpose, every AR application has a high level of interaction with customers, even with the introduction of specific gamification approaches.
Sales	AR applications help to enhance online and offline sales and conversion rate (purchases/online-offline visits), as well as positively influence the perception of value proposition.
Environment	AR applications simplify the online and offline integration. They can probably be considered the most innovative and accessible tools linking online and offline retail experiences.
Brand awareness and customer loyalty	Feedback and interaction with the value proposition through AR applications build brand awareness and the customer loyalty as AR empowers customer interactions to meet their information and service needs.
Information	Thanks to AR applications, retailers have additional sources of digital information that can bring in data about customer behaviour. On the other hand, the customer can get additional information with the help of AR applications provided by retailers.

Source: Adapted from Caboni and Hagberg (*2019*)

Sustainability in retail is increasingly topical, which is why customers and stakeholders should be stimulated to understand the value of this topic; thus, stimulation (a) should be the first effect created by the AR application to allow participants to engage every stakeholder, including the customer. If the AR application is searching for an incentive for the stakeholders involved, especially for their participation, the project will contain elements that can be memorable and interesting.

Communication (b) is the second activity. AR can stimulate, but it should communicate with the stakeholders involved, activating interest for the topic, informing, disseminating the whole project and explaining the reasons for the investments and, in general, the effort that each stakeholder should support. Therefore, it is necessary to educate and communicate with customers and stakeholders so that they are informed and understand the relevance of sustainability and the need for engagement.

The third activity is interaction (c). The AR application should be able to encourage stakeholders to participate, be part of the project, interact by providing data and information, disseminate the AR project, invite other stakeholders and customers to participate, offer perspective and change, and engage themselves in the declared sustainable choices, following the path indicated by the AR application.

Table 2 Linking AR benefits in retail areas and 3Ps satisfaction in retail

Keywords	Role of AR in sustainable retailing	3Ps involved
Advertising	AR as an advertising tool is widely used to promote products and services, attract customers, even in sustainable projects. AR is also used to communicate brand values, launching specific campaigns, and disseminating information inside and outside companies. For example, *Ferrarelle* is the first mineral water company to remove 20,000 tons of plastic from the environment each year. Every PET bottle goes through recycling with zero-impact plastic. *Ferrarelle* communicates its sustainability values and projects by using an AR report available online directly for consumers. The AR applications can be a valuable tool for online and offline communication between retailers and the supply chain as part of sustainability projects. Based on the experiences of manufacturers, we can assume that private label offerings can be involved in AR applications. For example, AR applications can help communicate the retailer's involvement in sustainable projects with employees and customers. For instance, AR applications and retailers' sustainability strategies can be applied on private label product packaging or simply in-store (or online) with links, QR codes, and connectivity tools.	Planet People
Experience	AR helps users to think differently and have alternative thoughts about everyday actions. This has been tested in architecture design, where AR has helped designers think differently (Ayer et al., 2016). In addition, specific AR software can help workers and consumers to have a different approach about sustainability practices through an AR environment with indirect benefits for the planet. *McDonald's* Germany aims to raise awareness among its customers about the chain's new in-store sustainability policy. To that end, the company has developed a smartphone application called *"McMission"*, available on Google Play and iTunes, that uses three-dimensional animations and simulations to convey helpful information on topics such as renewable energy and proper waste separation in a fun way. It can create an artificial environment by creating stories, interactive games and stimuli different from classic advertising. These AR aspects should encourage the customer to consciously change or eliminate their habits (in-store and online) by simply living in an experiential and immersive different environment. AR can help customers and workers live in a new sustainable dimension by developing sustainable behaviour. This process should appeal to consumers and encourage them to think about a responsible environment and people.	Planet People
Attraction	AR plays a major role in stimulating user interest in new ways of learning about a value proposition and enjoying new and alternative uses of products and services. AR applications can be based on entertaining content (O'Brien,	Planet Profit People

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Keywords	Role of AR in sustainable retailing	3Ps involved
	2019) or even support storytelling (Khoroshavin, 2020), always aiming to attract and involve the customer responsible for the behaviour and values of the organization. This perspective can be used to implement retailer strategies, projects, efforts, and results that attract users and engage them in sustainable behaviour when choosing a retail value proposition (online and offline), creating positive effects for the retail organization.	
Sales	AR is used to drive in-store and online sales. Retailers are investing in implementing AR and visual technology to increase the ability to convert contacts into sales. In the online shopping process, 3D technology can increase conversion rates by more than 40% (Motti, 2020). With AR applications for sustainable purposes, it is possible to contribute to sustainability business projects. Using AR tools, customers can be more engaged with the offer by getting more information about products and services. Customers can be much more confident in the offering and, eventually, can gain greater purchase satisfaction. The AR adoption for sustainable purposes can contribute to the economic sustainability of a business using AR tools.	Profit
Environment	AR applications tend to be user-friendly. This provides ease of use for many segments of users who can interact with online and offline retail offerings. The current trend of integrating offline and online activities can be supported by AR programmes designed to better interact with the retail environment, product tests and knowledge. Furthermore, the simplicity and accessibility of visualizing immersive and engaging environments can make a crucial contribution to education, dissemination of information and content about sustainability (Gómez-Galán et al., 2020). This is done to disseminate data and news on environmental issues that promote sustainable user/consumer behaviour that can lead to sustainable consumption choices with direct and indirect environmental impacts. For example, *Adidas* exploited AR to underline the global challenge of plastic waste. Via its AR application, customers could dive into a huge plastic-filled ocean and help clear the floating rubbish.	Planet
Brand Awareness and customer loyalty	Brand awareness and customer loyalty can be increased through a feedback system and interaction with the value proposition. Customer satisfaction is one of the main elements in building brand awareness and loyalty. AR can build projects and drive satisfaction and interaction between the retailer and the customer. Regardless of the goals of an AR application, brand awareness and customer loyalty can be built by encouraging them to use AR applications in-store or, eventually, out-of-store and online. By	People Planet Profit

Table 2 (continued)

Keywords	Role of AR in sustainable retailing	3Ps involved
	multiplying interaction opportunities, customers can extend contact with the company, and for this reason, interaction increases with multiple and various connections between the customer and the retailer. Thus, it is possible to link positive sustainability messages during the customer experience to the store brand or, in general, to the retailer's value proposition, for example, by using QR codes and links present on product packaging. This process helps create sustainable revenue opportunities to balance investments in AR for sustainability in retail. This process can help increase the number of customers interested in sustainability projects, the growth of brand (or store brand) awareness and customer loyalty, and potentially increase retailer profits (Sokolovsky, 2020). There are infinite opportunities to share digital information and create customer interaction using AR, trigging images, using AR codes or special applications. AR can enhance the power of the retailer message in terms of value proposition, brand awareness and, of course, in terms of customer engagement in sustainable projects. The effects created by AR can be shared even by retailers and employees. For example, a new project by the company *Chiquita Bananas*, allowed users to follow the journey of the product, highlighting the brand's varied initiatives to reduce environmental impact.	
Information	Information sharing is one of the current goals in AR applications. Interaction with AR tools increases information sharing, and integrated technology based on games, graphics, and 3D experience allows the user to learn quickly. The retail sector is integrated into a complex supply chain characterized by manufacturers, logistics companies, distributors, and customers. Each actor of the retail network can be involved in the information process in different ways. For example, sharing information about AR applications helps retailers build an information database of customers choices/purchases to optimize the offer but, on the other side, the customer can benefit from this data management. The data will even be used to better manage the offering satisfying customer needs and preferences. AR can be used to support retail design in terms of structure, for instance, when designing a store. 3D software can be used to visualize future stores, their architecture and even their functionality. The same technology can be used every day in product packaging design, such as in private label categories. Retailers, like industrial brands companies, can use AR to get information on new projects for private label products, experimenting with high-quality-image 3D prototypes. For example, the need to physically print or make packaging layouts in the early design stages can be removed.	Planet Profit

Table 2 (continued)

Keywords	Role of AR in sustainable retailing	3Ps involved
	The customer interaction is even characterized by AR software and tools to disseminate information and encourage customers to enjoy the contents by understanding the differences between offerings. AR can play an informational and educational role helping retailers, supply chain partners, and customers by integrating them into a system of rules and messages that can be simply recognized and eventually adapted to reduce waste and pollution (directly and indirectly). For example, *Arla*, a Finnish dairy company, launched a recycling game for kids to encourage the whole family towards better habits. The project *"Recycling Buddies"* is activated through AR and teaches kids different ways of recycling for fun and with rewards.	

Source: Authors elaboration

5 Limitations and Opportunities of AR in Sustainable Retailing

The role of AR in sustainable retailing is to create value through stimulation, communication, and interaction. Based on this role of AR, with the 3Ps (Planet-People-Profit) model lens, the emerging limitations and opportunities in the application of AR technologies in sustainable retailing can be highlighted (Table 3). Retailers and consumers should interact to develop specific projects for sustainable retailing.

Table 3 intersects the 3Ps with the effects of using AR in sustainable retailing. The vertical axes explain the elements of the 3Ps model interested in limitations and opportunities.

Considering the emerging functions of AR (stimulation, communication, and interaction) and relative opportunities and limitations, it is possible to assume that in retail, (a) AR can save time and resources by creating opportunities to create and live 3D interactive places with virtual and interactive experiences, but at the same time, it can contribute to pollution through the use of the internet; (b) AR can communicate and encourage people to think and act differently by adopting specific behaviours in work and consumption. Like any new technology, different cultures and approaches can limit its adoption. (c) AR can contribute to the efficiency in daily work by improving knowledge and project sharing between companies and employees, and it can help customers to improve their knowledge of retail offerings and services provided. Limitations can be recognized in terms of cost/benefit ratios on the part of workers and customers. AR projects can be perceived as a waste of time and capital if workers and customers do not recognize the effectiveness of technology.Some retailers in Europe are involved in sustainable projects, particularly fashion retailers such as H&M and Zara (Shankar et al., 2021). They are trying

Table 3 Opportunities and limitations in adopting AR technologies through the lens of the 3Ps

	Opportunities for the retailing industry and for customers in adopting AR tech	Limitations for the retailing industry and for customers in adopting AR tech
Planet	Prototyping and sampling through AR (Shankar et al., 2021) can help manufacturers and retailers reduce waste and time when developing new products and services. In particular, fashion retailers (H&M and ZARA) in the fast fashion market can exploit, for instance, the potential of AR skills, and augmented prototyping in particular, reducing product development and production time	The internet is a driving force for the development of AR applications. It runs on cloud databases that store data and information absorbing electric power. In many countries, electricity is generated using non-renewable energy sources. This can lead to environmental impact that is not in line with sustainability.
People Planet	On the company side, AR can optimize performances at the work environment by providing workers with additional incentives, information, and alternative visions while designing products and services, optimizing their time and resources, creating a more flexible and innovative workforce. For example, it is possible to think about using AR when designing blueprints for new services in-store or online. Using AR applications, it is possible to immediately see and interact with products and processes in real time by accelerating productivity and saving time and training costs. On the consumer side, the culture of sustainability is fostered by using AR applications to convey and disseminate knowledge. For instance, McDonald's uses an AR game to explain how to properly separate the different types of waste. At the end of each task, a small quiz tests the knowledge acquired from the game, and one's results can be easily shared with friends thanks to integration with the most well-known social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter.	Several limitations may arise with respect to technology adoption, as in other sectors adopting new technologies. In any case, it must be considered that the adoption of AR technology as a working tool or as a customer support tool may be negatively impacted by technology approaches due to differences in culture and generations of users around the world. For instance, younger generations such as X, Y, (Coombes, 2009), and Z (Turner, 2015) are more inclined to use technology such as AR than other generations like baby boomers (Parment, 2013). Thus, it can be assumed that AR may be affected by the classic limitations that arise when new technologies are introduced. In particular, distrust of this technology may affect retail managers, partners, and customers.
Profit People	AR promotes opportunities to achieve economic sustainability and respect for workers and the whole community. In terms of economic sustainability, opportunities can be defined in terms of cost and time savings in product design and testing services. This is true for the whole retail network, which includes copackers and specific manufacturing companies which are able to develop and produce products included in private label product lines. AR contributes to sustainable profits and people when it is used to communicate,	Getting benefits from AR can be difficult because any AR project implies investments in capital and time. People (workers and customers) are directly involved in the retail AR projects. Workers should change some traditional approaches and behaviours to production and distribution considering the application of these alternative means to the normal activities that should specifically increase their efficiency. It is possible to overcome these limitations, for example by training and working to encourage their involvement

Table 3 (continued)

	Opportunities for the retailing industry and for customers in adopting AR tech	Limitations for the retailing industry and for customers in adopting AR tech
	stimulate, and interact with customers and with any retail stakeholder, reducing the time to understand concepts and implement products/services. Moreover, AR offers opportunities to achieve social sustainability and the respect for people in terms of work and consumption. It improves the quality of work. For instance, it improves the product and service design process, promotes the relationship between employees and customers when sharing messages and concepts and increases the sense of belonging to the retail offering system.	in adoption of AR tools in their daily work. They can recognize the value of AR adoption by the quality of AR programmes and by the obtained results of its application. AR should be applied where it is truly needed, such as, as mentioned earlier, favouring the design or production/distribution process. On the customer side, AR technology should be applied to meet customer needs and desires and improve the relationship between customer and the retail offering. In particular, AR projects should be recognized as a useful investment of attention and time on the customer side. AR projects can be perceived as waste of energy, attention, and time if customers are unable to recognize the utility and value from the testing and implementing of AR tools.

Source: Authors elaboration

to attract customers because their main goal is to create sustainable networks from production through the distribution to customer choice. Table 3 explains that AR can strongly support this process of creating a sustainable network because AR technologies create connections and share information between the actors involved. As shown in Table 3, McDonald's is moving in this direction by offering the ability to interact with products during meal consumption. Herbal Essences used an AR application to tell customers about the material from which their bottles are made, which is recycled plastic collected from the world's dirtiest beaches. Adidas also uses AR applications to make people aware of the global issue of plastic waste. Via its AR app, customers can dive into a huge ocean filled with plastic with a giant blue whale and help clean up the floating rubbish.

As explained in Table 3, it is necessary to face the limitations in AR adoption. To overcome these limitations, it is necessary to understand what truly matters to companies, customers, and the sustainability of actions. When these three basic elements are considered, the opportunities arising from AR adoption exceed the limitations. In fact, specific AR applications can be considered expensive for independent retailers and for small chains unable to invest capital and time to organize AR technology and work to train and engage partners and customers. In contrast, as the technology becomes more widespread, application costs will decrease, and the technology will become more accessible and better perceived by users.

6 Conclusions, Implications, and Future Research Directions

This work introduces the relevance of AR in sustainability projects for people, retail, and global dynamics. Given this relevance, the retailing industry is constantly strengthening its efforts to ensure the sustainability of the entire supply chain and in-store (or online) activities. Currently, sustainability and technology issues are becoming new challenges for the retail sectors. On the one hand, some consumers demonstrate sustainable needs and pay attention to sustainable choices and purchases. On the other hand, retailers should consider these needs and, in some cases, encourage this sustainable behaviour. In particular, the retailing industry should prioritize collaboration with customers and partners since sustainable projects and strategies can be better implemented with a network of retail actors, including customers.

AR seems to play a role in communication and customer involvement. Its characteristics made the technology a means to expand communication and customer interaction opportunities, most straightforward explaining challenging concepts and activities in the realm of sustainability. The practical implications of using AR to enhance sustainability practices are clear for consumers and retailers. For the consumer, having AR during their retail experience will allow them to directly and practically participate in approaching sustainability by developing a culture of sustainability through play and interaction. From a retailer's perspective, the practical implications emerge from the fact that communication through AR on sustainable practices used to create their products can increase consumer sensitivity to the retailer's brand and, therefore, increase customer loyalty. At the same time, retailers can engage partners in using AR to participate in sustainability strategies by incorporating virtuous behaviours into their daily work, expanding their retail sustainability network.

As presented in the previous paragraphs, the role of AR in sustainable retailing is to create value through incentives, communication, and interaction. Each AR characteristic implies adaptations and eventual changes in retail organization and management. Integrating AR tools into the overall retail strategy and an influential role in incentives, communication, and interaction will be possible if the entire retail system from retail suppliers to the customer is involved. In addition, customers should perceive AR as a valuable tool that can provide adequate support for their own purchasing decisions rather than as a mere "add-on". Thus, a robust collaborative network in the retail system should be established, connecting all partners in a network in which the customer is included. Every online and offline actor should be included in the distribution system, from production to logistics.

This work has limitations due to its research-based nature. Since there is limited research on the role of AR in sustainability, this contribution presents concepts and thoughts that contextualize AR dynamics in other industries. The limitations and results of the work suggest future research directions. Given the small amount of currently published research on AR and sustainability, future research aims to define

the focus of the new retail paradigm based on the two pivotal levels described in this chapter: AR and sustainable retailing. It is recommended to consider research on each element of the previously presented frameworks. It is interesting to study the actual impact on sustainability created by leading AR's activities such as incentives, communication, and interaction.

Further research will focus on the differences between the identified characteristics of each AR. It is also necessary to understand whether the opportunities/ limitations are related to the specific AR technology, the adoption of the technology by retailers/partners, or the adoption of AR technology by customers. Future research should even consider the influence of different cultures on the adoption of AR in retail worldwide.

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To Pack Sustainably or Not to Pack Sustainably? A Review of the Relationship between Consumer Behaviour and Sustainable Packaging

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Abstract In the past few decades, the massive amount of packaging waste produced every year has unquestionably become one of the most significant sources of pollution. Consequently, several nations worldwide are now openly addressing packaging-related environmental issues in their political agendas. Moreover, because consumers are becoming increasingly ecologically aware and informed, companies and retailers are being induced to rethink their supply chains at all levels. Adhering to the principles of eco-friendly packaging may be considered a first strategic step towards developing a sustainable image which may yield a broader competitive advantage. Academic research has therefore attempted to investigate consumers' responses to environmentally friendly packaging. In this chapter, we review the extant literature so as to give valuable guidance to all firms and retailers striving to fulfil more eco-friendly packaging standards. Besides offering practical and helpful suggestions, our review presents an agenda for future research.

Keywords Packaging · Sustainability · Green · Retail · Consumer behaviour

1   Introduction

According to Eurostat data (2021), in 2018 European consumers generated more than 174 kg of packaging waste per inhabitant (i.e. 77.5 million tonnes in total). And while e-commerce continues with its enormous growth, the huge amount of packaging waste does not seem likely to diminish in the coming years (Regattieri et al., 2014). In fact, with the rise of e-commerce, the packaging market has been growing at an annual rate of 4.2% since 2010, and it is expected to continue at the same rate until 2024 (ALL4PACK, 2016). Packaging pollution raises significant environmental issues. In addition to the massive amount of waste produced every year, packaging consumes raw materials, water, and energy, and it increases air pollution. The

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magnitude of this problem is colossal: Tencati et al. (2016) report that packaging accounts for almost 20% of total municipal solid waste, while plastic packaging alone accounts for 50% of global plastic waste.

As a result, packaging-related pollution issues are influencing the political agenda of several countries, especially in the West. Packaging waste is among the priorities of the 'New Circular Economy Action Plan' issued by the European Commission in March 2020 (COM/2020/98 final). Moreover, because consumers' interest in sustainable consumption is constantly increasing (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014), companies are now forced to rethink their processes and redesign their supply chains to include more sustainable practices (Ertekin et al., 2020). The fight against packaging waste is now on a par with the social struggles on environmental protection, social justice, and economic growth issues. Inevitably, the rising interest of consumers has prompted businesses to increase the number of initiatives aimed at developing sustainable packaging that adheres to circular economy principles (Bocken et al., 2016).

However, by redesigning packaging in accordance with more sustainable practices, a company should bear in mind the fundamental role that packaging performs in the consumer's decision-making process. Packaging not only preserves products; it also sells them with its designs and the information that it provides. As Clement (2007) argues, effective packaging guarantees that the product will be noticed, producing a purchasing intention and creating positive impressions and emotions. The advantage of packaging over other marketing communication tools consists in the fact that it impacts on customers while they are actively involved in the purchase process: they are in a retail store with a variety of products to choose from, and they want to fulfil their consumerist needs. Over 70% of buying decisions are made right in front of the shelf, where a buying decision takes just a few seconds (Clement, 2007). In fact, packaging plays a fundamental role in attracting the attention of, and connecting with, consumers at the crucial moment when the purchase is about to be made. It follows that companies and retailers must always achieve a good balance between environmental demands and an attractive appearance.

Having underlined the importance and the topicality of sustainable packaging, the aim of this chapter is to report the main evidence set out in the pertinent empirical literature and which may inspire retailers to better inform their transition towards the practice of sustainable packaging. The literature on sustainable packaging divides between two main research streams: the first concerns the industrial/technical aspects of packaging understood as a material artefact (i.e. material, ability to perform, recyclability, etc.); the second comprises consumer behaviour studies on the relationship between consumer behaviour and packaging designs. While both streams are of paramount importance to retailers—because the former has the primary goal of improving the technical functions of the packaging, and the latter concerns how packaging should be developed to suit consumers' emotional needs more closely— the analysis that follows is focused on studies that approach the topic of sustainable packaging from a marketing/consumer-oriented perspective.

The chapter is organized as follows. It first examines the roles that packaging plays in retailing in order to show how its functions have evolved over time to meet

ever-changing consumer needs. After providing a widely accepted definition of sustainable packaging from the literature reviewed, the chapter surveys the main studies investigating variations in consumers' responses to eco-designed packages. This will be followed by an exploration of the motivations, benefits, as well as doubts and barriers, experienced by retailers when shifting towards more environmentally friendly practices. In conclusion, the chapter identifies specific managerial and theoretical implications and proposes directions for future research.

2 The Evolution of the Role of Packaging in Retailing

According to the extant literature (Bramklev, 2009; García-Arca & Prado-Prado, 2008; Jönson, 2000), packaging fulfils both technical (i.e. functionality and overall quality) and marketing functions (i.e. elements relating both to the aesthetics and the appearance of the packaging). On the one hand, packaging is used to preserve the product's integrity by protecting it against possible damage caused by handling and transportation. On the other, packaging is considered a 'silent salesman' (Pilditch, 1957): consumers are exposed to the product's packaging at the point of sale before they can directly experience its consumption or use product. After all, what has always mattered to retailers is capturing consumers' attention when they are looking at a store shelf (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). This so-called 'five-second advertising' effect (Kotler & Keller, 2012) helps consumers overcome information clutter in retail stores, which offer and promote hundreds of products at the same time. In fact, despite the numerous promotional techniques now available, packaging still plays a crucial role in influencing a consumer's buying intention and willingness to pay (Lamberz et al., 2020; Magnier & Schoormans, 2015; Steenis et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the functions that packaging performs in a conventional retail context extend beyond it. Packaging can in fact communicate the size, the relative expensiveness of the item, and specific benefits of the packaged product, thus suggesting its superior quality (Clement, 2007; Festila & Chrysochou, 2018). In sum, packaging can be defined as a 'touchpoint' able to communicate information and evoke feelings in buyers and consumers (Clement, 2007).

While until a few decades ago the role of packaging would have stopped at this point, today these functions represent only a part of it. In fact, as evidenced by existing research, packaging must shed the stigma of being only an accessory. Ciliberti et al. (2008) underline that, in addition to supporting consumers in making informed and responsible purchase decisions, packaging has a significant impact in increasing efficiency at all production and logistical levels. Improvements in this fundamental domain may bring benefits in terms of efficiency and sustainability to the entire supply chain. Moreover, as e-commerce continues its enormous growth—in 2020 online retail sales accounted for 18% of all retail sales worldwide (eMarketer, 2021)—packaging must be adapted so that it satisfies evolving consumer needs. Regattieri et al. (2014) argue that packaging functions must now develop to match these new requirements, which include an increased need to protect

items during shipment, larger amounts of packaging materials for each product, end-of-life management of products, and the growing attention of consumers to environmental sustainability. According to the latter, Jerzyk (2016) suggests that—in addition to its logistical (i.e. protection against damage and loss during handling and transportation) and commercial (i.e. communicative and promotional role) functions—packaging has another important function, which concerns the environment. In her study, Jerzyk (2016) argues that, because of packaging's environmental impact, retailers should redesign it according to more sustainable standards so as to meet the increasing consumer demand for more environmentally friendly practices, and develop, reinforce, and promote a green position. Consequently, the recent literature suggests that, once retailers have implemented green packaging practices, they should not only provide on the package information regarding the product contained in it, but also attach eco-sustainability claims and labels (Lamberz et al., 2020; Magnier & Schoormans, 2015; Samant & Seo, 2016). As we shall show in the following sections, properly communicating a package's eco-friendliness is an effective way to build a sustainable image which may influence both the consumer's brand impression as well as his/her purchase intention (Koutsimanis et al., 2012; Magnier & Schoormans, 2015; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008).

3 Methodology

In order to gather the main findings in the existing literature that may inspire retailers to adopt more sustainable practices, we conducted a systematic literature review (Tranfield et al., 2003). Our research focused on the importance and relevance of eco-friendly packaging, and it sought to determine the following:

- Consumers' responses to eco-designed packages.
- The benefits and risks experienced by retailers when adopting sustainable packaging.
- Specific managerial and theoretical implications.
- Directions for future research.

As shown in Fig. 1, to identify the publications suitable for this chapter, we first scanned the Scopus and Web of Science databases, searching for the keywords 'sustainable packaging' OR 'environmentally friendly packaging' OR 'eco-packaging' OR 'ecological packaging' OR 'green packaging' OR 'eco-friendly packaging'. After merging the results and removing all duplicates, we collected over 624 articles. During the second step, we removed all the studies in non-relevant fields ($n = 493$) and those studies that mentioned sustainable packaging but did not study it in their full text (n = 85). The selected papers ($n = 46$) were retained for a four-step analysis involving (1) documenting, (2) familiarizing with the field, (3) coding, and (4) categorizing (Kaartemo & Helkkula, 2018).
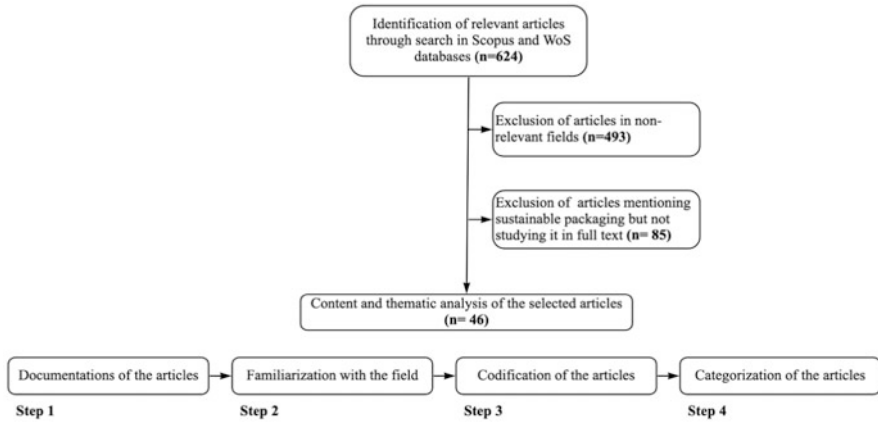
Fig. 1 The research process

4 The Meaning(s) of Sustainable Packaging

Although issues of sustainability are gaining importance and centrality in corporate agendas, it must be noted that one of the main reasons why retailers are now emphasizing the eco-friendly nature of the packaging that they use is the significant increase that the packaging market has undergone in recent years due to the rapid growth of e-commerce. In fact, e-commerce raises new challenges, such as an additional need to safeguard products and a growing concern among consumers with environmental sustainability. The latter notwithstanding, there has been only limited research into consumer perceptions of eco-friendly packaging, and—as we shall also show in this chapter—eco-friendly packaging has never been a clear concept in the consumer behaviour literature.

The current literature has used several terms to denote sustainable packaging: 'environmentally friendly packaging', 'eco-packaging', 'ecological packaging', 'green packaging', and 'eco-friendly packaging'. A widely accepted definition of sustainable packaging—which embraces functional as well as environmental and technological dimensions of sustainability—is provided by the Sustainable Packaging Coalition (SPC) (2011). A sustainable packaging:

- Is beneficial, safe, and healthy for individuals and communities throughout its life cycle.
- Meets market criteria for performance and cost.
- Is sourced, manufactured, transported, and recycled using renewable energy.
- Maximizes the use of materials from renewable or recycled sources.
- Is manufactured using clean production technologies and best practices.
- Is made from materials healthy in all probable end-of-life scenarios.
- Is physically designed to optimize materials and energy.

- Is effectively recovered and utilized in biological and/or industrial cradle-to-cradle cycles.

In sum, from production to disposal, sustainable packaging is required to protect the product and to communicate its benefits, while also embracing material reuse and waste reduction.
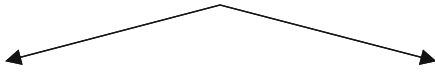
Forerunning studies in the thriving field of sustainable packaging have dealt with consumer-focused inquiries aimed at gaining knowledge about what consumers consider to be eco-friendly and what characteristics can be associated with sustainability. For instance, Scott and Vigar-Ellis (2014) studied consumer understanding, perceptions, and behaviours in regard to environmentally friendly packaging. Their findings showed that when the participants were asked about what eco-friendly packaging meant, they cited 'non-harmful', 'biodegradable', and 'recyclable' as the most common features. Respondents also highlighted that environmentally friendly packaged products are believed to enhance the quality of life because they help to reduce pollution, thus saving the planet. Finally, when asked how they could tell the difference between eco-friendly and normal packaging, respondents replied that they relied on the label as well as the recyclable logo. While analysing this difference, respondents cited also other features as indicative that the packaging is environmentally friendly. Earth colours such as cream, brown, or green were identified as more eco-friendly and therefore associated with environmentally friendly packaging.

Magnier and Crié (2015) examined the packaging features able to convey eco-friendliness, as well as consumers' responses to eco-designed packaging. The results of their interviews suggested that the ecological perception of a package is based on the evaluation of three different sets of macro-cues: structural cues, i.e. those referring to size, over-packaging removal, shape, recycled/biodegradable materials, and reusability; graphical cues, i.e. cues concerning the use of natural colours, photographs, images, and the recyclable logo; and informational cues, i.e. ones relating to the use of ethical vocabulary, general environmental claims, and environmental certifications from organizations that aim at protecting the environment.

Regarding the perceived benefits that consumers attribute to sustainable packaging, Magnier and Crié (2015) distinguished between private and pro-social benefits. The former comprise health benefits related to the decrease in pollution; convenience in terms of the easiness of eliminating or transforming packages after their use; the emotional (i.e. ability of an alternative to arouse positive feelings) and social (i.e. perceived utility linked to a product and one or several specific social groups) benefits that arise in a context where pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours have become social norms. On the other hand, pro-social benefits consist of protection of the environment (i.e. altruistic benefits that stem from protection of the Earth's resources) and protection of the well-being of others (i.e. benefits related to the protection of the Earth's well-being for future generations).

Additionally, Zeng et al. (2020) observed that consumers prefer to purchase products that are characterized by highly visible social signalling—such as

Table 1 The meaning(s) of sustainable packaging

Production techniques and design
Physically designed to minimize its shape and over-packaging (Magnier & Crié, 2015), and to optimize the use of renewable/recycled/biodegradable materials (Magnier & Crié, 2015; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014; SPC, 2011);
Manufactured, transported, and recovered (or recycled) using renewable energy and clean production technologies (SPC, 2011);
Must inform the consumer by means of its label, the use of ethical vocabulary, general environmental claims, environmental certifications, as well as the recyclable logo (Magnier & Crié, 2015; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014; Zeng et al., 2020).

Benefits	*Risks*
Beneficial and safe for both individuals and communities (Magnier & Crié, 2015; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014; SPC, 2011);	Its minimalist design may cause hygiene as well as protection-related problems (Magnier & Crié, 2015);
Non-harmful to the environment because it decreases pollution and waste (Magnier & Crié, 2015; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014);	Greenwashing concerns because consumers do not consider themselves as possessing the expertise necessary to judge packaging (Magnier & Crié, 2015);
Easy to eliminate or transform after its use (Magnier & Crié, 2015; SPC, 2011).	Perceived as more expensive (Magnier & Crié, 2015).

sustainable verbal attributes—in order to establish socially desirable traits for themselves: products able to communicate highly visible social signals are often preferred.

Besides mentioning the benefits, Magnier and Crié (2015) also reported the perceived costs of implementing sustainable packaging. It is important to note that a series of factors evidenced by the respondents may exert a negative effect on consumers' perceived value and benefits. Negative attitudinal responses are related to the loss of pleasure during the consumption experience because eco-friendly packaging is often perceived as less appealing—in terms of aesthetics and social value—due to its lack of colours and minimalist design. The latter, which also refers to the removal of over-packaging, may evoke hygiene as well as protection-related concerns that are likely to affect the overall perceived quality of packaging. Furthermore, in addition to being considered more expensive, sustainable packaging can generate problems in terms of trust among consumers that do not consider themselves as possessing the expertise necessary to judge whether or not the packaging is environmentally friendly.

The following table (Table 1) provides a brief summary of the main meanings typically attributed to sustainable packaging in the existing literature.

5   Sustainable Packaging and Consumers' Responses

As the growing importance of sustainability in the minds of consumers is inducing companies and retailers to rethink all the levels of their supply chains (Ertekin et al., 2020), adhering to the principles of green packaging may be an effective way to build a sustainable image. Indeed, recent research shows that as consumers become increasingly environmentally smart and knowledgeable, the adoption of sustainable packaging solutions by a company positively affects their attitude (Martinho et al., 2015; Prakash & Pathak, 2017; Steenis et al., 2017, 2018). Furthermore, the literature underlines that when sustainability becomes central in the design of the supply chain and is properly communicated, consumers tend to purchase environmentally friendly packaged products in order to satisfy their moral goals (Magnier & Crié, 2015), which results in a higher willingness to pay (Gershoff & Frels, 2015). Below we present the main empirical findings related to how consumers' behaviour is impacted by sustainable packaging.

5.1   *Purchase Intention and Willingness to Pay*

Because the principles of sustainable packaging are often adopted by companies and retailers to achieve better commercial results (Gustavo Jr et al., 2018), it is not surprising that research has often addressed the question as to whether the eco-friendliness that consumers attribute to packaging may increase their intention to buy and willingness to pay.

In their studies on detergent and mixed nuts packages, Magnier and Schoormans (2015) manipulated the visual appearance and verbal sustainability claims while testing the influence of these elements on consumers' affective attitudes and purchase intentions. Specifically, in the first study, the authors investigated whether the respondents' level of environmental concern influenced their response to the visual appearance and verbal sustainability claims of packages. The findings revealed that while the purchase intention showed no significant increase in low environmentally conscious respondents, the effect was positive and significant in high environmentally conscious ones, indicating that the purchase intention was stronger when there was a sustainability claim on the package. In their next study, Magnier and Schoormans (2015) tested whether brand ethicality mediates the relationship between the visual appearance, the verbal sustainability claim, and environmental consciousness, on the one hand, and purchase intention on the other. The results suggested that firms which greenwash by displaying false environmental claims on their packages will be seen as having low brand ethicality and that this decreases purchase intention. Indeed, the findings showed that the positive (or negative) effects of the combinations of visual and verbal ecological elements relate closely to brand ethicality, which directly affects the purchase intention.

Again adopting purchase intention as the main dependent variable, the study by Steenis et al. (2018) investigated consumers' responses to packaging redesigned in accordance with the principles of circular (e.g. adoption of biodegradable materials) and linear (e.g. packaging light-weighting) strategies. Two experiments were conducted in order to understand how the single (or multi-) strategy implementation of these two different sustainable design strategies affects consumers' purchase intentions. The findings suggested that consumers are more positive towards redesigns that follow the circular design strategy compared to the linear one. Moreover, Steenis et al. demonstrated that multi-strategy redesigns are perceived only as marginally more sustainable than single strategies.

Aagerup et al. (2019) investigated the effects of rational vs. emotional green packaging claims on consumers' purchase propensity for organic coffee. Overall, their findings showed that consumers prefer products with green claims over those with neutral (control) claims, and products with emotional green claims over those with rational green claims. In fact, only the most environmentally committed respondents with the highest level of information-processing ability expressed no preference for packaging with emotional claims. In sum, Aagerup et al. (2019) suggested that managers should emphasize their product's 'greenness' whenever possible, but they should use emotional or rational green packaging claims according to whom they target.

In regard to the willingness to pay, Lamberz et al. (2020) argued that if retailers and brand manufacturers of food succeed in presenting their sustainable packaged products at the point of sale, the likelihood of a purchase will be significantly increased. Employing an eye-tracking software at a point of sale, Lamberz et al. demonstrated that individual display elements (i.e. labels) have an influence on visual attention, search, and buying intention, as well as on the willingness to pay. Consumers who associate individual packaging features with sustainability are more likely to buy a product while also increasing their trust in it (Samant & Seo, 2016). In particular, the results showed that consumers with a positive attitude towards sustainability looked longer at individual display elements that addressed sustainability issues. The results also confirmed the hypothesis that consumers with a positive attitude towards sustainability have a greater willingness to pay.

5.2 Consumers' Perceptions and Preferences

Since—as underlined above—sustainable packaging is able to affect important dependent variables such as intention to purchase and willingness to pay, the literature has also focused on consumers' perceptions and preferences in regard to eco-friendly packaging.

For instance, Nguyen et al. (2020) studied consumers' perceptions of eco-friendly packaging in the context of packaged food products. Their findings demonstrated that the perceptions of a package's eco-friendliness are based on three key dimensions: packaging materials, manufacturing technology, and market appeal.

Regarding packaging material, consumers use their evaluation of different types of packaging materials to determine whether or not the packaging is sustainable. While plastic is considered negatively due to its environmental impact, both paper and biodegradable materials are perceived as environmentally friendly. However, consumers acknowledge the better protective performance of plastic compared to paper-based packaging, thus valuing the role of protection against possible damage more than sustainability. In regard to the dimension of manufacturing technology, consumers show limited understanding of the packaging manufacturing process: they are unable to evaluate the most environmentally friendly techniques. Nevertheless, consumers still desire and demand the adoption of eco-friendly manufacturing processes. Finally, with regard to market appeal, Nguyen et al.'s results show that consumers consider the graphic design as well as the functional performance when evaluating sustainable packaging. Consumers are attracted by colourful images but seem to be dissatisfied with the poor appearance of paper-based packages. These findings resonate with those of Magnier and Crié's (2015) study, which showed that eco-friendly packaging may cause a loss of pleasure during the consumption experience due to protection- as well as aesthetic-related problems. This highlights the functional role and aesthetic needs that eco-friendly packaging should satisfy in order to gain acceptance from some consumer segments.

Regarding the design and the choice of colours, Barchiesi et al. (2018) explored the capacity of a package's colour to convey CSR to consumers by focusing on packaged goods such as bottled water, deodorant, canned tuna, and hand soap. The study revealed that the colour of packaging directly influences the credibility and clarity of a CSR message. Specifically, Barchiesi et al.'s findings showed that, for the purpose of communicating a CSR message, the use of the colour 'green' may not be the best choice. In fact, 'white' and 'blue' are widely considered as the most attractive colours with which to credibly convey a sustainable message.

Focusing on the material, Ferrara and De Feo (2020) studied the attitudes of consumers towards more sustainable wine packaging alternatives. Since glass is the most commonly used packaging for wine worldwide, there is widespread scepticism towards the adoption of more eco-friendly packaging alternatives such as bag-in-box, aseptic cartons, or PET bottles. Nevertheless, the large majority of the respondents stated that they would reconsider purchasing wine in alternative packaging after being informed that the quality of the wine did not change. The results thus showed that, often, even the most unwilling consumer can develop new opinions and adopt new solutions when properly educated.

Skard et al. (2020) investigated consumers' perceptions about a product's functional quality when its core (e.g. the ingredients) and peripheral attributes (e.g. the packaging) are environmentally friendly. For this purpose, the core attribute was manipulated using the description '100% natural ingredients', while the peripheral one was manipulated using the description '100% recycled packaging material'. Although Skard et al.'s findings demonstrated that both eco-friendly core and peripheral attributes do not induce consumers to infer higher functional product quality, they suggested that the green peripheral attribute is preferred among eco-friendly shoppers: while consumers may believe that they must choose between

quality and sustainability, sustainable packaging has no effect on the product's functional performance, reducing the perception of this trade-off.

It should be noted that different consumers may have alternative purchasing patterns in regard to sustainable packaging. For instance, Testa et al. (2020) tested an integrated conceptual model that explored the influence of consumers' personal concerns, other pro-environmental behaviours, greenwashing beliefs, and consumer innovativeness. The data showed that consumers with higher environmental concerns are more likely to gather additional information on the environmental features of packaging, thus highlighting that the propensity to gather additional information mediates the relation between consumers' environmental concerns and purchasing intentions.

In sum, managers must provide clear and unequivocal information on the circular characteristics of packaging to support consumers in making informed and responsible consumption choices (Ciliberti et al., 2008).

5.3 Consumers' Demographic Variables

Perceptions of sustainable packaging and environmental friendliness are closely bound up with the demographic characteristics of consumers. The extant literature underlines attitudes and responses that differ mainly according to cultural background, age, and gender.

By surveying attitudes in three different cultures (i.e. Germany, France, and the USA), Herbes et al. (2018) examined how the interaction of eco-friendly packaging features impacts on an overall judgment of environmental sustainability. Specifically, the authors sought to determine how culturally diverse consumers rate different packaging materials in terms of environmental friendliness. Their results revealed that reusable materials are regarded as the most ecologically friendly in Germany, whereas recyclable ones are perceived as the most sustainable in both France and the United States. In general, renewable and biodegradable materials were rated highly, while plastic—despite being made of biomethane—was perceived as the least eco-friendly material. On average, American respondents gave scores higher than the European ones, thus suggesting that US consumers consider the options as more sustainable. However, unlike the American consumers surveyed, the Europeans also deemed 'reduced packaging' to be fundamental in a company's effort towards sustainability. In sum, the respondents frequently chose end-of-life attributes such as 'reusable', 'recyclable', and 'biodegradable', while giving lower ratings to attributes related to the use of raw material (e.g. made from natural/renewable resources).

In regard to age, Barber (2010) observed that belonging to different generations greatly influenced the participants' willingness to pay for greener packaging. Specifically, Baby Boomers (i.e. those born between 1946 and 1964) were willing to pay more for eco-friendly packaging compared to Millennials (i.e. 1981–1996). Koutsimanis et al. (2012) noted a similar higher willingness to pay among Baby

Boomers as well as Gen Xers (i.e. 1965–1980). The authors also observed that consumers aged over 25 are more inclined to recycle, and therefore have a positive attitude towards packaging materials that are more eco-friendly. Analogous results were obtained by Baruk and Iwanicka (2016), who recorded a closer attention to environmental concerns as the respondents' age increased.

As regards gender, Jezewska-Zychowicz and Jeznach (2015) found that women are more likely than men to consider the environmental friendliness of packaging and to minimize packaging-related waste. Similarly, Chekima et al. (2016) revealed that women are consistently more environmentally friendly than men. In another study, women with an average age of 50 showed the highest preference for eco-friendly packaging compared to men (Martinho et al., 2015). In short, the literature seems to suggest that women tend to engage in sustainable purchasing and disposal more than men.

To conclude, levels of education appear to be less important. For instance, Barber (2010) found that the level of education does not have an influence on the willingness to pay for eco-friendly packaged products. Similarly, Neill and Williams (2016) showed that the level of education does not have a statistically significant effect on the preference for returnable glass milk bottles. Baruk and Iwanicka (2016) claimed that an increase in the educational level does not indicate an increase in pro-environmental awareness. However, it should be noted that empirical results suggest that high-income countries are usually more environmentally concerned than low-income ones (Paul et al., 2016).

6   The Communicative Function of Sustainable Packaging

Effective communication may be achieved through a variety of channels, from CSR reports and press releases to websites and social media posts. However, because packaging is one of the most suitable means with which to convey a company's efforts in regard to sustainability (Barchiesi et al., 2018), it can undoubtedly be considered among the most effective communication channels (Pilditch, 1957). Indeed, packaging design has become crucial in the communication between retailers and consumers because it is able to communicate values and philosophies with which consumers can identify (Magnier & Crié, 2015; Zeng et al., 2020). Becoming increasingly skilled in conveying to the public the sustainable efforts that the company is undertaking across all steps of production and distribution may have positive effects on customer loyalty, word-of-mouth communication, resilience to negative news, and, consequently, positive economic results.

However, although the existing literature has tried to provide answers to the question of how sustainable packaging should be, there is still scant consensus among researchers. The extant research underlines that material choice has a strong effect on perceived sustainability (Steenis et al., 2018), but consumers are also affected by graphical influences (Magnier & Crié, 2015). For instance, among the most appreciated materials, researchers have found paper, cardboard, and glass

(Herbes et al., 2018; Neill & Williams, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2020). The use of plastic, on the other hand, may cause such sustainable communication to backfire. On analysing the most suitable colour, some studies suggest that earth colours such as green, white, and brown are better at signalling sustainability (Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014), while others recommend blue and white (Barchiesi et al., 2018). Chrysochou and Festila (2019) underline the importance of employing prototypical elements and images, because complex ones tend to require too much effort from consumers, thereby driving their attention away from the product. In detail, the authors investigated how sustainable packaging designs differ from traditional and conventional ones. Their results showed that the presence of nature in the images, as well as organic claims, are more prevalent in sustainably packaged products. Similar studies have highlighted how one of the strategies most frequently used to communicate a product's sustainability and eco-friendliness is the use of labels and claims which assert that the product is less impactful on the environment (Lamberz et al., 2020; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014). Although these elements are well-known to influence consumers' responses—from consumption patterns (Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014) to taste perceptions (Lee et al., 2013)—it should be noted that consumers' trust in the messages communicated through sustainable packaging appears to be crucial in the buying process (Aagerup et al., 2019). Indeed, Jerzyk (2016) showed that consumers are willing to change their choice to more sustainable packaging only if claims are credible. Therefore, in an environment where consumers are constantly bombarded with often misleading information, retailers—in addition to the use of sustainable materials, natural colours, and images—must provide clear and unambiguous data on packaging attributes because these matter in purchasing decisions and consumers' search for consistency among personal beliefs, past behaviours, and circular packaging attributes (Testa et al., 2020).

7 Turning to Sustainable Packaging

Circular economy has been gaining increasing attention from both institutions and, most importantly, consumers. The concept of circular economy focuses on extending the lifecycle of a product, minimizing waste, and maximizing its value. While in the previous sections the attention was focused on the characteristics and needs that eco-friendly packaging should fulfil, in the following sections motivations, benefits, as well as barriers related to the adoption of sustainable packaging by companies will be analysed.

For instance, Gustavo Jr et al. (2018) studied the motivations and doubts of a global retailer trying to improve packaging sustainability. Their findings showed that economic gains were among the main motivations for engaging in packaging redesign. Specifically, the economic gains that redesigned packaging generated were related to a reduction in the use of superfluous material, thus decreasing logistics costs and waste. Moreover, the study showed that retailers which combine economic gains with environmental sustainability develop more sustainable actions

when past experiences led to better economic results. On the other hand, the barriers that may prevent packaging redesign were mainly related to commercial uncertainties. To advance research on additional barriers limiting the development and spread of sustainable packaging, Ravi (2015) studied the electronics packaging industry. Through a survey on Indian electronic packaging companies, the author discovered that several barriers may prevent the adoption of eco-friendly packaging practices. In particular, constraints related to a widespread lack of awareness about environmental issues, as well as a lack of commitment in the top management which resulted in insufficient funds allocated to R&D departments.

Despite these doubts and barriers, the literature shows that the adoption of more sustainable practices can improve a business's productivity (Luthra et al., 2016), increase profits (Luthra et al., 2016; Hsu et al., 2016), and drive market share growth (Hsu et al., 2016). For example, Gurtu and Arendt (2020) showed that reducing packaging in the supply chain lowers the environmental impact of a company and improves its profitability. In fact, although packaging has an important role in every part of the distribution process, some of the materials used are often unnecessary. Over-packaging costs include not only those related to additional material and labour but also all expenses concerning storage, transportation, and safe disposal of packaging wastes. Therefore, better economic results are achieved mainly through a decrease in over-packing, which results in reduced packaging materials and production costs, as well as decreased storage and transportation expenses.

Similarly, Yildiz Çankaya and Sezen (2019) observed that companies engaging in green supply chain management practices (GSCM) obtained benefits on several fronts. Besides an improved social performance—because consumers and stakeholders in general appear to appreciate 'green' efforts—the adoption of these practices also affects the economic results of firms. For instance, a reduction in the packaging material used not only lowers material-related costs; it also reduces transportation expenses and production costs, and it increases overall efficiency. Cost advantages were also observed by Obrecht and Knez (2017), who studied the effects of the ecological redesigns of three different cargo containers on carbon emissions.

To examine the effects that occur when a company decides to implement a more sustainable packaging logistics approach, García-Arca et al. (2014) analysed the supply chain of Mercadona, one of the largest retailers in Spain. The analysis of the case study revealed that, as a result of the shift towards more sustainable practices, Mercadona achieved an average increase in palletization while simultaneously reducing the number of boxes handled. This resulted in an overall reduction of the packaging waste of plastic, paperboard, as well as cardboard. At the same time, Mercadona's supply chain experienced a reduction in costs related to transport, storage, and handling. García-Arca et al.'s findings also showed that total food losses and claims significantly decreased.

To conclude, Silva et al. (2013) studied the effects of the adoption of a returnable packaging approach by a company located in Brazil. Their findings suggested that, compared to the disposable packaging system, returnable packaging provides several advantages. Specifically, returnable packaging consumes less material, thus

resulting in a decrease of production costs. Moreover, in regard to environmental performance, it reduces its environmental impact by minimizing waste generation in the final customer.

8 Managerial and Theoretical Implications

Throughout this chapter, we have examined the role that packaging plays in the purchase decision-making process, and we have reviewed studies investigating consumers' responses to eco-friendly packaging in retailing. This section presents and discusses the practical and theoretical contributions of our literature review. The first part offers practical advice to retailers who want to implement and pursue more sustainable packaging practices. Specifically, this section shows which materials and colours are perceived as most sustainable and which graphical and informational cues should be used to best present the newly adopted sustainable packaging. Implementing the following suggestions may lead to positive customer evaluations, thus furnishing an improved competitive advantage. In the second part of the section, we identify knowledge gaps in the existing literature that future research on sustainable packaging needs to address.

In regard to managerial implications, the studies analysed show that shifting towards more eco-friendly packaging standards is an effective way to develop a sustainable image. In fact, green packaging is well suited to all those retailers wanting to achieve higher sustainability rates in their supply chain, as well as to communicate to their core audience their compliance with eco-friendly principles (García-Arca et al., 2014). In this direction, while adopting more sustainable practices, a retailer should always consider that packaging not only protects a product but also acts as a communication tool and as a source of sensations and experiences (Clement, 2007). As the existing literature suggests (Magnier & Crié, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2020), retailers should redesign their packaging according to three key dimensions which directly influence the perception of a package's eco-friendliness: packaging materials (i.e. structural cues), packaging manufacturing process (i.e. manufacturing technology), and overall appeal (i.e. graphical and informational cues) (see Table 2).

Although consumers tend to have little knowledge about the most environmentally friendly manufacturing techniques, packaging materials and market appeal are heavily judged. With regard to the structural cues, paper, cardboard, glass, and biodegradable materials are perceived as the most environmentally friendly, while plastic should be categorically avoided (Herbes et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2020). Additionally, eliminating over-packaging increases the perceived environmental friendliness of the package (Gurtu & Arendt, 2020). Current research also reports several findings on consumer preferences regarding graphical and informational cues of green packaging. For instance, consumers tend to presume the eco-friendliness of a package when it features organic and environmental (green) claims, nature in the images, earth colours as well as the use of little ink (Aagerup

Table 2 Consumers' perceptions of sustainable packaging

Packaging materials	Manufacturing process	Overall appeal
Paper, cardboard (Nguyen et al., 2020), and glass (Neill & Williams, 2016) are perceived as the most environmentally friendly materials; The use of plastic should be avoided (Herbes et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2020); Consumers tend to prefer end-of-life attributes such as 'reusable', 'recyclable', and 'biodegradable' (Herbes et al., 2018); Reducing over-packaging improves the perceived environmental friendliness (Gurtu & Arendt, 2020).	Although consumers seem unable to evaluate the most environmentally friendly techniques, they demand the adoption of eco-friendly packaging manufacturing processes (Nguyen et al., 2020). Consumers' awareness of the environmental friendliness of packaging manufacturing processes can provide differentiation.	Earth colours such as cream, brown, or green (Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014) but also blue and white (Barchiesi et al., 2018), and the use of little ink (Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014) are associated with eco-friendliness; Consumers are attracted by colourful natural images (Chrysochou & Festila, 2019; Magnier & Crié's, 2015); The use of eco-friendly claims and labels helps consumers understand whether a package is less environmentally impactful (Lamberz et al., 2020; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014); Consumers are reassured by the presence of logos or certifications of organizations that aim to protect the environment (Lamberz et al., 2020, Magnier & Crié, 2015; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014).

et al., 2019; Barchiesi et al., 2018; Chrysochou & Festila, 2019; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014). The sustainability of a package may also be communicated by using environmental certifications and labels from organizations that aim at protecting the environment (Lamberz et al., 2020, Magnier & Crié, 2015; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014). However, retailers need to be aware that communicating green practices subjects them to severe scrutiny by consumers who demand coherence between personal beliefs and packaging attributes (Aagerup et al., 2019; Jerzyk, 2016; Testa et al., 2020). In fact, the literature shows that purchase intention greatly decreases when retailers practise greenwashing (Magnier & Schoormans, 2015). On the other hand, when sustainability becomes central in the design of the supply chain and is properly communicated, consumers with a positive attitude towards sustainability issues show both a higher purchase intention and a greater willingness to pay (Lamberz et al., 2020; Magnier & Schoormans, 2015; Samant & Seo, 2016). Similar outcomes have been observed in several industries, thus signalling that adopting green packaging strategies can have positive effects on any company and retailer. In sum, when deciding how to redesign packaging in accordance with more sustainable practices, the literature suggests that focusing on attributes linked to the end-of-life of the materials (i.e. reusable, recyclable, biodegradable) and providing clear and

unambiguous information on the characteristics of the package are the most effective options (Herbes et al., 2018; Magnier & Crié, 2015; Testa et al., 2020).

Several studies underline that the attitude towards sustainable packaging is strongly influenced by the demographic characteristics of consumers. Barber (2010), Baruk and Iwanicka (2016), and Koutsimanis et al. (2012) agree that consumers tend to pay more attention to eco-friendly features as their age increases. In regard to gender, females are usually more inclined than males to judge the environmental friendliness of packaging (Chekima et al., 2016; Martinho et al., 2015; Jezewska-Zychowicz & Jeznach, 2015). By contrast, education levels tend to be less relevant to the purchase intention and willingness to pay (Barber, 2010; Baruk & Iwanicka, 2016; Neill & Williams, 2016).

Although research shows that green packaging provides both private (i.e. health-related benefits, highly visible social signalling) and pro-social (i.e. protection of earth and of future generations) benefits to consumers, Magnier and Crié (2015) note that a certain amount of negative attitude towards eco-friendly packaging is related to its minimalist design (i.e. lack of colours and removal of material) which makes it less appealing and may evoke hygiene- as well as protection-related concerns. Nevertheless, the literature agrees on two main results that a retailer can gain through the implementation of more sustainable packaging practices: (a) an improvement of the consumer's brand impressions as well as his/her purchase intention (Koutsimanis et al., 2012; Magnier & Schoormans, 2015; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008); (b) better direct and indirect economic results (García-Arca et al., 2014; Gurtu & Arendt, 2020; Lamberz et al., 2020). In fact, retailers that launched sustainable packaging programmes and tracked their performance gained greater economic results (e.g. Mercadona – García-Arca et al., 2014).

To conclude, our findings show that research on eco-friendly packaging is still in a nascent phase and has not yet been conducted comprehensively. Indeed, most of the relevant empirical studies considered in this review analyse consumer behaviour on the basis of changes on the marketing side (i.e. external factors) of the stimulus-response model (Kotler, 1997). For instance, these studies have investigated variations in consumers' responses to the use of more natural colours (Barchiesi et al., 2018; Scott & Vigar-Ellis, 2014), emotional and rational eco-friendly claims (Aagerup et al., 2019), reusable, recyclable, and biodegradable materials (Herbes et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2020), and labels that declare the eco-sustainability of a package (Lamberz et al., 2020). Consequently, their results suggest that a more marked change in the consumer's purchase intention and willingness to pay is evidenced mainly by those consumers with a pre-existing positive attitude towards sustainability. Although these findings have practical implications for increasing the market appeal of packaging following more eco-friendly standards, future research should also focus on consumers' mental processing frameworks that emphasize the influence that psychological factors (e.g. environmental awareness, sustainable thinking, and ecological knowledge) and consumers characteristics (e.g. lifestyle) exert on the purchase decision process that leads consumers to choose environmentally friendly packaged products. Filling this gap will provide deeper managerial insights not only into the key design elements that may deliver better direct and

indirect economic results to retailers but also which actions they should implement to inform and educate even the most unwilling consumers. Furthermore, since most of the studies reviewed in this chapter investigated the adoption of sustainable packaging in *business-to-consumer* companies and showed how to present sustainable packaging to end consumers, future research should focus on the *business-to-business* sector. Specifically, since B2B clients may be less responsive to graphical cues such as colours and natural images, future studies should investigate how to effectively communicate the adoption of green packaging in this sector. From a methodological standpoint, forthcoming studies in this nascent body of literature may benefit from the use of innovative research techniques, such as neuromarketing tools (e.g. eye-tracking), not only in physical research set-ups (Clement, 2007) but also in virtual ones, i.e. e-commerce websites. The latter are of particular interest considering the enormous and constant growth of e-commerce sales (Regattieri et al., 2014).

9   Conclusions

The colossal amount of packaging waste produced every year is arguably one of the major causes of environmental pollution in recent human history (Tencati et al., 2016). The result is that policies regarding environmental protection are now part of the political agenda of numerous nations and institutions worldwide. Furthermore, because consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about environmental pollution issues, retailers are forced to rethink their processes and increase the number of initiatives aimed at achieving higher sustainability rates (Bocken et al., 2016). Adhering to more eco-friendly packaging practices is a first strategic step towards creating an environmentally friendly image that may have positive effects on consumers' perceptions of a company. In recent years, academic research has therefore sought to provide useful advice to all those companies and retailers struggling to comply with eco-friendly packaging standards. The growing number of studies in the consumer behaviour literature investigating consumers' responses to green packaging prove that this research field is attracting increasing interest.

In this chapter, in order to offer practical guidance to retailers—and also to provide an overview on the evolution of the role of packaging—we have reviewed studies that test the effects that specific eco-friendly packaging design cues exert on consumers' choice and purchase intentions. Moreover, in order to provide a profile of those consumers who express a higher intention to buy green packaged products, we have reviewed studies that investigate the influence of socio-demographic variables (i.e. cultural background, age, gender, and level of education) on consumer behaviour.

While reporting practical and useful findings, our review has also outlined an agenda for future research based on some gaps identified during the review analysis. For instance, we noticed that there is a lack of attention paid to consumers' mental processing frameworks taking into account the influence that psychological factors

have in the purchase decision. Future research should focus on the role of environmental awareness, sustainable thinking, and ecological knowledge in the consumer decision-making process in order to inform retailers about the actions that they should implement so as to raise consumer concern about sustainability, thus making green packaging more appreciated and socially widespread. Moreover, because clients in the B2B sector may be less responsive to graphical cues, forthcoming studies should address the question of how to effectively communicate the adoption of green packaging practices in this sector. To conclude, because the alarming growth of e-commerce sales poses complex challenges in regard to packaging disposal, future research may benefit from innovative methodologies such as neuromarketing techniques with which to measure consumers' perceptions of sustainable packaging in virtual research set-ups, i.e. websites.

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How Does the Use of Shockvertising Trigger Moral Emotions? A Focus on the Plastic Issue

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Abstract Advertising aims to attract attention, evoke emotions, and convey information. However, consumers have a limited ability to remember and for selective retention. This phenomenon has been exacerbated with the advent of the internet. Consequently, the implementation of shocking images by companies has been considered a valid means to attract consumers' attention. Although the literature has explored consumers' reactions to shockvertising, few studies have focused on moral emotions. Hence, the research objective of this work is to understand which moral emotions are evoked by shockvertising and what the object of such emotions is. Because of the increased environmental impact of businesses and human activities, this study explores consumers' reactions and moral emotions evoked by the use of shocking images to communicate issues related to plastic waste. Our findings show that shocking images arouse, for the most part, negative emotions and, in particular, contempt and anger. The use of shocking images can thus attract users' attention, generate a discussion on the plastic issue, and enhance consumer awareness.

Keywords Sustainability · Plastic · Shockvertising · Social media · Content analysis

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1 Introduction

One of a company's goals is to find strategies capable of attracting consumers' attention. Although advertising is a tool that can capture attention by evoking emotions and conveying information, thus encouraging consumption (Dahl et al., 2003), consumers can only remember some of the information they are exposed to each day (Lee & Mason, 1999). For this reason, the use of a shockvertising strategy could be considered a valid means to attract consumers' attention. Shockvertising is a way of breaking through clutter and drawing attention (Lee et al., 2020). It can facilitate recall (Dahl et al., 2003), change perspectives (Moore & Harris, 1996), and move people and encourage them to act (Srivastava, 2021).

While the literature has investigated consumers' reactions to shockvertising, such as through brand evaluation (Lee et al., 2020; Srivastava, 2021) and consumer behaviour (Allred & Amos, 2018; Aung & Inn, 2019), no papers focus on its effects on moral emotions in the context of sustainability communication. Drawing from the classification of moral emotions carried out by Haidt (2003), the present research explores consumers' emotions evoked by viewing shocking images on social media. Specifically, given the growing importance of environmental issues, the present research analyses the application of shock advertising in the communication of sustainability by focusing on the current issues provoked by plastic waste. This study makes important contributions from both a theoretical and managerial point of view. First, the study expands the literature on shockvertising by exploring which moral emotions it can elicit and what their valence is. Second, this work shows that the elicitation of such emotions inspires dialogue on sustainability issues and engages consumers in discussions with the brand and other consumers. Finally, in showing the response of consumers to shockvertising and its ability to communicate the seriousness of certain issues, such as plastic waste and its consequences for the planet, we provide managers and institutions with a potential tool with which to attract consumers' attention and enhance their awareness. This chapter is structured as follows. The next section presents our review of the existing literature on shockvertising and moral emotions. Section 3 illustrates the methodology of our content analysis of posts published on Facebook by media and magazine companies that include shocking images. Section 4 presents our findings on the moral emotions elicited by shockvertising. Sections 5 and 6 summarize and discuss the main contributions and implications of our study and provide avenues for further research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Shockvertising*

Companies seek new ways of reaching their customers, such as by experimenting with unconventional strategies (Bachnik & Nowacki, 2018). Marketers are adopting

different methods to attract consumers' attention to break through advertising clutter and distinguish their companies from competitors (Bachnik & Nowacki, 2018). Particularly, marketers use creative advertising techniques such as shockvertising (Dahl et al., 2003), coined by the literature as controversial advertising (Fam & Waller, 2003), offensive advertising (Chan et al., 2007), and taboo advertising (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012) to attract attention and make advertising more interesting to users.

Shockvertising attempts to surprise an audience (Dahl et al., 2003) and attract attention (Lee et al., 2020). It is defined as a phenomenon useful for deliberately inducing feelings of fear or even offending the audience by violating social norms or personal ideals to draw attention (Bachnik & Nowacki, 2018). Advertisements are considered "shocking" when they violate personal values, regardless of whether this is due to the inclusion of sexually inappropriate, indecent, vulgar, or aesthetically unappealing content (Dahl et al., 2003). This type of advertisement seems to be more effective than nonshocking content in its ability to attract attention and facilitate recall, as it works through the surprise that is generated by "deliberately violating norms . . . to capture the attention of a target audience" (Dahl et al., 2003, p. 269). Shockvertising is used to influence emotions and change perspectives (Moore & Harris, 1996), to affect consumers at a fundamental level, to encourage consumers to act (Srivastava, 2021), to inspire debate, and to encourage attitude and behaviour change (Parry et al., 2013). The three main elements of controversy or provocation in advertising are distinctiveness, ambiguity, and transgression of norms and taboos (Vézina & Paul, 1997). A shock advertisement may activate a positive or negative reaction. Positive reactions (e.g. delight and humour) may lead to attention and fondness, while negative reactions (e.g. disgust or anger) may lead to offence (Dahl et al., 2003).

Referring to *brand evaluation*, Lee et al. (2020) use congruence theory to explain the relationship between shock advertisement, the brand associated with the advertisement, and the brand's product category. The authors suggest that only by understanding the relationships between these components of a shocking advertisement can norm violation be understood. Specifically, the authors show that when a familiar brand is advertised using a shocking advertisement, consumers will evaluate it less favourably when the brand is associated with a socially accepted product as opposed to a controversial one. Consequently, marketers of brands of socially acceptable products are better off using conventional advertisements. In contrast, marketers of brands associated with taboo products do not appear to have much to lose in terms of utilizing shocking or nonshocking advertisements, since some audiences already consider the type of product being advertised offensive regardless of the advertisement style. Srivastava (2021) focuses on brand evaluation by examining the effectiveness of an emotional, shocking, and humour-focused advertising strategy in terms of brand recall, imagery, attitudes towards the advertisement, and purchase intentions towards the brand with a focus on the eastern market. The study provides an understanding of the relationship between the three different types of advertising and types of products. Similar to Lee et al. (2020), Srivastava (2021) argues that the type of product promoted influences the effectiveness of the

advertisement. In particular, Srivastava (2021) proposes that the selection of the three approaches (shock, emotional, and humour) will depend on the type of product advertised. Especially for a new product to achieve advertising effectiveness, it is crucial to identify the fit between the product features and advertising appeals. Bachnik and Nowacki (2018) focus on attitudes towards advertisements by analysing degrees of social acceptance of unconventional and controversial advertisements. Bachnik and Nowacki (2018) verify that perceptions of controversy in advertising are influenced by the characteristics of a company, such as the company's sector of business activity, size, scope of activity, source of capital, and market position. In addition, an increase in awareness of social responsibility in advertising among the companies has resulted in a decrease in the number of controversial advertisements.

When studying the effect of shockvertising on *consumer behaviour,* many authors focus on nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and charities to understand the impact of shock advertising on donation intention (Allred & Amos, 2018; Aung & Inn, 2019; Cockrill & Parsonage, 2016). The authors examine the usefulness of using images that inspire emotions such as shock, fear, and disgust to encourage prosocial behaviour in a nonprofit organization context to attract the attention of potential donors (Allred & Amos, 2018; Aung & Inn, 2019). Allred and Amos (2018) assert that while a disgusting image may be effective for long-term behaviour change, it may also harm donations, thereby affecting revenue streams in the long term. The authors also highlight that it may be less effective for organizations raising funds to combat poverty, ailments, and disease to use disgusting images. The reduced impact of shockvertising on donation intention is also highlighted by Aung and Inn (2019), who argue that shocking advertising alone cannot trigger donation intention. For charities, shock advertising does work, though not by inspiring shock but instead surprise, interest, and compassion, as these are key emotions in the charity context. For charity advertisers, creating interesting and surprising advertisements rather than shocking advertisements may be more effective (Cockrill & Parsonage, 2016).

On the other hand, some authors also underline the benefit of this type of advertisement: shocking elements and negative emotions used in an advertisement are found to be useful in helping consumer audiences recall the content of an advertisement and increase levels of awareness (Aung & Inn, 2019). In addition, shocking content in an advertisement significantly increases attention, benefits recall, and positively influences behaviour; shocking advertising content is superior to nonshocking content in its ability to attract attention and facilitate memory of the advertisement (Dahl et al., 2003). Vézina and Paul (1997) assess the effect of provocative advertisements on consumers and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of provocation. The authors test for the positive effect of provocation in advertising referring to brand awareness and knowledge as well as for the level of knowledge of the advertisement's content. However, the authors find that exposure to extremely provocative appeals leads to negative reactions, while a moderate level of

provocation has an equal or slightly superior effect than a conventional creative strategy (Vézina & Paul, 1997; Cockrill & Parsonage, 2016). Moreover, younger consumers have a more positive reaction to both a provocative strategy and a provocative appeal (Vézina & Paul, 1997).

Finally, a third stream of research focuses on the *individual characteristics* that influence the perception of shock advertising. Parry et al. (2013) study reactions to shock advertising by for-profit (FP) and not-for-profit (NFP) organizations. The authors show that shocking advertising is certainly effective at attracting attention; however, its power of persuasion depends on the sector. The authors highlight a clear difference in participants' reactions to images in both the NFP and FP sectors. In fact, participants perceived shocking images to be more justifiable in the NFP sector if they were considered to have an influence in spurring a positive change in behaviour, following the findings of Dahl et al. (2003), who found that such tactics can increase awareness. However, there are still themes that are considered inappropriate in the FP and NFP sectors, such as the use of religious taboos or morally offensive images. Moreover, Parry et al. (2013) assess that the ability to persuade through shockvertising also depends on the cultural characteristics of the consumer. In particular, participants' countries of origin, religious affiliations, and gender are important elements to consider when measuring consumers' perceptions of shock advertising. Age is another factor that influences perceptions of this type of advertising (Machová et al., 2015). The authors identify five different age generations (veterans; baby boomers; generation X; generation Y; generation Z), and for each of them, they analyse perceptions of and attitudes towards shock advertising. Machová et al. (2015) discovered that younger generations are much more able to accept shock advertisements. Many veterans can quickly become loyal to a product with less controversial advertisements, and most baby boomers are able to obtain enough information from shock advertisements. Generation X finds shock advertisements of products more controversial than generation Y. Finally, the authors found that violence and fear are the second most common upsetting factors among the members of generation Z.

Although the literature has deepened analyses and investigated the reactions of consumers to shockvertising, there has still been no specific focus on moral emotions. In particular, it is unclear which moral emotions are aroused by viewing shocking images in advertising. This aspect is of paramount importance in the context of environmental sustainability and related consumer behaviour. Sustainable practices of brands are usually associated with positive moral emotions (such as gratitude), while negative emotions arise from brand violations of consumer expectations (Grappi et al., 2013). In this study, we wish to observe the moral emotions elicited by companies' communication about an emerging environmental issue that is not caused by the company but is considered to be the shared responsibility of companies, consumers, and society.

2.2   Moral Emotions

According to Haidt (2003), moral emotions differ in valence (positive vs. negative) and attributed accountability (self vs. other). Moral emotions can be divided into two categories: (1) other-condemning emotions (e.g. contempt, anger, and disgust) and (2) self-conscious emotions (e.g. shame, embarrassment, and guilt). Moral anger is a type of anger that arises when harm has been done to someone else whose rights have been violated (Prinz, 2007). Disgust is a negative emotion triggered by a "risk of being contaminated by a 'poisonous idea'" (Lazarus, 1991, p. 260). All forms of disgust include a motivation to avoid, expel, or otherwise break off contact with the offending entity, often coupled with a motivation to purify or otherwise remove residues of any physical contact made with the entity (Rozin et al., 2008). Moral disgust, a variant of disgust, is triggered by people who violate local social rules on how to use their bodies, particularly in the domains of sex, drugs, and body modification (Haidt, 2003). Contempt falls between anger and disgust and is sometimes said to be a blend of the two (Plutchik, 1980). Contempt is part of the reproach emotions family and is elicited by disapproving of someone else's blameworthy actions (Ortony et al., 1990).

As positive other-related emotions, the literature identifies gratitude, elevation, admiration, and awe (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Gratitude is defined as "a positive emotion that typically flows from the perception that one has benefited from the costly, intentional, voluntary action of another person" (McCullough et al., 2008). Admiration is an other-focused emotion elicited by observing above standard virtue or skill (Onu et al., 2016). In contrast, the emotion elicited by virtue exceeding standards is termed "elevation" (Haidt, 2000). Finally, a sense of awe is defined as a perception of vastness that cannot be assimilated but can be accommodated, or as the experience of humility and wonder—adventure—with living (Schneider, 2017).

Most Western researchers list shame, embarrassment, and guilt as the principal negative self-conscious emotions (Lewis, 1993). Shame results when an individual judges his or her actions as failing his or her standards, rules, and goals and then makes a global attribution (Lewis, 1995). Moreover, while shame is a personal feeling, embarrassment involves interpersonal exposure—concern with the image one presents before others felt to be present at the time. In short, it is possible to be embarrassed only in the presence of real or imagined others, while shame can occur for a private act. Embarrassment, therefore, is concerned with one's public image, with the reactions expected from real or imagined others to "inappropriate behaviours". The two terms thus refer to quite distinct but related forms of social anxiety (Edelmann, 1981). Guilt is the only one of the main three negative self-conscious emotions that motivates direct helping behaviours (Haidt, 2003) or third-party punishment behaviours (Tangney et al., 2007), and it is considered one of the main antecedents of prosocial behaviour (Muralidharan & Sheehan, 2017).

On the other hand, self-evaluation can also lead to positive emotions and even overly positive emotions. Lewis (1993) and Lewis (1995) identify hubris and pride as positive valence emotions. Hubris is defined as exaggerated pride or

self-confidence. Hubris is the emotion elicited when success regarding one's standards, rules, and goals is applied to a person's entire self and is often considered an unlikable trait to be avoided (Lewis, 1995). Pride is defined as a "positive emotion associated with a sense of achievement and self-worth" (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014, p. 121). Pride occurs when individuals positively evaluate their own performance of an action or achievement of an outcome (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Specifically, pride is "generated by appraisals that one is responsible for a socially valued outcome or for being a socially valued person" (Mascolo & Fischer, 1995, p. 66). Thus, pride is useful for improving a person's self-esteem and for encouraging future behaviours in compliance with social standards (Tangney et al., 2007).

2.3 Research Aim

As emerged from the analysis of the literature, the use of shocking images in advertising can be an effective means to increase consumers' attention and transmit information (Dahl et al., 2003). Moreover, given the increasing amount of information to which consumers are subjected daily, the use of shocking images can be considered a valid means to facilitate recall and capture attention (Lee & Mason, 1999; Srivastava, 2021). As previously highlighted, the literature on shockvertising focuses on brand evaluation, consumer behaviour, and individual characteristics, while its effect on consumers' emotions has been overlooked.

Shockvertising generates positive or negative reactions. Positive reactions (such as delight and humour) may lead to attention and fondness, while negative reactions (such as disgust or anger) may lead to offence (Dahl et al., 2003). Accordingly, we find it interesting to analyse which moral emotions can be aroused by viewing shocking images and to determine whether viewing shocking images triggers positive or negative emotions in consumers.

Given the relevance of shock advertising and the possible effects generated through this technique, our goal is to understand consumers' perceptions of this type of advertising and the reactions and emotions aroused. Specifically, given the emergence of environmental issues, the aim of the research is to analyse the application of shock advertising in the communication of sustainability. Our focus is the plastic issue that is currently damaging to the environment and the health of animals and people. Indeed, the global threat of highly persistent plastic waste accumulation and fragmentation in the world's oceans, inland waters, and terrestrial environments is becoming increasingly evident (Van Eygen et al., 2018). The persistent nature and deleterious effects of plastic debris make this issue one of the world's foremost environmental concerns, alongside climate change and ocean acidification. Global production of plastic currently exceeds 320 million tonnes (Mt) per year, over 40% of which is used as single-use packaging, resulting in plastic waste. Moreover, a substantial proportion of the plastic produced each year is lost to and persists in the marine environment, with an estimated accumulative potential of 250 Mt. by 2025 (Wright & Kelly, 2017).

Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyse the use of shocking images for the communication of issues related to the plastic issue. We seek to understand which emotions are evoked by shockvertising and to see if the use of shocking images can be used as a potentially effective means to generate a change in consumers' behaviour and an incentive to act.

3 Methodology

To analyse consumers' reactions to shockvertising, we adopt a content analysis. Content analysis has been extensively used across the social sciences to analyse people's communications. The language study reveals people's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, behaviours, and personalities (Schwartz & Ungar, 2015). In particular, we conducted a content analysis of social media focusing on Facebook. Social media are now used regularly by more than 1 billion people and facilitate billions of communications among users. As the first step, we searched Facebook for shocking images related to the plastic issue. We decided to focus on this theme because of the urgent need to limit plastic waste and its damage to the planet and human health. The use of shocking images to communicate the importance of the plastics issue can indeed be an essential tool capable of attracting attention to the relevance of the topic (Dahl et al., 2003), changing perspectives (Moore & Harris, 1996), creating debate, and facilitating attitude and behaviour change (Parry et al., 2013), encouraging consumers to act (Srivastava, 2021).

We deliberately selected six cases—Forbes, National Geographic, The Guardian, The New York Times, The Independent, and Discovery—that fulfilled the following criteria: (1) The company operates within the media and magazine business; (2) The post was published on Facebook in the last 6 years; (3) The post includes a shocking image related to the plastic issue and concerns this topic; (4) The post drew at least 100 comments. Therefore, we selected two posts for each company (see Table 1 in the Appendix) concerning the plastic issue and collected a total of twelve. For each post, we collected the first 100 comments, resulting in a sample of 1200 comments (100 comments * 12 posts). We examined the comments following an analysis protocol. More precisely, all the comments were recorded in an Excel database, and each was categorized for a descriptive analysis based on the post to which the comment referred and the object of the comment (sustainability, the plastic issue, consumers, and companies). Furthermore, we decided to classify the comments of each post according to the moral emotions expressed by the users. In particular, for each comment, we indicated the presence of a moral emotion possibly associated with the comment. More specifically, if it was possible to attribute an emotion, the number "1" was marked, and otherwise the number "0" was used. In addition, in the presence of a moral emotion (1), the specific emotion was classified following Haidt' classification (2003). In this way, it was possible to analyse consumers' reactions to shocking images employed to communicate about the plastic issue.

4 Results

Through the analysis of the comments, we identified seven moral emotions: contempt, anger, disgust, guilt, pride, hubris, and admiration.

The following subsections report the results that emerged from the content analysis. We first present the positive moral emotions and then the negative ones.

4.1 Positive Moral Emotions

The results show that negative emotions were mainly associated with the comments of Facebook users, except for admiration, hubris, and pride. Both hubris and admiration are in fact considered positive moral emotions, but hubris is a rather special one. Hubris is defined as exaggerated pride or self-confidence and, for this reason, is often considered an unlikable trait to be avoided (Lewis, 1995). Indeed, from the interpretation of the comments related to the posts collected, some users are arrogant on the topic of plastic issues. In most cases, users exhibit arrogance and presumptuousness towards the comments posted by other users:

"First of all, you need to read the article. Second, you don't understand how whales filter their food. Fail!" (Hanna)

"Read the article" (Jim)

In other cases, users are arrogant, as they attribute the cause of the current situation (pollution and environmental impact) to only certain countries without considering the negative impact everyone has and the contribution everyone can make to improve the current situation:

Don't harp on Americans we control our use of plastics and do not litter as a populist. We have fines for littering, and we pay if we have to use a bag at a grocery store, in fact most stores reverted back to paper bags. I've been around the world and the Middle East is rampant in use of plastics and don't forget countries in Asia like Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Then in central and South America after that Africa and Egypt (Philip)

Admiration is also identified as a positive moral emotion among the comments, and this emotion is especially attributed to the specific posts published by the companies selected. More precisely, the users feel admiration because in their opinion, the use of a shocking image to underline the problem of plastic is a winning strategy:

May be fake. But made me look closely & care! (Jhon)

Then the picture did its job bc it SHOULD make you sick! Not all art is just pretty to look at, often its purpose is to provoke thought and emotion, which this did. I think for that very reason, this was the PERFECT picture to accompany the article. (Kate)

Its eye catching - doing the job of getting attention (Mary)

In other cases, users admire ways to reduce environmental impact proposed by other consumers:

> Awesome idea! (Alex)

Finally, from the analysis of the comments, some users appear to feel proud of their own behaviour in terms of their contribution in trying to limit plastic consumption and environmental impacts:

> I buy cans in a recyclable cardboard box (Olivia)

> I always buy my Coke in cans their much easier to recycle (Wiliam)

> . . .The plastic I do get from the supermarket goes in an ecobrick (Joseph)

> If you live in the UK don't buy bottled water. Tap water is probably as good if not better, cheaper and environmentally superior (Sophia)

4.2   Negative Moral Emotions

As anticipated, apart from hubris, admiration, and pride, all other moral emotions attributed to the comments are negative. In particular, among these, contempt is the emotion most reflected in the posts published on the social network. Users feel contempt (especially concerning the general situation) of the excessive production of plastic and its environmental dispersion:

> It's the micro plastic, the tiny particles that are everywhere, from your polyester clothing as well! That is impossible to remove. (Ben)

> Tons of it on our streets, rivers & parks if you fancy it. (Samantha)

> Compact and put where? Waste that cannot be recycled is a global problem that's being shipped around the world and sent back again. (Patrick)

In other cases, users feel contempt for other people's irresponsible and careless behaviour:

> Sorry but they've purposefully thrown it into the ocean. Maybe now they'll realize plastic LASTS FOR A LONG TIME. Too bad for the other animals in the environment having to live with the ignorant decisions of local humans. (Jim)

> What's wrong with people dumping plastic? They should be dumped too on an island full of nothing but waste (Kate)

Moreover, people criticize and despise the market on the supply side; they abhor manufacturing companies for their excessive production of plastic and the underlying mechanisms involved:

> The last ripple of the heavy price paid (unpaid in fact) for the advanced western societies. The company made first plastic water / cola bottle should compensate for the global disaster (Jason)

> If any of the billionaires are set to make a profit from this, it will happen. Otherwise, it will not. (Laura)

Contempt is also exhibited in the posts published on Facebook:

Love this headline because of the ambiguity. . . (Constance)

. . .This article creates an impression that there's nothing left to deal with. It's a bit abracadabra-ish. (Ricardo)

After the emotion of contempt, anger is the second most expressed emotion in the posts. While anger is directed at other users, contempt is directed at the supply side for its excessive production of plastic:

. . .When I shop for anything I come home with more plastic than I do produce. This is nuts! (Alberto)

Plastics need to go!! Not only for our animal kingdom but for us.... Nearly EVERYTHING in our grocery stores is packaged in plastic!! Just how many toxins are leaching into our foods?? (Martha)

I've been told this since I was 6 years old in 1966. WHY are we still producing it? Are we thick or something? (Adelle)

Again, consumers express anger about people's irresponsibility and lack of effort to make their own contribution:

People tread the earth like a giant dumpster of disposable goods! (Matthew)

Depend on it? We're stuck with it, is more like it. So, just get more conscious about weeding it out of your day to day life. All it takes is effort, no excuses (i.e. "oh, I left my reusable bags in the car") (Harry)

In other cases, users express anger towards the information society publishing a post, as they question the truthfulness of the information conveyed or the inappropriate use of a shocking image:

FAKE NEWS. It doesn't matter that you open the article and read that it is art. 🥴 Art, but art just the same. Most read only the headline and move on with the inaccurate perception that this a real whale. FAKE and purposefully misleading (Oscar)

If NY Times actually did something about it, I would invest in a subscription. Put your money where your mouth is. Profits invested in change. (Charlie)

The last other-condemning emotion is disgust. Similar to the other two other-condemning emotions (anger and contempt), the emotion of disgust is expressed to condemn and criticize modern society:

The stench was disgustingly gross (David)

We are here for the first time and the street is filled with plastic and broken strings of beads. This was before tonight's parade. Gross. (Mason)

Moreover, this emotion is directed at people's behaviour:

it's just an excuse for adults to behave badly. Also you are right, it smells like rotting garbage and is disgusting. (Joe)

". . .Respect your beautiful beaches and clean this disgusting mess up. Get rid of single use plastic", "The human race is just disgusting" (Sarah)

Regarding self-conscious emotions with a negative valence, posts published on the plastic issue generate a sense of guilt in users:

> This isn't just big companies' failure you know you and I need to do better on recycling (Tracy)

> We have to start somewhere. The ice caps are going away. (Joanne)

The environmental impact is attributed to not only manufacturing companies but also people's bad habits:

> Coca Cola doesn't throw their bottles in the ocean, we only have ourselves to blame, human beings across the globe slowly but surely laying waste to our planet (Daniel)

> We are dumping it there. . . (Alex)

> . . .we are all guilty of neglect. We must do what we can and start at home (Emma)

From the comments of these users, through viewing the published posts and the use of shocking images, users are negatively affected, as they may realize their poor behaviour and limited contribution. They then realize that through everyone's contribution, the situation can improve; therefore, it is important to help:

> I'm gonna do my part and use even less plastic than I do now. It may not be much, but it's something (Reece)

5   Discussion and Conclusions

Given the numerous stimuli presented to consumers every day and their selective retention of information, the use of shock advertising by companies can be a valid means to attract consumers' attention. In this study, the goal was to understand consumers' reactions to the use of shocking images and the emotions aroused. In doing so, we focused on the use of shocking images by information companies on social media and particularly on Facebook.

Our analysis shows that the shock elements and the negative emotions used in advertisements can help audiences recall the content of advertisements and increase their awareness (Aung & Inn, 2019). Furthermore, the presence of shocking images related to the plastic issue mainly arouses negative emotions. In particular, the most attributable emotions are contempt and anger. Users feel anger and contempt not because of a post itself but because the information transmitted through a post makes them aware of the plastic problem. This awareness of the issue causes consumers to feel anger and contempt for the general situation and for the irresponsible behaviour of others and of the manufacturing companies that continue to produce and use plastic. The other-condemning emotion caused by the posts is disgust. Regarding the emotions of anger and contempt, users are disgusted with the current situation, with the lack of intervention by companies and authorities and for the lack of contribution and disregard of other people. In other cases, viewing shocking images used by news companies to highlight the problem of plastics evokes guilt in consumers. In this

case, users perceive the seriousness of the problem and feel guilty for their limited contribution. For this reason, consumers feel admiration towards media and magazine companies for using shocking images, which is considered an effective means to convey the seriousness of the problem of plastic waste and inspire consumers to change. This activates a willingness to change and try to contribute to improving the situation. In contrast, consumers feel proud when they know that they are already helping reduce the use and dispersion of plastic in the environment.

In conclusion, the use of shocking images by media and magazine companies to convey the problem of plastics could be considered an effective strategy. In fact, the use of shocking images can attract the attention of users and trigger a discussion on the plastic issue. In this case, the posts published focused on the problem of plastic and therefore on a negative and condemnatory theme; therefore, we expected that most emotions aroused in consumers would be negative. However, in attracting the attention of consumers, the use of shocking images generates awareness of the problem, creating in some cases a sense of guilt and a desire to change consumers' attitudes and lifestyles. Indeed, the use of images that touch consumers causes them to initiate a dialogue on plastic waste and environmental sustainability, which raises consciousness about the issue, which is one of the prerequisites for responsible behavioural change. Our findings can help institutions and media companies make their communication on sustainability issues more effective. The use of strong and shocking images can be considered an efficient means to convey and communicate the urgency and seriousness of certain issues, inducing consumers to change and make positive contributions to society. In conclusion, retailers can use the shockvertising strategy to trigger consumers' moral emotions; in particular, they can share strong images capable of conveying the central aspects of a certain issue, highlighting the fact and seriousness of a problem. Although retailers' use of shockvertising can contribute to creating and strengthening consumers' awareness of issues affecting the environment, this strategy can backfire if the responsibility of such issues is shared by the retailer itself.

6 Limitations and Future Research

We acknowledge some limitations of our research that offer a rich agenda for future studies. Through our analysis, we show that the use of shockvertising can be considered a good means to motivate consumers to change given its ability to attract the attention of users. However, despite the data collected, our results cannot be generalized, as in the present study, the focus was on the use of shocking images for the communication of a specific environmental issue. The current popularity of the topic facilitates its ability to draw the attention of consumers and to engage them emotionally. However, in other contexts, consumers might perceive the use of shocking images differently, and shockvertising could result in a less effective—and even disastrous—strategy. Starting from this consideration, further research could explore which factors determine the effectiveness of shockvertising.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to identify a moral emotion in all the users' comments. Further studies could develop an analysis of comments on shockvertising observing the cognitive and behavioural engagement of consumers with such images. Although understanding the emotional reaction of consumers is important to observe how they engage with shockvertising, other key outputs can emerge, including intentional and actual behaviours, the sharing of knowledge about the given topic, providing suggestions about how to address the issue or sharing individual thoughts and beliefs on taking responsibility for the given issue. In this case, future studies could conduct experiments.

Finally, we focus our research on shockvertising published on Facebook by media and magazine companies, whose key activity is to convey information to the public and often share content related to changes occurring in the world. Thus, many consumers read the posts published by such companies expecting to find information related to environmental sustainability and the impact of human activities. This facilitates engagement of consumers in dialogue initiated by shockvertising and the appropriateness of such images in underlining the negative consequences of plastic waste. However, companies operating in other industries—fashion, food, and cosmetics among others—are communicating their sustainability efforts as well. In this case, although companies' respect of nature and its resources is considered imperative by consumers, the use of shocking images to convey corporate sustainability messages can be inappropriate and ineffective. Indeed, feelings of guilt or disgust elicited by an image can have negative side effects on the brand itself and, consequently, on the behaviour of consumers.

Appendix

Table 1 Selected Facebook posts

Company	Publication date	Post link
Forbes	17/03/2019	https://www.facebook.com/forbes/posts/10157217213547509
Forbes	10/04/2018	https://www.facebook.com/forbes/posts/10156372874122509
National Geographic	20/02/2020	https://www.facebook.com/natgeo/posts/101571956424 98951
National Geographic	29/06/2018	https://www.facebook.com/natgeo/posts/10156494199683 951
The Guardian	4/01/2021	https://www.facebook.com/theguardian/posts/10159845871 721323
The Guardian	28/09/2020	https://www.facebook.com/theguardian/posts/10159566724 656323
The NY Times	30/08/2020	https://www.facebook.com/nytimes/posts/10152437235434 999
The NY Times	2/12/19	https://www.facebook.com/nytimes/posts/10152107439054 999

Table 1 (continued)

Company	Publication date	Post link
The Independent	9/10/20	https://www.facebook.com/TheIndependentOnline/posts/10158781424906636
The Independent	2/01/2020	https://www.facebook.com/TheIndependentOnline/posts/10157774979831636
Discovery	30/09/2015	https://www.facebook.com/Discovery/posts/10153742930348586
Discovery	1/09/2015	https://www.facebook.com/Discovery/posts/10153672504523586

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