

MARKETING PROJECTIONS OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE BRANDING ON CONSUMER LOYALTY

The current market reality is strongly influenced by the development of the concepts of “sustainable development” and “Experience economy”. The latter forms a new business model – B2H (Business to human) – a human-centered business. Together with the increasing percentage of sophisticated customers, this is becoming a serious challenge for the businesses. In this context, socially responsible branding is positioned as a relevant tool that serves, on the one hand, to satisfy the pursuit of social, economic and environmental justice, and on the other hand, makes the relationship “company-client” to be a form of experience beyond the rational framework of market exchange. The study presents an author’s model of the marketing projections of the application of socially responsible branding. In a mirror perspective – in terms of end-users and business, the relationships between the individual constructs of the model have been empirically tested with an emphasis on exploring the possibilities of socially responsible branding to influence the level of consumer loyalty, which is often considered a priority goal for companies. In conclusion, specific arguments are formulated for the practical applicability and significance of such a study.

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Introduction

More and more economic experts and analysts unite around the understanding that in the 21st-century conditions of the market environment and the behaviour of market participants are highly subject to and influenced by the development of two concepts – the concept of “Experience Economy” (Pine, Gilmore, 1998, p. 97-105) and the concept of “Sustainable development”. The latter is invariably on the agenda of the World Economic Forum in Davos, where leaders around the world seek effective solutions to achieve a stable balance between economic, social and environmental goals, the balanced trinity of which is the basis of the concept of sustainable development. This process quite naturally leads to a modification of the behaviour of market participants. On the one hand, companies strive to

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"produce sustainably" and behave as good corporate citizens – companies that do well and at the same time strive to do good. On the other hand, this behaviour can be seen as a consequence of the desire to serve a specific market segment with serious potential for development – the market of sophisticated customers. The basic premise is that "sophisticated" customers have a high ethical consciousness expressed in affinity for "sustainable consumption". They are: more educated (Hirschman, 1980, p. 283-295); have wide access to information, as a result of which they are better informed (Alba, Hutchinson, 1987, p. 411-454); are significantly more experienced in making purchases (Sproles, Geistfeld, Badenhop, 1978, p. 88-103); more competent in their consumer choices (Feick, Price, 1987, p. 83-97); more value-oriented (Feick, Price, 1987, p. 83-97). These are consumers who are looking for value beyond the classic four-dimensional form of marketing. Determining for the behaviour of this segment, and in particular for shaping this decision to purchase, is the content and quality of experience that users get from the brand, not just the product or service (Pine, Gilmore, 1998, p. 97-105). It is this philosophy that underlies the concept of the "Experience economy". The projection of the above in the context of sustainable development suggests that consumers will switch to brands whose purchase allows commitment to the realization of "sustainability" to be an intense experience as much as possible.

This poses a serious challenge to companies – not just to offer excellent products and services, but to "make the world a better place". The practical approach to achieve this is related to the integration of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the overall corporate strategy of business organizations. "In the business world, good is associated with CSR" (Kotler, Lee, 2011, p. 2) and it is defined as "the next big challenge for branding" (Kotler, Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 300), which led to the emergence of the category "Socially responsible branding" (SRB).

In its essence, SRB is ideologically in line with the philosophy of "Experience economy" and "sustainable development". It is a crossroads between the pursuit of social, economic and environmental justice and the desire for the relationship "company-client" to be a form of experience beyond the rational framework of market exchange.

In this context, SRB is a kind of balance between the interests and goals of both parties – corporate companies on the one hand and "sophisticated" consumers on the other hand. SRB identifies and differentiates companies that produce "sustainably" and at the same time serves as information for "sophisticated" customers about market offers corresponding to their high criteria when they choose a product.

SRB distinguishes those relationships in the market in which an active process of creating, sharing and experiencing value between companies and customers exists. This makes it a source of sustainable competitive advantage for business organizations. The latter can also be justified by the significant number of positive marketing effects of the implementation of SRB. The most significant of these is associated with the highly positive effect of SRB on gaining and maintaining customer loyalty. As an impact in three key areas – the value of the brand, company reputation and level of customer satisfaction, SRB influences customer loyalty, as it is defined as one of the essential tasks for modern marketing. Arguments in favour of this statement are the positive effects that keeping consumers has on the market

and financial results of business organizations. Loyal customers buy more, share favourable information about the company and its products, they are significantly less susceptible to the influence of competitors, they are less sensitive to changes in price levels and they require less financial resources for their service.³

The above said gives reason to believe that the problems associated with the study of the relationship and interdependence between "socially responsible branding" and "consumer loyalty" are relevant and significant. **The aim of the study** is, based on the analysis of various theoretical formulations to define the essence of the "SRB" category and to derive a model of marketing projections of SRB on consumer loyalty by proposing, justifying and testing research tools to empirically verify the relevance of this model on the market of carbonated soft drinks in Bulgaria.

Literary Review in the Context of the Researched Issues

Socially responsible branding

In the specialized marketing literature, there is no clearly formulated definition of what is meant by SRB (Vallaster, Lindgreen, Maon, 2012, p. 56).⁴ Some authors (Stanimirov, Zhechev, 2013, p. 182) define it as a kind of branding; others more generally point out that in the process of SRB, ethical brands are created that "do not harm the public good, but seek to contribute to its maintenance" (Fan, 2005, p. 341-350). Following the concept of sustainable development, NIELSEN experts define these brands as "sustainable".

Based on an analysis of existing theoretical formulations, the authors of the study identify two points of view on the nature of the "SRB" category. According to the first, the starting point for formulating a definition of SRB is the conceptual essence of Carroll's pyramid (Carroll, Buchholtz, 2003, p. 40)⁵, or a brand can be defined as socially responsible if it identifies a company that has made a profit legally and ethically (including producing sustainably) and spends this profit in a way that is in the public interest (most often by engaging in one/several corporate social initiatives).

The second point of view does not contradict the above said, but rather gives a different perspective on the content of the "SRB" category. The phraseological-semantic analysis of the term shows that SRB is a process of creating and managing brands by following the principles of CSR; it is a form of integration of branding and the CSR ideology. Brands that are characterized as socially responsible are those that identify the fulfilment of

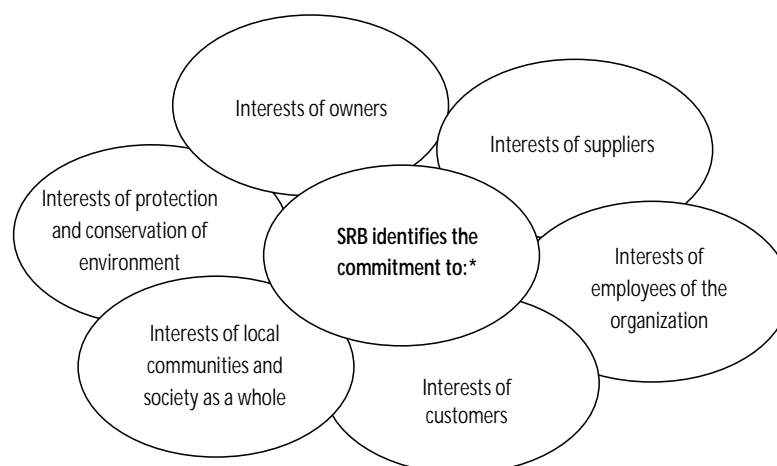
³ Adapted from Kotler, F. Marketing Management. (*Upravljenie na marketinga. Klasika i stil*, Sofia, 2005, p. 54.)

⁴ The essence and effects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) have been studied and described by a number of specialists in the field of marketing and management. However, the manifestation of CSR in branding is still considered „unexplored matter“ which, to some extent, explains the lack of a unified, scientifically based definition of SRB.

⁵ Interested persons' theory is the base of one of the most popular and widely applicable understandings of the nature of CSR – the Carroll's pyramid which views Corporate Social Responsibility as a set of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities.

commitments on the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibility of the company, which, according to Carroll, together represent CSR. So far, the two points of view overlap. The new element in the formulation of the definition of SRB comes from the understanding of brands as a set of certain associations. Based on this and based on the consideration of CSR as a concern for increasing well-being, improving the quality of life and ensuring the interests of all stakeholders (owners, suppliers, employees, customers, local community, society as a whole and the environment) such brands can be defined as socially responsible that due to well-formulated and implemented positional strategy, maintain homogeneous and stable position/image in the minds of each of these parties and is associated with the implementation of their interests and expectations (Figure 1):

Figure 1
Socially responsible brand as a set of homogeneous and sustainable associations of fulfilling the interests of all stakeholders



* In real market conditions, the satisfaction of the interests of all interested parties to the same extent is practically impossible (often, in order to protect the interests of one party, it is necessary to deliberately ignore the interests of another one). This means that in defining the nature of SRB we are dealing with "level"/"degree" of SRB, or in other words, there is a lower or higher degree/level of overlapping of the initially conflicting interests of the six groups of interested parties.

Source: The figure is derived by the authors.

- for the owners (the company), the socially responsible brand is associated mainly with the fulfilment of economic responsibilities;
- for the suppliers, it is important that the brand is associated with reliability and correctness in the partnership with the company;
- for employees, the socially responsible brand is the one that communicates the observance of the legal responsibilities of the company and guarantees the provision of a good working environment and working conditions;

- for the customers and especially for the segment of the "sophisticated" customers, such brand is socially responsible which can satisfy their striving to sustainable consumption; the brand that carries associations of ethics and social engagement of the company it identifies; the brand that distinguishes those market offers in which the company and customers actively experience the process of creating and sharing value;
- for the local community, society as a whole and the environment – associations for a socially responsible brand are connected to the implementation of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities of the company.

Based on the above, we can say that the brands created and managed with the presumption of social responsibility promote and support the public pursuit of social, economic and environmental sustainable development by integrating the concept of sustainability in their image and striving to implement it effectively (Nieto, 2009, p. 29). Therefore, they do not just identify the product and its characteristics, but become communicators of the values professed by the company, ambassadors of important causes for society, which business organizations defend alongside their corporate interests. These brands are characterized as socially responsible, as a new generation of brands which Kotler (2010) calls "brands with a civic position."

Socially responsible brands are the basis for the creation of a new branch of modern marketing – the branch of "brand citizenship". We can consider it as part of corporate citizenship; as a form of commitment to social norms and values, to nature, state, society and its problems in the process of creating and managing brands.

According to Kotler, the committing to "brand citizenship", to creating and maintaining socially responsible brands, gives us confidence that the future value proposition in marketing, formulated in the spirit of "Experience economy" and "sustainable development", as "providing of meaning" (Kotler, Kartajaya, Setiawan, 2010, p. 39) will actually and effectively be realized by the companies on the market.

Model of marketing projections of SRB on consumer loyalty

Systematizing the marketing projections of SRB is not an easy task from a research point of view. The theoretical review made by the authors shows that there is a complex combination of logically substantiated and empirically confirmed relationships and interactions between the SRB category and other marketing constructs. However, we can conclude that by having an impact in three main areas – brand value, corporate reputation and level of customer satisfaction, SRB influences customer loyalty and this is one of the most important marketing effects of its application.

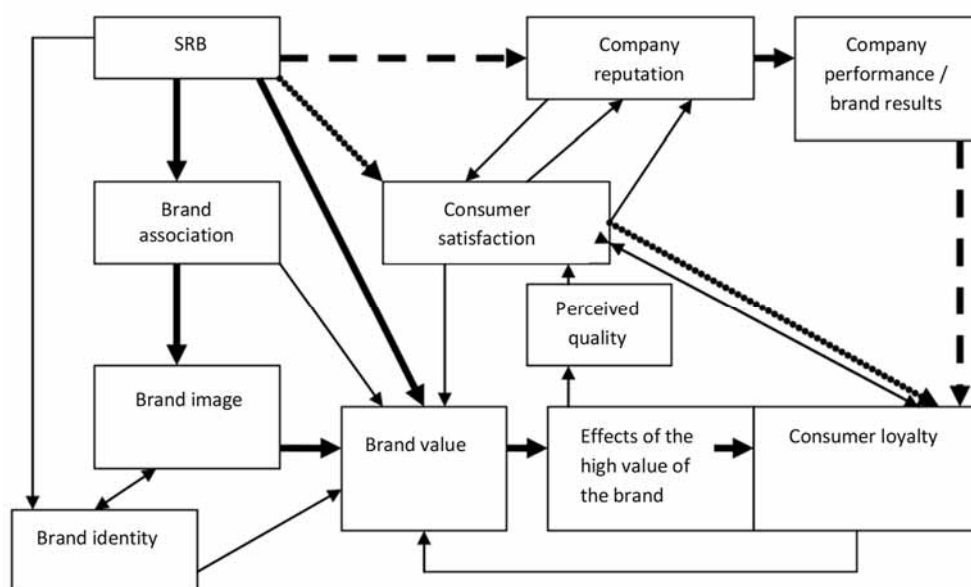
The model of marketing influence of SRB on consumer loyalty is presented in Figure 2.⁶ The relationship of key importance for tracking the interactions between the individual

⁶ This figure is created by the author. It is constructed on the basis of an overview of a wide range of specialized literature sources, providing theoretical and empirical justification of the relationships illustrated.

constructs of the presented model is that between SRB and the value of the brand. Marketing research confirms that the application of CSR in branding (SRB) leads to increasing the value of the brand, directly or indirectly, by having a beneficial effect on the formation of brand associations, creating a positive brand image and brand identity. The relevance of this relationship is further confirmed in the context of the "Experience economy".

Figure 2

Model of marketing influence of SRB on consumer loyalty



Legend: The three types of arrows denote the three directions of influence of SRB on consumer loyalty: (1) first direction – a thick, bold arrow; (2) second direction – a normal arrow; (3) third direction – dotted arrow.

Source: The figure is derived by the authors.

The high value of the brand is essential for the good market performance of the companies; it has a number of positive effects, one of the most significant of which is related to gaining and maintaining consumer loyalty.

In addition to the value of the brand, SRB has a direct impact on the constructs "customer satisfaction" and "corporate reputation". The latter is crucial for the performance of companies, and in particular of the brand. Consumer loyalty is formed and maintained as a result of the good performance of the brand and depending on the level of customer satisfaction.

Based on the presented model of marketing projections, the influence of SRB on the formation and maintenance of customer loyalty can be conditionally distinguished in three areas:

First direction: by direct/indirect impact on the value of the brand:

- A number of scientific studies confirm that the application of SRB has a direct impact on the value of the brand and leads to its increase (Lai, Chiu, Yang, Pai, 2010, p. 460, 465; Melo, Galan, 2011, p. 428).
- SRB creates strong, favourable and unique associations for the brand, which respectively has a positive impact on its image (Keller, 1993, p. 1-22). The attractive brand image, formed as a result of SRB effects, leads to an increase in the value of the brand (Nan, Heo, 2007, p.71⁷;Berry, 2000, p. 128-137).
- It is important to note that associations alone also have a direct effect on the formation of brand value (Crimmins, 1992, p. 11-20). Falkenberg (1996) argues that forming favourable associations and positive feelings among target consumers leads to an increase in brand worth. The contribution of the associations to the increase of the value of the brand can be considered in the following directions: 1) the associations create a basis for product differentiation; 2) associations create motives for purchase; 3) the associations help the customers to remember, process, interpret and remember information that is important for the respective brand; 4) the associations create a positive attitude towards the brand (Stanimirov, Zhechev, 2013, p. 120-121; Brestnicka, 2004, p. 111-113).
- SRB has a direct impact on brand identity and helps to increase its attractiveness (Lundmark, Elsalhy, 2009, p. 21-22). On the one hand, a more attractive identity increases the chances of forming a more attractive brand image, and on the other hand, it results in a higher brand value.
- The overall manifestation of the considered constructs and the proven interactions between them lead to an increase in the value of the brand. The high value of the brand is desirable and valuable for companies because of the number of positive effects it brings:
- There is a positive relationship between the value of the brand and the market share of the brand (However, there are areas of business in which this relationship is an exception – an example is the fashion industry) (Agarwal, Rao, 1996, p. 237-247). The higher value results in a larger market share for the brand, which leads to the formation of a larger market share for the company holding the brand.
- There is a positive relationship between brand value and consumer perceptions of brand quality (Dodds, Monroe, Greal, 1991, p. 307-319). Based on the formulations of the index models for measuring customer satisfaction (Swedish, American and European

⁷ Some authors believe that in the formation of brand value, the influence of SOB is much stronger when it happens through brand associations and brand image, compared to the case of direct interaction.

models) we can say that the perceived quality is a construct that has a direct impact on the level of customer satisfaction and has an indirect influence on loyalty. As a rule, the perception of high quality results in increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. However, Stanimirov (2010) points out that a situation is possible in which customers are highly loyal to a brand that is characterized by perceived low quality and vice versa – the fact that a brand has a perceived high quality does not necessarily mean that it will be liked and preferred by consumers.

- There is a positive relationship between brand value and consumer evaluation of brand extensions (Aaker, Keller, 1990, p. 27-41).
- There is a positive relationship between brand value and consumers' price insensitivity (Erdem, Swait, Louviere, 2002, p. 1-19).
- There is a positive relationship between brand value and brand resilience in crises (Dawar, Pilluta, 2000, p. 215-226). This predetermines the relatively more stable market position of the companies that own these brands.
- There is a positive relationship between the value of the brand on the one hand and consumer preferences and the intention to buy the brand on the other hand (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, Donthu, 1995, p. 2-40).
- There is a positive relationship between the value of the brand and the level of consumer loyalty (Stanimirov, Zhechev, 2013, p. 36). When customers perceive the value of a brand as high, the likelihood that they will repurchase increases (Kotler, Armstrong, 2008). It is economically justified and reasonable to say the opposite as well: the more loyal customers a brand has, the more its value grows.

Second direction: by influencing the level of consumer satisfaction:

The specialized literature on marketing describes different approaches through which SRB influences consumer satisfaction (Luo, Bhattacharya, 2006, p. 1-18). According to the most common of them, SRB contributes to the creation of high levels of customer identification with the company, which creates the opportunity for a more complete satisfaction of consumer needs and desires, and this results in increased customer satisfaction (Bhattacharya, Sen, 2003, p. 76-88) and consumer perceptions of brand value (Keller, 1993, p. 1-22).

Theory and practice prove that customers identify with a particular company when they believe that its characteristics are compatible with their personal beliefs, understandings, norms and values; when they are internally convinced that identification with the relevant organization will increase their self-esteem and self-respect (Scott, Lane, 2000, p. 43-62).

The more socially responsible the company is in its actions, including in the process of creating and managing its brands, the more satisfied are the "sophisticated" consumers. This is also determined by the fact that the pursuit of "sustainable" consumption is given the opportunity for practical realization in the conditions of "sustainable" production, which companies "corporate citizens" exercise. In this case, customers tend to identify with the organization and the brands it offers in the market, as SRB meets their expectations by giving them the opportunity to express themselves (Hsu, 2012, p. 194). In the context of the

concepts of "Experience economy" and "Sustainable development", the effect of the latter is multiplied – through SRB, consumers "experience" their contribution to the creation and sharing of value.

The high level of consumer satisfaction formed this way has a favourable effect on the level of consumer loyalty. An argument in support of this statement is the fact that consumer satisfaction, although indirect, is one of the "most powerful indicators of customer loyalty" (Georgieva, Tonkova, Stanimirov, 2008, p. 173). Kotler (2000) emphasizes that "the key to retaining consumers is in their satisfaction." Mladenova (2000) specifies that the probability of a customer to buy the company product/brand again is determined by the degree of his/her satisfaction, obtained as a result of his/her initial experience with this product/brand. The consumers who are satisfied will continue to buy the products of the company, they will tell their acquaintances about the satisfaction of the use of the said products; they will pay attention to competitive offers to a lesser extent and will be interested in the new products that the company offers on the market (Mladenova, 2000, p. 173).

The opposite statement is also true – the higher the level of loyalty, the greater the customer satisfaction will be. However, the identification of the satisfied consumer with the loyal one is not always reasonable (Zhelev, 2000, p. 84).⁸

In addition to the level of consumer loyalty, satisfaction has a direct positive impact on corporate reputation (Jones, 2005, p. 10-32)⁹, which has a crucial role in the performance of the company/brand.

Third direction: by influencing the company reputation and the performance of the company/brand:

The application of CSR in branding (SRB) can be seen as a form of strategic investment aimed at creating and maintaining corporate reputation (McWilliams, Siegel, Wright, 2006, p. 1-18). A large number of studies in the field of marketing confirm the positive impact of CSR on corporate reputation (Garberg, Fombrun, 2006, p. 329-346; Ahearne, Bhattacharya, Gruen, 2010, p. 574-585).

Creating a favourable corporate reputation is one of the key factors for achieving sustainable competitive advantage of the organization (Sanchez, Sotorrio, 2007, p. 337) and for achieving a better performance of the company/brand in the market. The good corporate reputation serves as a promise and guarantees the quality of the products and services offered by the company; it attracts and maintains a more skilled workforce because it

⁸ Zhelev specifies that there are situations in which dissatisfied customers of a company continue to be loyal to it because they either have no alternative offers, or believe that alternative suppliers cannot offer them something better. Reverse situations are possible as well in which highly satisfied users of one company switch to other suppliers, as they expect even better parameters of the offers and even greater realized benefits from the purchase of the product of the company.

⁹ Jones also focuses on the opposite direction of impact "corporate reputation → customer satisfaction → brand value". The author points out that satisfaction generates brand value only when the expectations of all stakeholders are met. Jones points out that for all stakeholders basic is the expectation of a good corporate reputation. When it exists, consumers are satisfied, and this results in an increase in the value of the brand.

corresponds to higher employee self-esteem (Roberts, Dowling, 2002, p. 1077-1093). Barnett (2008) draws our attention to the beneficial effect that corporate reputation has on the financial performance of the company/brand. In terms of costs, a good company reputation creates trust between the company and stakeholders, leading to a reduction in the share of transaction costs and a reduction in transaction risk. In terms of revenue, a good company reputation creates a favourable investment climate, opportunities to realize price premiums and conditions for attracting new customers, as well as maintaining the loyalty of current ones.

As a result of the positive impact of SRB on corporate reputation, companies/brands demonstrate better market performance, part of which is related to maintaining a loyal customer base.

The presented three directions of influence of SRB on the consumer loyalty give a relatively complete idea of the variety of marketing influences of its application.

Traditionally, for the majority of companies on the market, loyalty in the "company-customer" relationship is considered a desirable goal.¹⁰ Business organizations create, develop and maintain relationships with their customers while striving to meet their requirements and build long-term partnerships, the practical implementation of which is sought in the formation of a sustainable preference for the product/brand, repeated purchases and recommendations – components inherent in loyalty. The latter is established as a particularly valuable asset in the business world due to the influence its high level has on the lifetime value of customers on the one hand, and on the other hand – due to the many positive effects on the market and financial results of companies.

Consumer loyalty

In order to fully prove the importance of consumer loyalty, it is necessary to clarify its conceptual nature. In the specialized literature on marketing, related to the study of consumer loyalty, there are different opinions on how to define it. According to one of the widely accepted approaches, loyalty can be considered as a one-dimensional or multidimensional construct, depending on the number of dimensions used for its measurement and evaluation (Stanimirov, 2010, p. 131-132).

The authors of the study adhere to the understanding of loyalty as a multidimensional, and more precisely, a three-dimensional construct consisting of behaviour, knowledge (evaluation) and emotion (East, Gendall, Hammond, Lomax, 2005, p. 10-27).

The most significant characteristic of the three-dimensional model is related to the fact that it presents consumer loyalty as a behavioural-relational phenomenon in which the relational aspect is expressed through two independent elements – emotions and knowledge

¹⁰ Scientific precision requires specifying that not all companies are oriented towards maintaining relational exchange, respectively to building and maintaining consumer loyalty. There are businesses and situations where transactional exchange is preferred. In CSR-oriented companies, the aim is for long-term partnerships as only in their continuum the socially responsible behaviour of business organizations can be effectively implemented and bring benefits to all stakeholders.

(evaluation). Knowledge is associated with the formation of psychological preference for the product/service based on accumulated information about the price and characteristics of this product/service, as well as based on positive thoughts and beliefs associated with it (Roy, 2011, p. 114).

The differentiation of emotion as an independent component in the formation of consumer loyalty is reasonable and has its own scientific argumentation. Stanimirov (2010) notes that in order to create and maintain loyalty, on the one hand, it is necessary to achieve a certain degree of customer satisfaction, and on the other hand, to create an emotional connection with the product/brand used by the customer. Dimova (2013) adds that if there is no emotional connection with the products/brands, and they are purchased by customers only on the basis of rational choice, "then you cannot rely on repurchase." Kehayova (2009) explains this phenomenon by the fact that consumers "experience the consumption as well". A thesis around which the philosophy of the "Experience economy" is built.

Referring to the above said, proponents of three-dimensional model unite around the view that reporting on the impact of all three components (knowledge, emotion and behaviour) in the context of loyalty allows a more effective forecast of the prospects of consumer behaviour, and in particular of the intention of customers to make recommendations and make repeat purchases (Roy, 2011, p. 112). The authors of the study adhere to this position, assuming that SRB has a favourable marketing influence on the three dimensions of consumer loyalty. The authors defend the thesis that in all three directions of the model of marketing influence of SRB, the latter has a favourable impact on loyalty, expressed in repeated purchases, recommendations and formed preferences.

Research Methodology

The relevance of the presented thesis is a subject of empirical testing on the market of carbonated soft drinks in Bulgaria. The choice of the object of study is determined by the following reasons: (1) According to the National Statistical Institute in Bulgaria, there is a steady trend of growth in the consumption of carbonated soft drinks per household member – from 50.9 litres in 2010 to 65.3 litres in 2017. These data give grounds to assume that in this market, there are conditions for the formation of consumer loyalty (i.e. repurchases of certain brands and a high degree of probability of recommendations); (2) The market leader in carbonated soft drinks in Bulgaria with a market share of almost 50% (Coca-Cola) is among the companies that are a benchmark in the exercise of socially responsible behaviour worldwide; (3) The companies producing carbonated soft drinks implement CSR and make the effects of the use of this concept visible to the end-user through the production of high-quality products, use of recyclable, recycled and/or biodegradable packaging; engagement with social causes important to society and the environment, charity events and care for society. All this, on the one hand, allows the pursuit of sustainability to be practically implemented, even on a daily basis, and on the other hand, it makes consumers active participants in the process of creating and sharing value by creating an "experience" for them beyond product consumption.

The chosen object of study is unconventional in terms of the alleged discrepancy between the socially responsible practices of companies and the usefulness/harmfulness of the products they produce and sell and the likelihood that consumers will consciously show consistency in the consumption of the latter. However, this makes the results of the research interesting from a marketing point of view.

In addition to the nature of the object of study, the design of the research methodology takes into account some other specifics:

First. The empirical testing of the interrelations of the model of the marketing projections of SRB on the consumer loyalty is realized under a proven hypothesis for the presence of a segment of "sophisticated" consumers on the market of carbonated soft drinks in Bulgaria. In another study, the authors apply a procedure of profiling users of this market by using the original author's model – "SMF", developed by the example of the RFM method (Stanimirov, Georgieva, 2019, p. 3-17).

The results show that on the market of carbonated soft drinks in Bulgaria, there is a segment composed of a significant percentage of consumers who are identified as "sophisticated". They have a strong ethical awareness and ethical consumer behaviour and constitute the more profitable part of the market, which is an argument for companies to seek to effectively manage relationships with this segment of consumers and, in particular, to create and maintain their loyalty. Moreover, it is considered that due to the conceptual correspondence precisely in the segment of "sophisticated" consumers, SRB would have the most significant impact on the level of loyalty.

Second. Consumer loyalty is operationalized through: (1) repeated purchases; (2) recommendations made and (3) brand preference.

It is important to clarify that both in repeated purchases and in the recommendations made, the degree of correlation between the brand that consumers like the most and the one that they actually buy/recommend the most is studied. This decomposition of the components "repeated purchases" and "recommendations" is necessary because of the sometimes objectively (due to the presence or absence of certain factors – financial, personal, situational) existing situation of "gap between consciousness and behaviour" among consumers. In other words, consumer affinity to the brand is not always characterized by a corresponding manifestation of positive psychological predisposition in real behavioural actions. In this regard, Keller (2008) differentiates "behavioural loyalty" from "psychological attachment".

The third component of the operationalization of loyalty – the expressed preference for the brand, emphasizes loyalty as an evaluation process. The preference is formed on the basis of the comparison of competing brands according to certain criteria (such as level of sustainability in production; involvement in corporate social initiatives, etc.). The superiority of a brand by certain criteria provokes positive emotions among consumers and makes it preferred to other alternatives on the market. Positive emotions are an important component of consumer loyalty (in line with the three-dimensional approach to clarifying its nature).

To objectify the dimensions of this third component of the operationalization of consumer loyalty in the course of the study, three coefficients were applied: coefficient of attachment; switching coefficient and budget coefficient (Knox, Denison, 2000, p. 35).

Third. The authors of the study point out that the intensity and straightforwardness of the relationships discussed in the model of marketing projections of SRB on consumer loyalty depends on the socio-cultural context (Malai, 2011, p. 168) as well as on the presence and manifestation of a set of factors, differentiated as an individual, contextual and others. However, they are subject of discussion in other studies of one of the authors and remain outside the scope of the present study.

Fourth. The research is realized from a mirror perspective – from the point of view of the producers/bottlers of carbonated soft drinks in Bulgaria, and from the point of view of the consumers of these drinks. This perspective naturally presupposes double testing of the formulated research hypotheses, once in the context of business organizations – manufacturers and once in the customer context.

The main hypotheses that this study analyses consider both direct and indirect influence of SRB on brand loyalty and are presented as follows:

H1: SRB has a direct impact on the level of consumer loyalty.

H.1.1. There is a statistically significant relationship between SRB and consumer loyalty in the form of repeated purchases.

H.1.2. There is a statistically significant relationship between SRB and consumer loyalty in the form of recommendations.

H.1.3. There is a statistically significant relationship between SRB and consumer loyalty in the form of a formed preference.

H2: SRB has an indirect influence on the level of consumer loyalty.

H.2.1. There is a statistically significant relationship between SRB and brand image.

H.2.2. There is a statistically significant relationship between SRB and the level of satisfaction.

H.2.3. There is a statistically significant relationship between SRB and brand reputation.

H.2.4. There is a statistically significant relationship between the three components of indirect influence – image, satisfaction, reputation.

H.2.5. There is a statistically significant relationship between satisfaction and repeated purchases as a form of loyalty.

H.2.6. There is a statistically significant relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in the form of recommendations made regarding both the most liked and the most frequently purchased brand.

H.2.7. There is a statistically significant relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in the form of preference.

H.2.8. There is a statistically significant relationship between the image of the most liked brand and repeated purchases as a form of loyalty.

H.2.9. There is a statistically significant relationship between the image of the most liked brand and loyalty in the form of recommendations made regarding both the most liked and the most frequently purchased brand.

H.2.10. There is a statistically significant relationship between the image of the most liked brand and loyalty in the form of preference.

H.2.11. There is a statistically significant relationship between the image of the most frequently purchased brand and repeated purchases as a form of loyalty.

H.2.12. There is a statistically significant relationship between the image of the most frequently purchased brand and the loyalty in the form of recommendations made regarding both the most liked and the most frequently purchased brand.

H.2.13. There is a statistically significant relationship between the image of the most frequently purchased brand and loyalty in the form of preference.

H.2.14. There is a statistically significant relationship between the reputation of the most liked brand and repeat purchases as a form of loyalty.

H.2.15. There is a statistically significant relationship between the reputation of the most liked brand and loyalty in the form of recommendations made regarding both the most liked and the most frequently purchased brand.

H.2.16. There is a statistically significant relationship between the reputation of the most liked brand and loyalty in the form of preference.

H.2.17. There is a statistically significant relationship between the reputation of the most frequently purchased brand and repeated purchases as a form of loyalty.

H.2.18. There is a statistically significant relationship between the reputation of the most frequently purchased brand and loyalty in the form of recommendations made regarding both the most liked and the most frequently purchased brand.

H.2.19. There is a statistically significant relationship between the reputation of the most frequently purchased brand and loyalty in the form of preference.

H3: SRB has an indirect impact on the level of consumer loyalty, expressed in the form of repeated purchases, by building a favourable image.

H4: SRB has an indirect impact on the level of consumer loyalty, expressed in the form of repeated purchases, by increasing the level of satisfaction.

H5: SRB has an indirect impact on the level of consumer loyalty, expressed in the form of repeated purchases, by forming a positive reputation.

H6: SRB has an indirect impact on the level of consumer loyalty, expressed in the form of recommendations made, by building a favourable image.

H7: SRB has an indirect impact on the level of consumer loyalty, expressed in the form of recommendations made, by increasing the level of satisfaction.

H8: SRB has an indirect impact on the level of consumer loyalty, expressed in the form of recommendations made, by forming a positive reputation.

H9: SRB has an indirect impact on the level of consumer loyalty, in the form of a formed preference, by building a favourable image

H10: SRB has an indirect impact on the level of consumer loyalty, expressed in the form of a formed preference, by increasing the level of satisfaction.

H11: SRB has an indirect impact on the level of consumer loyalty, expressed in the form of a formed preference, by forming a positive reputation.

Proving or rejecting the listed hypotheses requires gathering primary information, sufficient in terms of volume and quality. The method of data collection applied is a survey, whereas for two types of respondents, two separate questionnaires were produced. End users are reached through an online research platform, where an electronic version of the survey is generated. After a positive answer to the filtering question "Do you consume carbonated soft drinks?" the size of the sample ended in 276 respondents. In this sense, the results of the study are relevant for the studied population.

The data from the business represented by producers/bottlers of carbonated soft drinks are collected through a direct personal survey. An expert assessment was formed by implementing a model of non-random sample "based on the respondents", which consist of 13 respondents.

Both the consumer-oriented and the business-oriented surveys have been developed in a way that allows for a structured survey as a descriptive method for collecting primary data with a high degree of similarity between the two surveys, but at the same time taking into account the specific aspects for each of the two groups of respondents.

The statistical processing of the collected primary information is performed via the software products MS Excel 2007 and SPSS 17.0. The data from the empirical study are processed using a combination of statistical methods, including descriptive, correlation, regression and χ^2 analysis. Conclusions and summaries are formulated and visualized by tabular tools and are the subject of subsequent discussion.

Discussion of the Results of the Empirical Research

The conducted tests for the presence and strength of dependence between the variables of the model of the marketing projections of SRB on the consumer loyalty can be conditionally differentiated in two directions:

- direct influence of SRB on consumer loyalty;
- indirect influence of SRB on consumer loyalty in the commented three aspects.

The interpretation and analysis of the results of the conducted tests allow the main research hypotheses to be proved or rejected, respectively.

Table 1 summarizes the results of the conducted strong (regression analysis) and weak tests (χ^2 test) to diagnose the direct impact of SRB on consumer loyalty. SRB is considered equivalent to the activities of the company in the field of CSR. The impact of SRB has been tested against all operationalizing loyalty variables – repeated purchases; recommendations made (both for the most liked brand and for the most frequently purchased brand) and preference (measured by attachment coefficient, switching coefficient and budget coefficient).

Table 1

Direct influence of SRB on consumer loyalty

Variables tested	R	R ²	Sig.	χ^2	
				Cramer's V	Sig.
<i>* The analyzed dependences are statistically significant at $\alpha=0.1$</i>					
SRB \diamond Consumer loyalty (repeated purchases)	,534	,285	,000	,333	,000
SRB \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations for the most frequently purchased brand)	,624	,389	,000	,339	,000
SRB \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made of the most liked / preferred brand)	,637	,405	,000	,353	,000
SRB \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Coefficient of attachment)	,401	,161	,000	,251	,872
SRB \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Switching coefficient)	The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha=0,05$,436	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square ($,521$) $>\alpha=0,05$	
SRB \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Budget coefficient)	The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha=0,05$,386	,362	,011

The data in Table 1 show that SRB has a direct impact on the level of consumer loyalty. It is strongest in terms of recommendations regarding the most liked/preferred brand (coefficient of determination – 0,405), the weakest is the influence of SRB on the formation of preference as a form of loyalty (when testing the first relationship, the coefficient of determination is only 0,161, for the other two connections the model is not adequate). This gives grounds to *confirm the hypotheses that there is a statistically significant relationship between 1) SRB and consumer loyalty in the form of repeated purchases as well as between 2) SRB and consumer loyalty in the form of recommendations made. However, the hypothesis that SRB has a direct impact on consumer loyalty in the form of a formed preference is rejected.*

The hypothesis that SRB also indirectly affects the level of consumer loyalty has been proven by a series of tests (strong and weak), the results of which are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Indirect influence of SRB on consumer loyalty in three directions

Variables tested	R	R ²	Sig.	χ^2	
				Cramer's V	Sig.
<i>* The analyzed dependences are statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.1$</i>					
Influence of SRB on the brand image					
SRB \diamond Image of the most liked / preferred brand	,438	,192	,000	,215	,000
SRB \diamond Image of the most frequently purchased brand	,424	,180	,000	,194	,000
SRB \diamond Image of the most liked / preferred brand compared to other brands on the market	,425	,180	,000	,271	,000
SRB \diamond Image of the most frequently purchased brand in comparison with other brands on the market	,419	,176	,000	,241	,000
Influence of SRB on consumer satisfaction					
SRB \diamond Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand	,598	,358	,000	,372	,000
Influence of SRB on the reputation of the brand					
SRB \diamond Reputation of the most liked / preferred brand	,523	,274	,000	,277	,000
SRB \diamond Reputation of the most frequently purchased brand	,497	,247	,000	,246	,000
<i>* The analyzed dependences are statistically significant at $\alpha=0.05$</i>					
Image \diamond Satisfaction					
Image of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand	,428	,183	,000	,342	,000
Image of the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand	,383	,147	,000	,311	,000
Image of the most liked / preferred brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand	,415	,172	,000	,303	,000
Image of the most frequently purchased brand in comparison with other brands on the market \diamond Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand	,433	,188	,000	,277	,000
Satisfaction \diamond Image					
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Image of the most liked / preferred brand	,428	,183	,000	,342	,000
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Image of the most frequently purchased brand	,383	,147	,000	,311	,000
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Image of the most liked / preferred brand compared to other brands on the market	,415	,172	,000	,303	,000
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands on the market	,433	,188	,000	,277	,000

Variables tested	R	R ²	Sig.	χ^2	
				Cramer's V	Sig.
Satisfaction \diamond Reputation					
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Reputation of the most liked / preferred brand	,594	,353	,000	,436	,000
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Reputation of the most frequently purchased brand	,574	,329	,000	,368	,000
Reputation \diamond Satisfaction					
Reputation of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand	,594	,353	,000	,436	,000
Reputation of the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand	,574	,329	,000	,368	,000
Satisfaction \diamond Loyalty					
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (repeated purchases)	,513	,264	,000	,328	,000
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most frequently purchased brand)	,615	,379	,000	,445	,000
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most liked / preferred brand)	,601	,361	,000	,432	,000
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (attachment coefficient)	,138	,019	,022	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square (.966) $> \alpha = 0,05$	
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Switching coefficient)	The model is not adequate as the significance level is $> \alpha = 0,05$,325	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square (.683) $> \alpha = 0,05$	
Satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Budget coefficient)	The model is not adequate as the significance level is $> \alpha = 0,05$,392	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square (.436) $> \alpha = 0,05$	
Image \diamond Loyalty					
Image of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (repeated purchases)	,391	,153	,000	,242	,000
Image of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations regarding the most frequently purchased brand)	,414	,172	,000	,281	,000
Image of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most liked / preferred brand)	,400	,160	,000	,278	,000
Image of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (attachment coefficient)	The model is not adequate as the significance level is $> \alpha = 0,05$,054	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square (.983) $> \alpha = 0,05$	
Image of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond	The model is not		,244	The two variables are	

Variables tested	R	R ²	Sig.	χ^2	
				Cramer's V	Sig.
Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Switching coefficient)		adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha=0,05$		independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square (.999) $>\alpha=0,05$	
Image of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Budget coefficient)		The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha=0,05$,217	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square (.701) $>\alpha=0,05$	
Image of the most often purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (repeated purchases)	,404	,163	,000	,259	,000
Image of the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most frequently purchased brand)	,392	,154	,000	,259	,000
Image of the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most liked / preferred brand)	,360	,129	,000	,242	,000
Image of the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Coefficient of attachment)		The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha=0,05$,309	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square (.735) $>\alpha=0,05$	
Image of the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Switching coefficient)		The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha=0,05$,140	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square (.980) $>\alpha=0,05$	
Image most often purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Budget coefficient)		The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha=0,05$,139	,365	,007
Image of the most liked / preferred brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (repeated purchases)	,384	,148	,000	,257	,000
Image of the most liked / preferred brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations regarding the most frequently purchased brand)	,327	,107	,000	,261	,000
Image of the most liked / preferred brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most liked / preferred brand)	,326	,106	,000	,246	,000
Image of the most liked / preferred brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (attachment coefficient)		The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha=0,05$,828	,319	0.038
Image of the most liked / preferred brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Switching coefficient)		The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha=0,05$,268	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square (.876) $>\alpha=0,05$	
Image of the most liked / preferred brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Budget coefficient)		The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha=0,05$,318	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square (.702) $>\alpha=0,05$	
Image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (repeated purchases)	,401	,161	,000	,233	,000
Image of the most frequently purchased brand	,338	,115	,000	,232	,000

Variables tested	R	R ²	Sig.	χ^2	
				Cramer's V	Sig.
Image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most frequently purchased brand)					
Image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most liked / preferred brand)	,301	,091	,000	,213	,000
Image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (attachment coefficient)	The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha = 0,05$,944	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square ($,150$) $>\alpha = 0,05$	
Image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Switching coefficient)	The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha = 0,05$,358	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square ($,909$) $>\alpha = 0,05$	
Image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands on the market \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Budget coefficient)	The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha = 0,05$,439	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square ($,134$) $>\alpha = 0,05$	
Reputation \diamond Loyalty					
Reputation of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (repeated purchases)	,471	,222	,000	,347	,000
Reputation of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most frequently purchased brand)	,492	,242	,000	,373	,000
Reputation of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most liked / preferred brand)	,517	,267	,000	,381	,000
Reputation of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (attachment coefficient)	,120	,014	,047	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square ($,716$) $>\alpha = 0,05$	
Reputation of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Switching coefficient)	The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha = 0,05$,198	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square ($,534$) $>\alpha = 0,05$	
Reputation of the most liked / preferred brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Budget coefficient)	The model is not adequate as the significance level is $>\alpha = 0,05$,312	The two variables are independent of each other, since Pearson Chi square ($,643$) $>\alpha = 0,05$	
Reputation of the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (repeated purchases)	,481	,231	,000	,326	,000
Reputation of the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most frequently purchased brand)	,516	,267	,000	,322	,000
Reputation of the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (recommendations made regarding the most liked / preferred brand)	,478	,229	,000	,325	,000
Reputation of the most frequently purchased brand \diamond Consumer loyalty (brand preference)	The model is not adequate as the		,111	The two variables are independent of each	

Variables tested	R	R ²	Sig.	χ^2	
				Cramer's V	Sig.
preference) (attachment coefficient)					
Reputation of the most frequently purchased brand \leftrightarrow Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Switching coefficient)			,329		
Reputation of the most frequently purchased brand \leftrightarrow Consumer loyalty (brand preference) (Budget coefficient)			,547	,360	,014

Based on the information presented in the table, we can summarize that there is:

- statistically significant but weak relationship between SRB and brand image (determination coefficient varies between 0.176 and 0.192);
- statistically significant relationship between SRB and the level of satisfaction (determination coefficient 0.358);
- statistically significant but weak relationship between SRB and brand reputation (determination coefficient varies between 0.247 and 0.274).

The data in Table 2 show that there is also a statistically significant relationship between the three components (between image and satisfaction, satisfaction and image, satisfaction and reputation, reputation and satisfaction). These connections are logically substantiated and described in the presentation of the model of marketing projections from the application of SRB. At the present stage of the exhibition, these three constructs are of interest due to the fact that they form the three directions of indirect influence of SRB on consumer loyalty.

The subsequent strong and weak tests (presented in Table 2) show that there is:

- statistically significant relationship between satisfaction and repeated purchases as a form of loyalty (determination coefficient 0.264);
- statistically significant relationship between satisfaction and recommendations (both regarding the most liked and for the most frequently purchased brand) as another form of operationalizing loyalty (determination coefficients – 0.379 and 0.361);
- statistically significant relationship between the image of the most liked/preferred brand and loyalty in the form of repeated purchases and recommendations made regarding the most liked and most frequently purchased brand (determination coefficients – 0.153, 0.172 and 0.160);
- statistically significant relationship between the image of the most frequently purchased brand and loyalty in the form of repeated purchases and recommendations made regarding the most liked and most frequently purchased brands (determination coefficients – 0.163, 0.154 and 0.129);

- statistically significant relationship between the image of the most liked / preferred brand compared to other brands on the market and loyalty in the form of repeated purchases and recommendations made regarding the most liked and most frequently purchased brand (determination coefficients – 0.148, 0.107 and 0.106);
- statistically significant relationship between the image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands on the market and loyalty in the form of repeated purchases and recommendations made regarding the most liked and most frequently purchased brand (determination coefficients – 0.161, 0.115 and 0.091);
- statistically significant relationship between the reputation of the most liked/preferred brand and loyalty in the form of repeated purchases and recommendations made regarding the most liked and most frequently purchased brand (determination coefficients – 0.222, 0.242 and 0.267);
- statistically significant relationship between the reputation of the most frequently purchased brand and loyalty in the form of repeat purchases and recommendations made regarding the most liked and most frequently purchased brands (determination coefficients – 0.231, 0.267 and 0.229).

The tests also show that there is no statistically significant relationship between:

- image and loyalty in the form of preference;
- satisfaction and loyalty in the form of preference (129);
- reputation and loyalty in the form of preference (130);

The above said gives grounds to confirm the hypotheses of indirect influence of SRB on consumer loyalty in the theoretically differentiated three directions, by: 1) creating a favourable image; 2) increasing the level of satisfaction and 3) forming a positive reputation. The hypotheses formulated in this way are valid in terms of loyalty in the operationalization of the latter – as repeated purchases and as recommendations made. The hypothesis of indirect influence of SRB on consumer loyalty is rejected when considering the latter as a formed preference.

A comparison is made of the strength of SRB influence on consumer loyalty by direct and indirect impact and the relation is tested against all operationalizing variables of consumer loyalty and taking into account the indirect impact on all commented constructs of the marketing effects model (Figure 2). The results of the analysis can be summarized as follows:

1) Regarding the impact of SRB on consumer loyalty in the form of repeated purchases:

The strength of direct influence is 0.534. The total strength¹¹ of indirect influence through the individual constructs is as follows: image of the most liked/preferred brand (0.705); image of most frequently purchased brand (0.705); image of the most liked/preferred brand

¹¹ The value of the total strength of influence is formed as a sum of the strength of direct influence + the strength of indirect influence by means of the respective construct.

compared to the other brands (0.697); image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands (0.702); satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand (0.841); reputation of the most liked/preferred brand (0.78); reputation of most often purchased brand (0.773).

2) *Regarding the influence of SRB on consumer loyalty in the form of recommendations made regarding the most frequently purchased brand:*

The strength of direct influence is 0.624. The total strength of indirect influence through the individual constructs is as follows: image of the most liked/preferred brand (0.805); image of the most frequently purchased brand (0.79); image of the most liked/preferred brand compared to the other brands (0.763); image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands (0.766); satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand (0.992); reputation of the most liked/preferred brand (0.881); reputation of the most frequently purchased brand (0.88).

3) *Regarding the influence of SRB on consumer loyalty in the form of recommendations made regarding the most liked/preferred brand:*

The strength of direct influence is 0.637. The total strength of indirect influence through the individual constructs is as follows: image of the most liked/preferred brand (0.812); image of the most frequently purchased brand (0.79); image of the most liked/preferred brand compared to the other brands (0.776); image of the most frequently purchased brand compared to other brands (0.763); satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand (0.996); reputation of the most liked/preferred brand (0.907); reputation of the most frequently purchased brand (0.875).

4) *Regarding the influence of SRB on consumer loyalty in the form of brand preference (attachment coefficient):*

The strength of direct influence is 0.401. Indirect influence was reported only through the constructs – satisfaction with the most frequently purchased brand (0.484) and reputation of the most liked/preferred brand (0.464).

5) *Regarding the influence of SRB on consumer loyalty in the form of brand preference (Switching coefficient):*

The strength of direct influence is 0.227. There is no reported possibility of indirect influence of SRB on loyalty.

6) *Regarding the influence of SRB on consumer loyalty in the form of brand preference (Budget coefficient):*

The strength of direct influence is 0.233. There is no reported possibility of indirect influence of SRB on loyalty.

Based on the presented data, we can make two important conclusions:

- 1) The strength of the influence of SRB on consumer loyalty is significantly greater when the impact is not direct, but is mediated by creating a favourable image; positive reputation or maintaining a high level of customer satisfaction.

- 2) Exactly through the formation and maintenance of a high degree of consumer satisfaction, SRB has the strongest influence on consumer loyalty. The latter is not surprising given the fact that satisfaction, although indirect, is considered the strongest measure of loyalty. In this sense, in order to encourage consumers of carbonated soft drinks to repeat purchases and make recommendations, producers/bottling companies should make efforts to maintain their satisfaction at a high level. In the presence of a significant segment of "sophisticated" consumers on the market of carbonated soft drinks in Bulgaria, and in the conditions of "Experience economy" and striving for "sustainable development", this is possible by maintaining the behaviour of a good corporate citizen, which is also achieved by positioning of the company/brand as socially responsible.

The point of view of the business in terms of marketing projections of the implementation of SRB in general, and in particular on consumer loyalty, is presented in the form of expert assessment. For this purpose, as already mentioned, a survey was conducted among 13 representatives of the industry. Both some of the market leaders and small producers/bottlers of carbonated soft drinks with a significantly limited scale of activity are included. Some of the suppliers of the so-called "Private labels" also take part. In view of the requirement for confidentiality of the information provided, it is not possible to specify the companies participating in the survey.

The data systematized in Table 3 show that from a business point of view, the strongest advantages of engaging with CSR are related to creating a positive reputation (average score – 3.92) and a positive image of the company/brand (average score – 3.85). With a small difference, the representatives of the producers/bottlers of carbonated soft drinks rank the other positive effects of the application of SRB: 1) forming positive associations with regard to the company/brand (average score – 3.69); 2) creating a positive identity of the company/ brand (average score – 3.62).

The position of the business regarding the other effects of SRB, the existence of which is argued in theoretical terms, is contradictory. For example: 1) 17% of the surveyed companies do not think that the implementation of CSR/SRB helps to meet the expectations of consumers in the market (41% give a positive opinion); 2) 15% of the respondents deny the possibility to have a positive influence on the quality of the offered products through CSR/SRB (23% of the companies defend the opposite position), 3) as well as on the level of consumer satisfaction (54% believe that it is possible); 4) 8% of the respondents do not find a positive relationship between CSR/SRB and the value of the brand (62% of the respondents admit the existence of such); 5) 8% are also the companies according to which CSR/SRB does not contribute to their better performance on the market (however, 54% are of the opposite opinion).

There is a relatively higher degree of unanimity among business representatives regarding the role of CSR/SRB in the process of customer relationship management. For 54% of the companies, socially responsible behaviour helps to attract more customers, but also, the percentage of companies that are more sceptical of this finding is not low (46%).

61% of respondents are convinced that CSR/SRB helps to develop customer relationships, but at the same time, the percentage of companies that believe that CSR/SRB can be a

motive for maintaining customer relationships in the long run, as well as to gain and keep their loyalty is significantly lower – respectively 39% and 46%. This discrepancy shows that in addition to the socially responsible behaviour of producers/bottlers of carbonated soft drinks, other factors that determine their choice and consumer habits are essential for consumers.

Table 3

Effects of the application of CSR/SRB

Commitment to CSR, including in the context of branding (SRB) helps to ...:	1	2	3	4	5	Mean evaluation
	<i>1 – I do not agree at all 5 – I completely agree</i>					
1. create positive associations regarding the company/brand	-	23%	8%	46%	23%	3.69
2. create a positive image of the company/brand	-	-	38%	39%	23%	3.85
3. create a positive identity of the company/brand	-	-	62%	15%	23%	3.62
4. increase the value of the brand	8%	15%	15%	46%	16%	3.46
5. increase the quality of the offered products	15%	23%	39%	8%	15%	2.85
6. satisfy the expectations of the consumers on the market	17%	17%	25%	25%	16%	3.08
7. increase the level of consumer satisfaction	15%	8%	23%	31%	23%	3.38
8. create a positive reputation of the company/brand	-	8%	31%	23%	38%	3.92
9. better performance of the company/brand on the market	8%	15%	23%	39%	15%	3.38
10. attract more customers	-	23%	23%	31%	23%	3.54
11. develop customer relationships	-	8%	31%	46%	15%	3.69
12. maintain relationships with customers in the long run	-	15%	46%	23%	16%	3.38
13. form and maintain consumer loyalty	-	23%	31%	23%	23%	3.46

In conclusion, we can summarize that the results of the survey in a mirror perspective show that there is a certain difference in the positions of the two groups of respondents regarding the possibilities of influencing consumer loyalty through SRB. Both consumers and business representatives recognize the existence of a positive relationship between the two constructs, but interpret the strength and direction of the influence of SRB on consumer loyalty in different manners.

A series of strong and weak tests of the data collected from the survey of end customers confirm that SRB influences the level of consumer loyalty in the form of repeated purchases and recommendations, both directly and indirectly, by forming a positive image; positive reputation and by increasing the level of satisfaction. Exactly the latter is established as the relationship with the greatest strength or, in other words, the application of SRB makes customers significantly more satisfied, and this is a prerequisite for them to be significantly more loyal in both behavioural and psychological aspects.

Businesses, on the other hand, also recognize that SRB influences forming and maintaining consumer loyalty. However, unlike consumers, business representatives are of the opinion

that the strongest impact of SRB on loyalty is through forming a positive reputation of the company/brand. The direction –"SRB – positive associations – positive image – consumer loyalty" is ranked next and the businesses put the influence of SRB on consumer satisfaction as a tool for forming and maintaining loyalty only in the last place.

The summaries derived in this way are a prerequisite for formulating the final part of the study, in which the authors systematize the applied aspects, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Practical Applicability of the Results of the Conducted Research

The practical applicability of the results of the study can be identified in several ways:

First. Since the term "Experience economy" was first introduced about 20 years ago (Pine, Gilmore, 1998, p. 97-105), its creators Pine and Gilmore have constantly been exploring how consumer decisions about a given purchase are increasingly determined by the experience of the customers in the context of modern market conditions. Experts are adamant that since a long time, the availability of a good product or service is no more a competitive advantage on the basis of which a company can be differentiated from other market providers. Given the fact that the latter is highly saturated, consumers expect and demand a positive and personalized experience with a brand – "to feel that they are heard, understood and cared for"(Pine, Gilmore, 1998, p. 97-105). In this sense, emotion is gaining an increasingly key role as a motivator of consumer behaviour and a factor in the purchase decision.

This can be argued by the fact that the "Experience Economy" has created a new business model – B2H (Business to human) – a business focused on people. This model takes into account the fact that people are emotional beings by nature and in 90% of cases, emotions influence their purchasing decisions. This requires companies' offers not only to be rationally economically justified, but also to target customers emotionally (Kapital, 2019).

The latter is especially important given the profile of the modern consumer. The concept of consumer "sophistication" is presented as one of the leading global trends in consumer behaviour for 2019 (Euromonitor International, 2019).¹² Modern consumers are less and

¹² The report of Euromonitor International "Top 10 Global consumer trends 2019" outlines the ten main trends in consumer behaviour for 2019. One of them is related to the profile of the "conscious" consumer. The characteristics in the profile and behaviour of this type of user, presented in the report, ideologically correspond to the profile and behavioural characteristics of the "sophisticated" consumer, which gives grounds to summarize that this is the same market segment, characterized by ethical consciousness, resulting in ethical, "sustainable" consumption. We can even say that the use of the term "conscious" is a kind of refinement of the previously widely used definition "sophisticated consumers". In Bulgarian, the translation of the latter concept is quite controversial (from "pretentious" to the accepted "sophisticated" customers). This sometimes leads to a distortion in the understanding of the essence of the concept of "consumer sophistication". In this sense, the definition of "sophisticated" consumers as "conscious" consumers is a positive move towards identifying the latter as responsible market participants who seek social, economic and environmental justice in their behaviour and consumption.

less sensitive to price, but more and more demanding and aware in their purchasing decisions; they are looking for products of natural origin; they worry about the effects of consumption on quality of life; they are strongly committed to the cause of reducing the volume of plastic used (Euromonitor International, 2019).¹³ The common manifestation of these trends confirms the relevance and importance of the topic of sustainability in the context of consumer behaviour and shows that modern consumers are looking for companies with a position of active corporate citizens; organizations with a social consciousness that in all of their actions and decisions seek a balance between their own interests and public demand of models for sustainability. These are companies that manage to offer customers "value" of a super-material nature, as well as to make them active participants in its creation and sharing. Kotler (2010) identified this process as a new stage in marketing – a stage in which priority is given to values (so-called Marketing 3.0), in the context of which consumers are looking for companies that do not just provide the best products or services on the market, but whose mission, vision and values would maximize their pursuit of social, economic and environmental justice.

Companies are expected to offer not just excellent products and services, but to "make the world a better place" (CSR Bulgaria, 2017)¹⁴, whereas the practical approach to achieve this is related to the integration of the concept of CSR in the overall corporate strategy of business organizations, including in the process of creating and managing brands. The maintenance of SRB makes the companies competitive in the conditions of "Experience Economy" by providing an opportunity for the expectations and demands of the "sophisticated" consumers "for experience" to be fully satisfied. This study gives a theoretical argumentation of the presented thesis and empirically verifies its relevance by proving that the strongest impact of SRB on consumer loyalty is precisely by increasing the level of customer satisfaction.

Second. The study of the market of carbonated soft drinks in Bulgaria and the presented data on the strength of direct and indirect influence of SRB on consumer loyalty, as well as the confirmation of statistically significant relationships between these two variables in all aspects of the model of the marketing projections of SRB, are sufficient to argue that SRB can play a significant role in the customer relationship management process. SRB helps to develop and maintain the latter in the long run, especially in the presence of a segment of "sophisticated" consumers.

Effective customer relationship management can add value to the business in several ways: 1) it allows companies to better profile their market offers which create preconditions for a higher degree of customer satisfaction, repeated purchases, recommendations to potential customers and others; 2) optimization of the client portfolios of the companies with an emphasis on clients with a higher value or those that require service related to specific

¹³ These and other trends were identified as determining consumer behaviour globally in 2019, according to a study by Euromonitor International. Euromonitor International. (2019) Top 10 Global consumer trends 2019. 2019.

¹⁴ "A good company offers excellent products and services, but a great company does all this and strives to make the world a better place". (William Ford Jr., Chairman, Ford Motor Co.) Quotes and sayings in the positive spirit of corporate social responsibility. CSR Bulgaria. <http://csr.bg/social-responsibility/csr-quotes>, last accessed on 22.07.2017.

competencies of the suppliers; 3) more effective financial planning given knowledge of the characteristics and dynamics of the behaviour of individual groups of clients within client portfolios throughout their life cycle.

Third. The results of the empirical testing of the relevance of the model of marketing projections of SRB on consumer loyalty presented in the study, metrify the effects of SRB implementation, emphasizing that the benefits for companies from creating and maintaining such brands far outweigh the positive image effects. Maintaining SRB undoubtedly creates value for companies of a non-financial nature, but at the same time allows it to be directly estimated by measuring the positive market and financial effects that consumer loyalty brings to companies. All this proves the need for sustainability in the investments of companies for the creation, development and maintenance of SRB. In the presence of "sophisticated" consumers and in the conditions of "Experience economy", SRB has a significant role in shaping consumer decisions and is an important factor in maintaining consumer loyalty. The latter is among the priority goals for the majority of companies in the market.

Conclusion

In the context of the trend in the 21st century to do business with care and emphasis on sustainable development and focus on the experience of consumers beyond the consumption of products and services, knowing all the positive effects of SRB implementation is a strong competitive advantage for companies.

Referring to various theoretical formulations, the authors of the study define the essence of the SRB category and derive a model of marketing projections from the application of this category by placing a priority focus on the relationship "SRB-consumer loyalty". The latter is among the leading goals in the strategies of many organizations, and in particular in the context of managing relationships with their customers. The results of the empirical mirror research conducted on the market of carbonated soft drinks in Bulgaria confirm the relevance of this model by proving that SRB really has a positive role in forming and maintaining the loyalty of the consumers. According to the latter, this is due to the fact that through SRB customers get satisfaction from their desire to experience value creation, while according to business representatives SRB practices form loyalty by creating a positive reputation of the company/brand.

In this context, the authors of the study believe that in order to effectively use all alternatives to form, develop and maintain long-term partnerships with their customers and in particular to be able to meet the requirements of "sophisticated" customers, companies should be aware of the effects of the application of SRB. To do so, it is good to organize more trainings in companies from different industries and this should happen, on the one hand, at the top management level in order to justify the inclusion of CSR in the strategic priorities of the organization, and on the other hand – at all other levels of the corporate hierarchy in order to ensure employees' conscious empathy for this different philosophy of doing business, creating and managing brands.

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