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# Socially Responsible Marketing and Competitive Management in the construction sector: preliminary insights

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## Resumo

Nos últimos anos, o marketing socialmente responsável tem assumido um papel decisivo no contexto empresarial de vários setores de atividade. Em particular, o marketing socialmente responsável parece desempenhar um papel decisivo no processo de tomada de decisão dos consumidores e tornou-se mesmo um factor inerente à competitividade empresarial. Por isso, o setor da construção (em Portugal), sendo um setor com grande rivalidade competitiva, reúne exemplos de tendências socialmente responsáveis. Numa perspetiva exploratória, este estudo pretende fornecer insights preliminares sobre o papel que o marketing socialmente responsável pode desempenhar na competitividade empresarial. No final, serão apresentadas as limitações do estudo e delineadas linhas de investigação futura.

**Palavras-chave:** competitividade, construção, inovação, marketing socialmente responsável

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## Abstract

In recent years, socially responsible marketing has taken on a decisive role in the business context of various sectors of activity. In particular, socially responsible marketing seems to play a decisive role in the decision-making process of consumers, and has even become an inherent factor in business competitiveness. Therefore, the construction sector (in Portugal), and being a sector with competitive rivalry, brings together examples of socially responsible trends. From an exploratory perspective, this study aims to provide preliminary insights into the role that socially responsible marketing can play in business competitiveness. At the end, the study's limitations will be presented and lines of future research will be outlined.

**Keywords:** competitiveness, construction, innovation, socially responsible marketing

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a pivotal aspect of modern business practices, reflecting a company's commitment to ethical behavior, sustainable development, and community engagement. In today's globalized economy, stakeholders, including consumers, investors, and employees, increasingly demand transparency and accountability from corporations (Asamoah et al., 2025).

CSR initiatives not only enhance a company's reputation but also contribute to long-term financial performance by fostering trust and loyalty among stakeholders. Moreover, companies that prioritize CSR are better positioned to mitigate risks associated with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors, thereby ensuring sustainable growth and resilience in a rapidly changing market landscape (Taamneh et al., 2025).

Therefore, the construction sector (in Portugal), and being a sector with competitive rivalry, brings together examples of socially responsible trends. The construction industry in Portugal is a predominant sector, significantly contributing to the nation's economic growth and development. This sector not only generates substantial employment opportunities but also drives advancements in infrastructure, urbanization, and housing. The strategic importance of construction is underscored by its role in enhancing the country's competitiveness and quality of life. Moreover, the industry's commitment to innovation and sustainable practices is pivotal in addressing contemporary challenges such as environmental sustainability and resource efficiency (Gomes et al., 2022).

As a cornerstone of the Portuguese economy, the construction sector's robust performance is essential for fostering long-term economic stability and progress (Costa et al., 2021). From an exploratory perspective, this preliminary research aims to provide preliminary insights into the role that socially responsible marketing can play in business competitiveness.

## 2. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

The importance of CSR is further underscored by the growing awareness of social and environmental issues. Companies are expected to address challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality through responsible business practices (Sánchez-Torné et al., 2020). By integrating CSR into their core strategies, businesses can drive positive change and create shared value for both society and the environment (da Silva Pereira & Sousa, 2020). This proactive approach not only aligns with global sustainability goals but also enhances a company's competitive advantage by differentiating it from less responsible counterparts. Ultimately, CSR is not merely a philanthropic endeavor but a strategic imperative that underpins the long-term success and sustainability of modern enterprises. In particular, socially responsible marketing seems to play a decisive role in the decision-making process of consumers, and has even become an inherent factor in business competitiveness.

Before tackling the impact of socially responsible marketing (SRM), it is important to introduce the concepts of CSR and SRM, and at the end of this point to present the interface or link between the two concepts. It is not intended to exhaust the presentation of the evolution of both concepts over time and the explanation of the various models and/or theories that support them, given that they will be described in more detail in the dissertation. According to Sobral et al. (2021), the concept of CRS is gaining more and more fans due to the growing visibility of environmental impacts and society's systemic vision. Companies are no longer limited to managing their business and jobs; they now face a global concern. CRS is a broad concept, the result of the interaction between theory and practice. Over the last six decades, models have evolved from a restrictive interpretation, considering it an "economic obligation", to a broader interpretation, as a "voluntary obligation". Latapí Agudelo et al. (2019) state that at the organizational level, a holistic business structure based on the principles of CRS prevails, combining the notions of sustainability, shared value creation and the belief that organizations can "do what is best for the world".

For Cheng et al. (2011), Socially Responsible Marketing is the use of marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate and publicize value, in order to influence the behavior of the target audience where they

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benefit as well as the society in which they are inserted. In today's market, socially responsible organizations are attractive targets for new investments, but they are also sought after by new employees, since the level of involvement in socially responsible practices can have a positive effect on both the degree to which participants perceive the organization as a place to work and their intention to apply for a job there (Oliveira et al., 2015).

Corporate Social Responsibility can be a source of competitive advantage when hiring new employees. While this advantage is not in itself a primary reason for integrating social and environmental considerations into business activities and developing more responsible relationships with multiple stakeholders, it does support pro-CSR positions (Duarte et al., 2014). By recognizing the broader impact of these policies and options on their interactions with stakeholders, especially potential candidates, companies can strategically use these options to win not only the “war for talent” but also the “war for sustainability” in an increasingly competitive and dynamic global market (Duarte et al., 2014). Only ethical and responsible management, encouraged by the daily and continuous practice of legality, humanity, transparency, responsibility, organizational culture and values can influence an institution's organizational performance and will be able to guarantee, with merit, feedback or reward from society, including the interest of stakeholders. According to Ellen et al. (2006), when a company adopts socially responsible marketing it can differentiate itself positively. Consumers value companies that contribute to social and environmental good.

The future of corporate social responsibility (CSR) will be shaped by evolving societal expectations and the increasing complexity of global challenges. Companies will need to navigate issues such as climate change, social inequality, and technological disruption with greater agility and innovation (Windsor, 2001). The integration of CSR into core business strategies will become imperative, requiring firms to adopt more transparent, accountable, and sustainable practices. Additionally, the rise of stakeholder activism and regulatory pressures will compel businesses to demonstrate genuine commitment to ethical and responsible conduct (Waddock et al., 2002). As CSR continues to evolve, companies that proactively address these challenges will not only enhance their reputations but also secure long-term resilience and competitive advantage in a rapidly changing world (Martinuzzi & Krumay, 2013).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Methodology is a set of methods and procedures that guide scientific research or studies. It covers both theoretical and empirical aspects, providing guidelines for collecting, analyzing and interpreting data. In essence, methodology is the approach used to solve a research problem, using specific techniques and instruments. This methodological approach will be carried out, in a first stage, through the collection of various types of documents, as well as their subsequent analysis and exploration. After this, a literature review will begin, setting out what Socially Responsible Marketing and Competitive Management are, defining their concept, and recognizing the characteristics that are effectively relevant and timely. In the second stage, an interview will be carried out with managers of selected companies, followed by a qualitative analysis of the data. A questionnaire will then be drawn up and applied to the managers and employees of the organization under study. According to Quivy (1998), this is a data collection instrument which consists of asking a series of questions to a group of respondents, usually representative of a population.

Later in this stage, the quantitative method will be used to process and analyze the data, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for this purpose. This is a method for verifying and quantifying data, and its purpose is therefore to measure, measure and quantify the data. In this way, we can see the use of a mixed methodology that will also be richer, encompassing the qualitative method and the quantitative method, and thus, by analyzing through these two approaches, it will be possible to make an even more in-depth analysis.

The central problem is to understand how socially responsible marketing impacts competitive management, in short, competitiveness, in the context of the companies chosen in the research. Some relevant questions can be posed: Question 1: How do social responsibility practices affect corporate image? Question 2: How do these

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practices influence the perception of the brand by stakeholders? Question 3: What is the balance between social responsibility and competitiveness?

In specific:

Hypothesis 1: Companies that adopt socially responsible marketing practices have a competitive advantage over their competitors.

Hypothesis 2: The positive reputation generated by socially responsible actions improves brand perception and stakeholder trust.

Hypothesis 3: Socially responsible marketing strategies can attract and retain talent, indirectly impacting competitiveness.

Following on from the hypotheses, there is a set of objectives to be met, as they are the ones that establish the aim of the research: Objective 1: To empirically investigate the impact of socially responsible marketing strategies on the competitive performance of the chosen companies; Objective 2: To analyze how these strategies affect customer satisfaction, brand loyalty and stakeholder perception; Objective 3: To propose practical recommendations for companies wishing to balance social responsibility and competitiveness.

#### **4. PRELIMINARY RESULTS**

The construction sector in Portugal is strongly characterized by competitiveness and business rivalry. In this sense, corporate social responsibility could be an important element in determining the decision-making process of consumers and making the sector more responsible at a global level. Corporate social responsibility is an aspect that has been heavily studied in the academic community. The study brings together, at this preliminary stage, some preliminary insights that could allow us to better understand how socially responsible marketing and corporate social responsibility could influence business competitiveness in the construction sector. The construction industry has been reducing the barriers to entry into the sector, and this reduction is particularly materialized by the low investment required initially, which generates the appearance of new competitors (Gomes et al., 2022; Miller, 1987). The Civil Construction and Public Works sector is very diverse and includes the construction of residential, tourist or service buildings, as well as the development of civil engineering works such as roads, bridges, railways, dams, among others. It is characterized by having a large and diversified value chain, since it uses a large number of inputs (means and companies) from the start of a contract to the end (Nunes, 2001; Baganha, Marques, Góis, 2002; Gomes et al., 2022). It should be borne in mind that public works are mostly financed by European funds, while private works are financed by (private) bank loans or equity (Gomes et al., 2022). In this sense, a contraction in the EU leads to a decrease in public works and therefore a decrease in confidence in the sector. Likewise, this mistrust increases the difficulty of obtaining bank loans for private individuals - which leads to an effective downturn in the sector (Baganha et al., 2002). The business structure of the construction sector is made up of large multinational companies, regional companies, specialized companies and individual entrepreneurs (Baganha et al., 2002; Gomes et al., 2022).

Centeno (2010) states that the SA 8000 standard establishes standards for responsible social practices in organizations. This standard is aimed at increasing the competitive capacity of any organization that voluntarily guarantees the ethical component of its production process and cycle, providing for compliance with national legislation and compliance with its nine requirements: Child Labour; Forced Labour; Health and Safety; Freedom of Association and Right to Collective Bargaining; Discrimination; Disciplinary Practices; Working Hours; Remuneration; Management System. APCER is one of the few certifying bodies in the world to be accredited by SAAS - Social Accountability Accreditation Services, to provide certification services in the field of Social Responsibility, in accordance with the SA 8000 standard.

NP 4469:2019 is based on the PDCA concept - Plan, Do, Check and Act, providing a tool for organizations to ensure continuous improvement in their social responsibility performance. It encourages organizations to define the value system that best represents the organization and the principles that guide their activity,

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identify their significant stakeholders and manage the aspects most relevant to their activity, as well as raise awareness and involve critical suppliers.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Corporate social responsibility is a key aspect of business success today. In particular, the construction sector in Portugal is characterized by competitiveness and rivalry between players operating in different contexts. Corporate social responsibility can be understood in various areas and dimensions. For example, some good practices point towards environmental sustainability and good sustainable practices in the construction industry.

In the construction industry, socially responsible practices are essential for sustainable development and community well-being. Companies should prioritize environmental stewardship by minimizing waste, reducing carbon emissions, and using eco-friendly materials.

Additionally, ensuring fair labor practices, promoting worker safety, and engaging with local communities through transparent communication and ethical business practices are crucial. By integrating these principles, construction firms can contribute to the long-term health of both the environment and society.

Other examples point towards gender equality, integration of minority groups and combating racism. There are also concerns about promoting the well-being of employees, the local community and projects linked to the health of those involved in the company.

This study, although exploratory, provides some insights that allow us to reflect on the importance that corporate social responsibility can have at a competitive level in the construction sector. The study has some limitations, considering that at this stage there is no empirical study and no exploratory interviews have been carried out on the subject.

However, future studies should make it possible to develop this study with greater complementarity (i.e. in-depth interviews and focus groups). This study provides preliminary insights into socially responsible marketing and the management of organizations.

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