



1. Topic's relevance

Taking into account the consumers' opinions and expectations is a crucial factor to be able to distinguish an organization that sells products or services responsibly. Within this scope, social responsibility (SR) establishes guidelines which should be implemented to create markets that are fairer, more equitable and informed, where the consumers are able to discern between their purchasing options and know both their rights and contributions towards a more sustainable development.

Among the responsibilities associated to consumers, an organization should provide accurate, fair, transparent and useful education and information, both in the marketing and contracting processes, with the purpose of promoting the sustainable use and design of products or services aimed at facilitating access to all, in addition to meeting the needs of those more vulnerable.

Social responsibility brings consumer issues around to fair marketing practices, safety and health protection, sustainable consumption, resolution of controversies and compensation, protection of privacy and data, access to essential products or services, treatment of vulnerable consumers' needs and education, among others.

2. Definitions

Consumers: those individuals or groups who use the result of the decisions and activities of organizations, which not necessarily implies the payment of products and services.

Environmental aspect: an element that is part of an organization's activities, products or services and may interact and affect the milieu.

Environmental impact: the effect of any action in the environment which can be either adverse or favorable, as a total or partial result of an organization's environmental aspects.

Sustainable consumption: the use of services and products that respond to basic needs and produces a

better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials and reducing emissions from waste materials and pollutants during the life cycle of the service or product, so as not to endanger the needs of future generations.

Sustainable consumption seeks to promote the following principles:

- **Safety:** the right to have access to products that are not health or life threatening.
- **To be informed:** access to adequate information in order to make well-grounded decisions, and to be protected against deceitful advertising.
- **To choose:** capacity to choose within a range of products and services, with satisfying quality assurance.
- **To be listened to:** freedom to form consumer groups that can express their opinions in decision-making processes and execution of consumption-related government policies.
- **To be compensated:** Availability of effective compensation through an equitable agreement in the event of fair claims.
- **Education:** on environmental, social and economic impacts regarding consumer choice.
- **Healthy environment:** condition that avoids putting the well-being of present and future generations at risk.
- **Respect the right to privacy:** No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence.
- **Precautionary principle:** when there is a suspected risk of serious or irreversible harm to the environment or to public health, the absence of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing effective preventive measures.
- **Gender equality and women's empowerment:** Prevent perpetuation of gender stereotypes.

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*Based on: ISO 26000:2010. Guidance on social responsibility.



- **Promotion of universal design:** Design of products and environments that can be used by everyone, without the need for adaptation or specialization.

3. Self-evaluation guide on critical issues associated to consumption

In regard to consumers, the organization should take the following provisions into account:

Subject 1: Fair marketing practices, objective and impartial information and fair hiring practices

- Are the products and services promoted in a way that is likely to be understood by consumers, with information that facilitates making decisions and comparing the characteristics of different products or services?
- Is information provided regarding the social, economic and environmental impacts associated to the products or services throughout their entire life cycle and in the entire value chain?
- Is the enterprise being careful about not becoming involved in confusing, deceitful, fraudulent or unfair practices?
- Is the information being shared in a transparent, pertinent, available and comparable manner for all consumers?
- Are the prices, total taxes, terms and conditions of use for the offered products or services disclosed openly, including credit options, real interest rates, costs involved, amount to be paid, number of payments and fee due dates?
- Is there evidence to justify all of the statements or declarations used to promote the product or service?
- Does the product or service provide complete, accurate and understandable information on all of the important aspects (quality, safety and health aspects related to its use, potential dangers and availability)?
- Does the product or service provide information on the contact person and location of the organization?
- Are the contracts written in clear, readable and understandable language, never including unfair contract terms?

Subject 2: Health protection and consumer safety

- Is there certainty that all of the products and services offered are safe?
- Is the competence of laws, regulations, standards and other health and safety related specifications evaluated?
- Is there a clear and effective strategy to stop the services or withdraw from the market all of the products that might constitute an unforeseen hazard, have a serious

defect or contain false or deceitful information?

- Is there a clear policy to compensate consumers for any losses experienced in case of having acquired damaged products, with defects or considered dangerous?
- Have the most probable users been identified, the use planned for the products or services, the reasonably foreseeable incorrect use and the risks associated to each group?
- Has the safety and health information design associated to the product considered each consumer's different needs?
- Has the use of harmful chemical substances been avoided as much as possible?
- Are there campaigns designed to instruct consumers about the adequate use of products, including warnings about the risks of product misuse?

Subject 3: Sustainable consumption

- Is information provided on the performance, impacts on health, energy efficiency, content, ingredients, animal wellbeing related aspects, safe use, maintenance, storage and final disposal of products and their packages?
- Is practical advice provided to modify unsustainable patterns of consumption, to reduce negative impacts on health and environment?
- Does the design of the product and its container seek to facilitate its reuse or recycling, high quality and long service life at affordable prices?
- When product labeling is used, are the labels reliable, effective and verifiable?

Subject 4: Customer service, support and resolution of complaints and controversies

- Does the enterprise take measures to prevent complaints and are these provided follow-up for analysis and to respond through clear mechanisms for the resolution of controversies and compensations?
- Do the warranty certificates offered excel the mandatory warranty?
- Does the enterprise provide post-sale and support information to the customer related to its products or services?
- Does the enterprise offer its customers maintenance and repairs at a reasonable price, at accessible locations and are spare parts obtained within a reasonable period of time?



Subject 5: Customer data protection and privacy

- Does the enterprise limit the collection of personal data to essential information in order to provide the product or service?
- Is consumer data obtained only through legal and fair means, specifying the purpose for which they have been collected?
- Does the enterprise, under any circumstance, avoid disclosing or using consumer personal data for purposes other than those specified at the time they were obtained?
- Does the enterprise disclose the identity and location of the person in charge of rendering accounts on data protection in the organization?

Subject 6: Access to essential services (applies to organizations that provide these services)

- Does the enterprise have policies to not disconnect the users from essential services provided by the organization due to lack of payment, without giving users the opportunity to make their payments within a reasonable period of time?
- Does the service provide wide coverage, and when rationings or interruptions are required, are they carried out in an equitable and nondiscriminatory manner?
- Does the organization have updated systems to prevent service interruptions?

Subject 7: Education and awareness building

- Are consumers educated regarding health and safety issues associated to product use, including any related hazards?
- Are consumers informed on the laws and regulations, and ways to obtain compensation?
- Are consumers informed about weights and measures, prices, quality, credit conditions, availability of essential services, risks related to use of product and other concerns associated to the product or service?

3. Good integration practices

3.1. Planning the integration of the topic into the organization

It is convenient to begin by conducting a conscientious self-evaluation on the topic. The list of questions in the previous section can be useful for that purpose. Upon defining which points the organization has failed to comply, a methodology must be established to prioritize the pending issues. At this point, it can be very helpful to consider the interests of all key actors. Consumers or clients should be included in this analysis, as well as the

compliance of national legislation on consumer protection. In this sense, noncompliance may reflect a serious fault that could endanger the business's continuity. Once the order of priorities has been established, as in any plan, short, medium and long-term actions should be determined, according to the available resources and to the seriousness of each fault.

3.2. How does the integration take place?

In order to integrate these aspects into the organization, once the priorities have been established and the process is planned, it is advisable to define who will be in charge of implementing the improvements.

3.3. Verification

As in any improvement process, a monitoring role needs to be established to provide a follow-up of the actions. Internally, it is advisable to establish a system to facilitate this follow-up, which could be based on the list of questions provided in the previous section, using it as a check-up tool, or a more complex evaluation tool can be developed.

4. What should be done in case of risk?

Whenever there are risks associated to consumer issues, the importance of such risks should be analyzed, along with the effects that these could generate. Regarding this topic, controversies and complaint resolution processes are core elements, in addition to effective communication, analysis and control mechanisms. These issues should be emphasized.