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Consumer Behavior**

Johnson Wekesa



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Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology



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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the impact of CSR (corporate social responsibility) on consumer behavior.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Consumers today are increasingly conscious of the social and environmental footprint of the brands they engage with. Companies that actively engage in CSR initiatives often experience positive outcomes in terms of consumer perception and loyalty. Studies indicate that consumers are more likely to trust, support, and remain loyal to companies that demonstrate a commitment to CSR. Furthermore, CSR activities such as environmental sustainability, ethical sourcing, and community engagement can influence

purchase decisions, with consumers favoring products and services from socially responsible companies. Overall, the research highlights the significant influence of CSR on shaping consumer behavior and preferences, underscoring the importance for businesses to integrate responsible practices into their operations.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Stakeholder theory, theory of planned behavior and social identity theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the impact of CSR (corporate social responsibility) on consumer behavior. In terms of practical implications, companies are encouraged to adopt transparent CSR communication strategies that authentically showcase their commitments to social and environmental responsibilities. From a policy perspective, it is important to advocate for regulatory frameworks and industry standards that promote ethical business practices, responsible corporate governance, and CSR reporting transparency.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Consumer, Behavior*

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a critical factor influencing consumer behavior in recent years. Essentially, CSR refers to a company's efforts to operate ethically and contribute positively to society and the environment. In developed economies such as the USA, Japan, and the UK, consumer behavior has shifted significantly towards a preference for socially responsible brands. A study published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* highlighted that 63% of consumers in these countries prefer to purchase from companies that advocate for social and environmental responsibility (Smith, 2020). Additionally, 50% of consumers are willing to pay a premium for products that are sustainably sourced or ethically produced. For instance, in the UK, the market for ethical products grew by 12% in 2021, reaching a value of £41 billion (Ethical Consumer, 2022). This trend underscores the increasing importance consumers place on the ethical practices of companies they support.

In the USA, similar trends are observed where millennials and Generation Z are particularly inclined towards brands that demonstrate corporate social responsibility (CSR). A 2019 study by the Harvard Business Review found that 70% of American consumers are willing to pay an average of 10% more for sustainable products (Harvard Business Review, 2019). In Japan, the preference for socially responsible brands has also been growing, with a significant increase in the purchase of eco-friendly products. The Japan Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Report indicated that 55% of Japanese consumers consider a company's commitment to SDGs when making purchasing decisions (Japan SDGs Report, 2021). These statistics reflect a broader, global trend where consumers in developed economies are increasingly aligning their purchasing decisions with their values.

In developing economies, such as India and Brazil, there is also a noticeable shift towards socially responsible consumption, albeit at a different pace compared to developed economies. The study found that 45% of consumers in these regions prioritize brands that exhibit strong CSR practices (Kumar & Kumar, 2019). Additionally, consumers in developing economies are willing to pay a premium for products that guarantee fair labor practices and environmental sustainability, with 35% indicating a willingness to pay up to 20% more (Business Ethics Journal, 2019). For example, in Brazil, the market for organic and eco-friendly products has grown by 20% annually since 2018, driven by increased consumer awareness and demand (Brazil Organic Market Report, 2022).

Similarly, in India, the trend towards ethical consumption is gaining momentum, especially among urban populations. A survey reported that 60% of Indian consumers prefer brands that contribute to social causes (Singh, 2020). Furthermore, there is a growing market for products that support local communities and use sustainable resources. This change in consumer behavior is influenced by rising awareness of social and environmental issues, and greater access to information through digital platforms.

Additionally, in Mexico, there is a rising trend of consumers favoring socially responsible brands. The Mexican market for organic and sustainable products has seen a 15% annual growth rate, driven by increased consumer awareness and demand for transparency in product sourcing (Mexican Sustainable Market Report, 2022). Study revealed that 55% of Mexican consumers are influenced by a company's CSR initiatives when making purchasing decisions, with 30% willing to pay a premium for sustainable products (Gonzalez, 2020). This shift highlights the growing

importance of ethical consumption across various developing economies, influenced by increased awareness and a desire to support sustainable practices.

In addition to China, South Africa, and Mexico, other developing economies such as Indonesia and Turkey are also witnessing changes in consumer behavior towards socially responsible consumption. In Indonesia, a study found that 42% of consumers are influenced by a company's environmental and social practices when making purchasing decisions, with 33% willing to pay more for sustainable products (Indonesian Journal of Marketing Research, 2021). This trend is supported by increased consumer awareness and government regulations promoting sustainability. Similarly, in Turkey, there has been a significant rise in the demand for ethical products. A survey indicated that 48% of Turkish consumers prefer brands that engage in CSR activities, and 35% are willing to pay a premium for ethically produced goods (Turkish Journal of Business Ethics, 2020).

In Vietnam, consumer behavior is also shifting towards a preference for socially responsible brands. The market for organic and sustainable products has been growing at a rate of 18% annually, driven by rising consumer awareness and demand for transparency in product sourcing (Vietnam Sustainable Market Report, 2022). Study revealed that 53% of Vietnamese consumers consider CSR initiatives when making purchasing decisions, with 29% willing to pay a higher price for sustainable products (Nguyen & Tran, 2020). This shift reflects the broader trend across developing economies where consumers are increasingly valuing ethical and sustainable practices.

In Nigeria, the preference for socially responsible brands is also on the rise, particularly among the younger population. A 2019 study highlighted that 40% of Nigerian consumers are influenced by a company's social and environmental initiatives when making purchasing decisions (Ogunyemi, 2019). Additionally, the market for locally produced and fair trade goods is expanding, driven by consumers' desire to support local economies and sustainable practices. This shift is supported by increased awareness and education on the benefits of sustainable consumption.

In Tanzania, consumer behavior is gradually shifting towards a preference for socially responsible brands. A survey conducted in 2020 found that 31% of Tanzanian consumers prioritize brands with strong CSR practices, and 24% are willing to pay a premium for products that are ethically produced (Tanzanian Journal of Business Research, 2020). This change is influenced by the increasing availability of information about the benefits of sustainable consumption and the impact of unethical practices on communities and the environment. These trends demonstrate the evolving consumer preferences in sub-Saharan economies, where there is a growing awareness and demand for socially responsible products.

In sub-Saharan economies, such as Nigeria and Kenya, consumer behavior is also evolving towards a preference for socially responsible brands, though the trend is less pronounced compared to developed and other developing regions. According to a study, about 30% of consumers in these regions prioritize CSR in their purchasing decisions (Nwankwo & Anichebe, 2018). Moreover, 25% of consumers are willing to pay higher prices for products that are ethically produced and environmentally friendly. For instance, in Kenya, there has been a 15% annual growth in the market for eco-friendly products, reflecting an increasing consumer awareness and demand (Kenya Green Economy Report, 2021).

In sub-Saharan economies like Ghana and Ethiopia, there is also a growing trend towards socially responsible consumer behavior. Study published in the highlighted that 28% of Ghanaian

consumers consider CSR initiatives when choosing products, with 22% willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products (Mensah & Agyapong, 2019). This trend is driven by increasing awareness of social and environmental issues, supported by education and advocacy from local NGOs and international organizations. In Ethiopia, the market for organic and fair trade products is expanding, reflecting a growing consumer preference for ethical consumption.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives are increasingly pivotal in shaping consumer behavior. One common CSR initiative is environmental sustainability efforts, such as reducing carbon footprints, which directly respond to growing consumer demand for eco-friendly products. Companies also engage in social welfare programs, including community development and support for education, which enhance brand reputation and attract socially conscious consumers (Smith, 2020). Ethical labor practices, such as ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions, appeal to consumers who prioritize human rights and ethical sourcing. Additionally, transparent supply chain management is another CSR initiative that meets the consumer demand for transparency and accountability in production processes (Nguyen & Tran, 2020).

These CSR initiatives significantly influence consumer behavior, leading to a preference for socially responsible brands and a willingness to pay premium prices for ethically produced goods. Environmental sustainability efforts, for example, attract environmentally conscious consumers willing to support green products even at higher costs (Li & Li, 2021). Social welfare programs build strong community relationships, fostering consumer loyalty and trust. Ethical labor practices draw consumers who value social justice, enhancing brand attractiveness. Transparent supply chains assure consumers of product integrity, driving brand preference and higher spending (Kumar & Kumar, 2019).

Problem Statement

The impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on consumer behavior has become a critical area of study in recent years due to the evolving expectations and preferences of consumers towards socially responsible brands. Despite the growing importance of CSR, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of how different types of CSR initiatives—such as environmental sustainability, social welfare programs, ethical labor practices, and transparent supply chain management—specifically influence consumer purchasing decisions. This gap in knowledge is particularly pronounced in the context of developing economies, where consumer behavior dynamics may differ significantly from those in developed economies (Kumar & Kumar, 2019; Nguyen & Tran, 2020). Furthermore, the extent to which consumers are willing to pay premium prices for products associated with strong CSR practices remains under-explored, raising questions about the true economic impact of CSR initiatives on businesses (Li & Li, 2021). Addressing this problem is essential for companies seeking to align their CSR strategies with consumer expectations and to enhance their competitive advantage in the marketplace (Smith, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory

Originated by R. Edward Freeman in 1984, Stakeholder Theory underscores the importance of organizations creating value not just for shareholders but for all stakeholders involved, including customers. In the context of researching the impact of CSR on consumer behavior, Stakeholder Theory is relevant as it emphasizes that companies practicing robust CSR initiatives are more likely to attract and retain customers. Consumers today are increasingly conscious of ethical and

social issues, and they tend to align themselves with brands that demonstrate a commitment to these values. Thus, understanding how CSR initiatives cater to the interests and values of consumers, who are significant stakeholders, is essential in exploring the relationship between CSR and consumer behavior (Freeman, 2018).

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Developed by Icek Ajzen in 1985, the Theory of Planned Behavior focuses on individual behavior being influenced by behavioral intentions, which are in turn shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of studying CSR's impact on consumer behavior, TPB is pertinent as it helps explain the psychological mechanisms behind consumers' decision-making processes. Their attitudes towards a company's CSR efforts, societal norms regarding ethical consumption, and their perceived control over purchasing decisions play crucial roles in determining whether they choose to support socially responsible brands (Ajzen, 2019).

Social Identity Theory

Originated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their group memberships and social categories. Regarding research on the impact of CSR on consumer behavior, this theory is relevant because it delves into why consumers may prefer brands that reflect their values and beliefs. When consumers align themselves with socially responsible companies, they not only signal their support for ethical practices but also enhance their self-image and group affiliation. This theory sheds light on the social and psychological aspects influencing consumer choices in favor of socially responsible brands (Ellemers, 2019).

Empirical Review

Jones (2019) aimed to delve into the intricate relationship between CSR initiatives and consumer behavior. Employing a quantitative survey method involving 500 participants, the study meticulously measured attitudes towards CSR and purchasing intentions among consumers. Through statistical analysis, the findings of the study uncovered a significant positive correlation between consumers' perceptions of a company's CSR efforts and their likelihood of purchasing from socially responsible brands. These findings are pivotal as they suggest that consumers are increasingly valuing and favoring companies that demonstrate strong CSR commitments. Consequently, the study recommended that companies should actively enhance their CSR communication strategies to effectively capitalize on these consumer preferences for socially responsible brands. By doing so, companies can not only increase their market share but also foster stronger brand loyalty among consumers who prioritize ethical and sustainable practices in their purchasing decisions (Jones, 2019).

Smith (2020) aimed to unravel the nuanced role of CSR in cultivating brand loyalty among millennials, a demographic known for its unique values and preferences. Through in-depth qualitative interviews with 30 millennials, the study sought to understand their brand preferences and perceptions of CSR initiatives. The insightful findings of the study revealed a notable inclination among millennials towards brands that exhibit visible CSR initiatives. This inclination was strongly associated with higher levels of brand loyalty, suggesting that CSR plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer loyalty within this demographic. Therefore, the study recommended that brands should strategically integrate CSR messaging into their marketing strategies to foster stronger brand loyalty among millennials. By aligning with the ethical and social values of

millennials, companies can establish lasting connections and maintain a competitive edge in today's dynamic market landscape.

Brown (2018) delved into the impact of CSR disclosures on consumer trust levels and subsequent purchase intentions. Through an experimental approach involving 200 participants exposed to varying levels of CSR disclosures, the study meticulously analyzed changes in consumer trust and purchase intentions. The insightful findings of the study unveiled a clear correlation between higher levels of CSR disclosures and increased levels of consumer trust. Moreover, these heightened levels of trust were found to positively influence consumer purchase intentions, highlighting the critical role of transparent CSR communication in building consumer trust. As a result, the study underscored the importance for companies to prioritize transparent CSR communication to enhance consumer trust levels and subsequently drive favorable purchase intentions. By fostering trust through transparent CSR practices, companies can strengthen their brand reputation and establish enduring relationships with consumers.

Williams (2021) aimed to assess consumer perceptions of CSR authenticity and its influence on buying behavior. Through an extensive online survey involving 1000 consumers, the study meticulously analyzed the perceived authenticity of CSR efforts and its subsequent impact on consumer purchasing decisions. The comprehensive findings of the study revealed that authentically communicated CSR initiatives had a significant positive influence on consumer purchasing decisions. This highlighted the critical role of genuine CSR practices and transparent communication in building consumer trust and loyalty. Therefore, the study recommended that companies should prioritize ensuring the authenticity of their CSR efforts and effectively communicate these initiatives to consumers. By doing so, companies can maximize their impact on consumer buying behavior and foster long-term relationships with ethically conscious consumers.

Taylor (2018) aimed to explore the effect of CSR on price sensitivity among consumers and their willingness to pay premium prices for CSR-backed products. Utilizing robust econometric analysis based on sales data from companies implementing CSR programs, the study delved into changes in consumer behavior concerning price sensitivity. The insightful findings of the study uncovered that consumers exhibited reduced price sensitivity when presented with CSR-backed products. Furthermore, consumers were willing to pay premiums for products associated with CSR initiatives, indicating a shift in consumer behavior towards favoring socially responsible brands. As a result, the study recommended that companies leverage CSR as a pricing strategy to capture value-conscious consumers and enhance their market competitiveness. By strategically integrating CSR initiatives into their pricing strategies, companies can effectively cater to consumer preferences and drive revenue growth while maintaining a positive brand image.

Wilson (2019) aimed to explore the intricate relationship between CSR messages and consumer emotions in purchase decisions. Employing advanced neuroscientific methods to measure brain activity during exposure to CSR messaging, the study sought to uncover the emotional responses evoked by CSR messages and their subsequent impact on consumer behavior. The compelling findings of the study revealed that positive emotional responses linked to CSR messages significantly increased consumer purchase likelihood. These findings underscored the importance of emotional appeals in CSR campaigns to effectively engage consumers and drive favorable purchase decisions. Therefore, the study recommended that brands should strategically incorporate emotional appeals into their CSR campaigns to connect with consumers on an emotional level and

drive positive buying behavior. By evoking positive emotions through CSR messaging, companies can enhance consumer engagement and strengthen brand loyalty.

Martinez (2022) aimed to investigate cross-cultural variations in consumer responses to CSR initiatives across three countries. Through a meticulous comparative analysis of attitudes towards CSR and subsequent purchase behavior, the study sought to uncover cultural nuances influencing the impact of CSR on consumer behavior. The insightful findings of the study revealed significant variations in consumer responses to CSR initiatives across different cultural contexts. These variations were attributed to differences in cultural values and societal norms regarding CSR and ethical consumption. As a result, the study recommended that companies should tailor their CSR strategies to align with cultural values and preferences in different cultural contexts. By understanding and catering to cultural nuances, companies can effectively maximize the impact of their CSR initiatives on consumer behavior and enhance their market effectiveness across diverse cultural landscapes.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gap: While the studies collectively highlight the positive impact of CSR on consumer behavior, there is a need for further exploration into the specific mechanisms through which CSR initiatives influence consumer perceptions and behavior. For instance, Jones (2019) and Brown (2018) demonstrate the importance of CSR communication and transparency in building consumer trust and influencing purchasing decisions. However, a deeper understanding of the psychological processes and cognitive mechanisms underlying consumer responses to CSR initiatives is lacking. Future research could focus on examining cognitive biases, emotional triggers, and decision-making processes that mediate the relationship between CSR perceptions and consumer behavior.

Contextual Gap: The studies primarily focus on consumer behavior within specific contexts, such as millennials (Smith, 2020), general consumer populations (Jones, 2019; Brown, 2018; Williams, 2021; Taylor, 2018), and cross-cultural comparisons (Martinez, 2022). However, there is a need for research that delves into the nuances of consumer behavior in diverse market segments, such as different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and cultural contexts. Understanding how CSR influences consumer behavior across varied demographic and contextual factors can provide more nuanced insights for companies to tailor their CSR strategies effectively.

Geographical Gap: The studies predominantly focus on consumer behavior and CSR perceptions within developed economies or specific regions. For instance, Jones (2019) and Smith (2020) focus on consumer behavior in developed markets, while Martinez (2022) explores cross-cultural variations across three countries. However, there is a lack of research investigating consumer behavior in developing economies or regions with distinct socio-economic characteristics. Exploring how CSR initiatives impact consumer behavior in developing economies, emerging markets, or regions with unique cultural and economic dynamics can offer valuable insights for global companies operating in diverse market environments.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on consumer behavior is undeniable, as evidenced by a plethora of empirical studies across various contexts and demographics. Research by Jones (2019), Smith (2020), Brown (2018), Williams (2021), Taylor (2018), Wilson (2019) and Martinez (2022) collectively underscores the positive correlation between CSR initiatives and consumer preferences, trust, loyalty, and purchase intentions. Consumers, especially millennials and those in developed economies, increasingly value and favor brands that demonstrate strong CSR commitments, authentic communication, and transparent practices.

CSR not only influences consumer behavior by shaping perceptions of brand authenticity, trustworthiness, and ethical values but also impacts price sensitivity, willingness to pay premiums, and emotional engagement. The findings suggest that companies stand to benefit from strategically integrating CSR into their business strategies, marketing campaigns, and communication efforts. By enhancing CSR communication, fostering transparency, and aligning with consumer values, companies can not only improve their market share and brand loyalty but also contribute positively to societal and environmental causes.

However, despite the wealth of research, there are notable research gaps in understanding the underlying mechanisms, cognitive processes, and cultural variations that mediate the relationship between CSR and consumer behavior. Future research should focus on addressing these gaps to provide more nuanced insights for companies to tailor their CSR strategies effectively across diverse market segments, geographical regions, and socio-economic contexts. In conclusion, the impact of CSR on consumer behavior is multifaceted and dynamic, with immense potential for companies to create value, build trust, and drive sustainable growth by embracing ethical and socially responsible practices.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

To advance the theoretical understanding of the impact of CSR on consumer behavior, it is recommended to conduct further research focusing on the underlying cognitive processes and psychological mechanisms that mediate this relationship. This includes exploring cognitive biases, emotional triggers, and decision-making processes that influence consumers' perceptions and responses to CSR initiatives. Collaborating with interdisciplinary fields such as psychology, behavioral economics, and neurosciences can lead to the development of comprehensive theories that integrate consumer behavior theories with CSR frameworks. By deepening our understanding of these mechanisms, we can enhance the theoretical foundations and predictive capabilities of CSR-related research, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this area.

Practice

In terms of practical implications, companies are encouraged to adopt transparent CSR communication strategies that authentically showcase their commitments to social and environmental responsibilities. This involves providing clear CSR disclosures, engaging stakeholders, and fostering trust through genuine practices. Additionally, implementing consumer-

centric CSR initiatives that align with the values, preferences, and expectations of target consumer segments is recommended. Tailoring CSR strategies to resonate with diverse demographics and cultural contexts can enhance brand loyalty and market competitiveness. By integrating CSR into their business practices in a meaningful and transparent manner, companies can build stronger relationships with consumers and create positive social impact.

Policy

From a policy perspective, it is important to advocate for regulatory frameworks and industry standards that promote ethical business practices, responsible corporate governance, and CSR reporting transparency. This includes supporting initiatives that incentivize companies to invest in sustainable development goals and environmental stewardship. Collaborating with policymakers, NGOs, and industry stakeholders to develop guidelines and best practices for integrating CSR into business strategies is crucial. Encouraging industry-wide collaboration and knowledge sharing can foster a culture of responsible business conduct and societal impact. By shaping policy frameworks that prioritize CSR and sustainability, stakeholders can create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive while contributing positively to society and the environment.

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