

Consumers' Perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibilities: Effects on Trust and Purchase Intention

Aydın Kayabaşı¹ - Burcu Mucan²

Abstract

Despite the growing body of literature on the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), finding a commonly accepted definition of CSR is still problematic. The main research question of this study is whether a firm's CSR activities affect consumer trust and purchase intention in relation to the corporation. To this end, a review of the literature is performed and the concepts of CSR, consumer trust and purchase intention are examined. First, an important part of this study is to determine how consumers define the level of CSR. The study then investigates how consumers evaluate the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities of businesses, and the extent to which these variables affect consumer trust and purchase intention. Finally, the study evaluates the relationships between consumers' trust and purchase intention, and phone manufacturers' CSR activities. Exploratory factor analyses are conducted and the model is tested using LISREL. The results of the study provide insights into consumers who support socially responsible businesses, and reveal that the only variable affecting purchase intention of consumers is philanthropic responsibilities, and consumer trust is perceived as a significant tool to improve purchase intentions.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Consumer Trust, Purchase Intention, Structural Equation Modelling

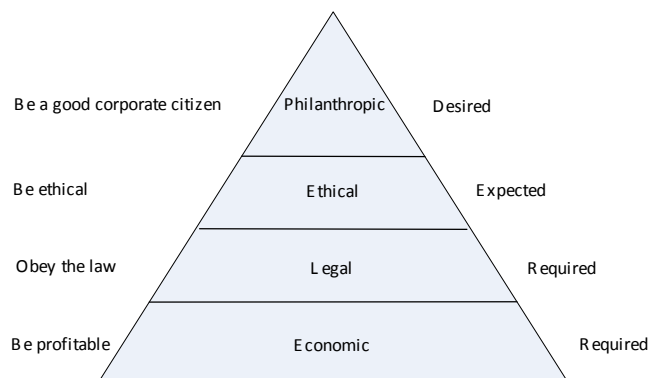
Introduction

Over the past decade, consumers have witnessed some important company transformations. Beyond the drive for higher competitiveness and productivity levels, there is a growing concern related to the social and environmental impacts of companies' actions (Ferreira et al., 2010). The increasing expectations of society require enterprises to be more sensitive to these issues. However, despite the popularity of corporate social responsibility (CSR) research, there is still little information about the effects of CSR activities on consumers.

Despite this increasing emphasis on CSR in the marketplace, it has been given various definitions. Carroll (1999) states that the evolution of the CSR concept began in the 1950s, expanded during the 1960s, and proliferated during the 1970s. In the 1980s, there were fewer new definitions and more empirical research, and alternative themes began to mature. In the 1990s, the CSR concept transitioned significantly into alternative themes, such as stakeholder theory, business ethics theory and corporate citizenship. Maignan and Ferrell (2001) consider corporate citizenship as a marketing tool, and discuss its potential impact on consumers, while Carroll's "pyramid of CSR" indicates a hierarchy of responsibilities ascending from economic and legal to more socially oriented responsibilities - i.e. ethical and philanthropic (Carroll, 1991; Tuan, 2012).

1 Dumlupınar University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Turkey, aydin.kayabasi@dpu.edu.tr (Contact Person)

2 Dumlupınar University, Hisarcık Vocational School, Turkey, burcu.mucan@dpu.edu.tr



Source: Schwartz & Carroll (2003, p. 504)

Figure 1. Carroll's (1991) Pyramid of CSR

In Carroll's model, each dimension of CSR can be examined in relation to the various stakeholders of the organization (e.g. owners, customers, employees, the community) (Mohr et al., 2001). Economic responsibilities mainly relate to qualified products and service offerings, and timely manufacturing and delivery services. Park et al. (2014) state that fulfilment of economic responsibilities enhances corporate reputation. Besides economic responsibilities, companies must also obey the related legal obligations, otherwise illegal corporate behaviours can influence companies' images and reputation in a negative manner. The aims of firms in meeting their ethical responsibilities are to ensure that their actions do not harm individuals or the public at large, and that the firm does what is right, just and fair (Park et al. 2014; Smith and Quelch, 1993). Philanthropic responsibilities reflect the common desire to see businesses get actively involved in the betterment of society (Maignan and Ferrell, 2001). However, Schwartz and Carroll (2003) argue that it is often difficult to distinguish between "philanthropic" and "ethical" activities on both theoretical and practical levels. Therefore, a three-domain model of CSR has been developed according to this view.

In brief, corporates, which are part of society, are obliged to increase their positive effects at the highest level and decrease negative ones at the lowest by taking the long-term needs and requests of society into consideration (Bayraktaroğlu et al., 2009). Corporates, which strive for the realization of their economic

objectives, should attract the attention of all stakeholders by obeying the laws and playing their part with regard to ethical and philanthropic issues in line with these obligations.

Theoretical Background

The need to understand the relationship between companies' socially responsible behaviour and consumers' purchase decisions is becoming increasingly relevant, as consumers are looking for more information about their rights and about the responsibilities that companies have towards society (Ferreira et al., 2010; Titus & Bradford, 1996). There have been numerous studies suggesting a link between CSR and consumer behaviour, and customer satisfaction (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). Some studies have demonstrated a link between CSR and financial performance (McWilliams & Siegel, 2000; Saeidi et al., 2015; Stanwick & Stanwick, 1998), as well as brand and product evaluations (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Klein & Dawar, 2004). Brown and Dacin (1997) found that negative CSR associations can ultimately have a detrimental effect on overall product evaluations, whereas positive CSR associations can enhance product evaluations.

Some studies have focused mainly on consumers' perceptions of trust and price (Ferreira et al., 2010; Park et al., 2014). A study by Park et al. (2014) asserts that CSR activities create and nurture consumers' trust in companies, which will, in turn, bring

about consumers' positive or improved perceptions of these firms. Another striking study was conducted by Bhattacharya et al. (2008). This study points out the importance of CSR in the relation to the employee framework. In addition, Nejati and Ghasemi (2012) studied employee perspectives of CSR in Iran. Bhattacharya et al. (2008) found that successful CSR strategies must also satisfy varying employee needs, encourage employee identification, and be co-created with employees. In particular, CSR is most effective when employees are the actual enactors, with the company acting as an enabler.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Trust

Consumer trust is of great value in the marketing literature since trust is considered a strategic variable in current marketing (Flavian and Guinaliu, 2005; Selnes, 1998). Consumer trust is defined from a consumer perspective as the consumer's belief that a corporation will perform in a manner consistent with expectations regarding its expertise, integrity and goodwill (Park et al., 2014). Many studies have analysed the relationship between consumer trust and brand loyalty, brand image, purchase intention, and customer satisfaction. In particular, consumer trust is crucial when decisions involve high risk. Pivato et al. (2008) analysed the impact of CSR on consumer trust and reported that CSR is the creation of trust among stakeholders, and that trust in turn influences subsequent actions (Monday, 2011). There is empirical evidence that ethical and philanthropic CSR are mediated by consumer trust. Unless consumers trust the company's pro-social position, they will not be willing to reward the company for its CSR activity (Yoon et al., 2006). This leads to our first hypothesis, as follows:

H₁: Consumers' perceptions of CSR (economic_a, legal_b, ethical_c, philanthropic_d) have an effect on consumer trust.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Purchase Intention

Whether or not CSR is effective in activating consumers' purchase intentions is still unclear. Therefore, some studies have examined the relationship between CSR and purchase intention. For example, Lee and Shin (2010) found that there is a positive relationship between consumers' awareness of CSR and

consumers' purchase intentions. Their study implies that consumers seek "good" CSR, and intend to buy products from "good" companies. Murray and Vogel (1997) stated that there is little prior evidence that CSR affects stakeholders' attitudes and behavioural intentions towards the firm. In particular, different profiles of stakeholder groups and demographic factors differentiate consumers' intentions towards companies. A study by Lin et al. (2011) shows that purchase intention is indirectly improved by strengthened corporate ability and CSR. If CSR initiatives are incongruent with the consumer's own character or value (David, 2005; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001) then CSR can be less effective. Carrigan and Attala (2001) studied the relationship between CSR and consumer behaviour. In their study, focus group surveys revealed that consumers did not care how well the company behaved. The respondents considered the media as a powerful source of information on ethical issues rather than the company. If they believe information in the media that a company has behaved badly or well, then this will negatively or positively affect their purchase intentions. Therefore, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H₂: Consumers' perceptions of CSR (economic_a, legal_b, ethical_c, philanthropic_d) have an effect on purchase intention.

Consumer Trust and Purchase Intention

Consumer trust is an important issue in the marketing literature, because trust is another way of establishing long-term relationships between consumers and companies. In the extant literature on trust and buying behaviour, trust has been conceptualized and/or operationalized as either the intention to behave well in perceived risky situations, or the trustworthiness of the object of trust (Becerra & Korgaonkar, 2011). Building a trustworthy relationship with customers is not easy. Hahn and Kim (2009) assert that consumer trust has been acknowledged in the marketing literature as a crucial factor for successful business trades, and, in turn, the development and management of a long-term customer relationship. Several marketing scholars have also realized the importance of trust, and analysed the relationship between trust and online purchase intention (e.g. Schlosser et al., 2006; Thaw et al., 2009). With the increasing usage of e-commerce in particular, consumer trust in intangible assets, such as brand, brand image, and websi-

tes, are increasingly becoming subjects of study. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) suggest that brand trust will contribute to both purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, where trusted brands should be purchased more often and evoke a higher degree of attitudinal commitment. Pivato et al. (2008) suggest that trust plays an important role as a mediating variable in the CSR-financial-performance relationship. In contrast, however, Lee and Shin's (2010) research focused on consumers' awareness and purchase intentions to support responsible businesses, but did not establish any link between intent and behaviour. However, according to Becerra and Korgaonkar (2011), trust beliefs influence online intentions mostly by influencing intentions to purchase. In addition, Kenning (2008) found a positive effect of trust on buying behaviour in food retailing. Therefore, the relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention is incorporated as part of the conceptual framework of this study. Based on these extant studies, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H₃: Consumer trust has an effect on purchase intention.

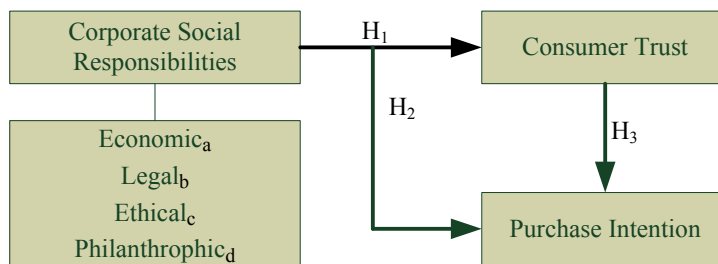


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

The scope of this research is shown within the conceptual framework presented in Figure 2.

Sample and Data Collection

In this research, a convenience sample of respondents from university students studying at four different universities in Turkey was captured for quantitative analysis using a structured questionnaire. Data was collected from 410 university students studying business, engineering, and tourism management. A total of 15 completed questionnaires were eliminated from

Method

In this section of study, data collection, sampling, univariate and multivariate statistical analysis and results are described.

Research purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the effect of consumers' perceptions of CSR on consumer trust and purchase intention. Within this scope, the sub-aims are as follows:

- To determine consumers' level of awareness of social responsibilities (economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic).
- To analyse the effect of level of awareness of social responsibilities (economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic) on consumers' trust.
- To analyse the effect of level of awareness of social responsibilities (economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic) on consumers' purchase intention.
- To analyse the effect of consumers' trust on purchase intention.

the analysis, as there were so many non-response variables. Data obtained from the remaining 395 respondents were analysed using univariate and multivariate statistical analysis. The scales used in structuring the questionnaire, and the definitions regarding the theoretical structure of the dimensions measured, are expressed next.

The measurement scales used in this research were all adapted from previous studies. First, we tried to measure whether the respondents had any knowledge

of CSR. Within this context, CSR definitions derived from the literature were presented to the respondents, who were asked to evaluate whether these actually define CSR sufficiently. The definitions were cited from Kotler and Lee (2005). All of the measurement items for the CSR definitions were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = definitely do not define to 5 = definitely define.

Perceptions of CSR were then measured using 21 items, which included three control items added to the original scale by the researchers. A total of 18 items consisting of four dimensions in the scale were adapted from Maignan (2001). All measurement items were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Consumer trust was measured using four items adapted by Rose et al. (2012). Measurement items related

to consumer trust were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Purchase intention was measured using a total of four items adapted by Rose et al. (2012) and Deveraj et al. (2006). Measurement items related to purchase intention were again measured using a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Distributions regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants were analysed within the scope of the research. The descriptive statistics related to age, gender and income level in the demographic variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 395)

Age	Sex	Income (Turkish Lira)
18-22 Years (n = 249) 63%	Female (n = 189) 48%	>1500 (n = 130) 32%
23-28 Years (n = 146) 38%	Male (n = 206) 52%	1501-2250 (n = 85) 22%
		2251-3000 (n = 81) 21%
		3001-3750 (n = 51) 13%
		3750 > (n = 46) 12%

We asked the respondents how knowledgeable they were about CSR definitions according to the above-mentioned five-point Likert-type scale. The general mean was equal to 3.66; however, the means of the four definitions of CSR were greater than 3.66. This shows that the respondents have significant know-

ledge about CSR. The results show us that the fourth and seventh definitions (see Figure 2) had the highest mean values, and thus CSR definitions can be defined at medium and high levels by respondents. The values of the means and standard deviations of CSR definitions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Definitions of CSR

Definitions of CSR	Mean	SD
1. It means corporates voluntarily contribute positively to society.	3.69	0.98
2. It means corporates are voluntary environmentalists.	3.63	1.01
3. It means corporates improve the prosperity of society.	3.69	0.96
4. It is a responsibility that corporates should assume to mitigate their effects on society.	3.84	1.00
5. It is a commitment corporates make to increase the life quality of employees and their employees' families.	3.44	1.04
6. It is a responsibility corporates have to development.	3.52	1.05
7. It is society's expectation that corporates do business in a way that meet ethical, legal, commercial and social expectations.	3.82	1.08

Validity and Reliability

As a result of measurements conducted in accordance with the aim of the research, exploratory factor analysis was carried out so as to determine the dimensions regarding the scales. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) was used to evaluate the validity of the data regarding the factor analysis. According to the BTS values obtained, the bivariate correlation coefficient between the variables ($p < 0.001$) is statistically significant, and thus the data is suitable in terms of factor analysis. In addition, Kaiser's measure of sampling adequacy was used in order to evaluate sampling adequacy, and revealed that the results are within the acceptable limits (KMO; 0.83, 0.77, 0.79) (Harrison-Walker, 2001). A total of 21 items for CSR perceptions, four items for consumer trust and four items for purchase intention were included in the factor analysis. The varimax rotation technique and principal component analysis were also used to identify the key factor structures. As a result of the factor analysis, it was determined that CSR perceptions have a four-dimensional structure

(economic (ECO), legal (LEG), ethical (ETH), philanthropic (PHI)), whereas consumer trust and purchase intention present a unidimensional structure. It was also established that the dimensions obtained are parallel with the theoretical structure. Items with a factor loading value of less than 0.5 as a result of the factor analysis were excluded from the analysis. The overall variance values explained are between 0.54–0.68, which can be accepted as good values for the validity assessment. The factor loadings regarding all the scales have a higher significance than 0.5 (Grewal et al., 1998).

Since it is not possible to measure a dimension using a single item, some measures for assessment of internal consistency must be used. Cronbach's alpha and the item-to-total correlation values were analysed in order to assess internal consistency, and the values obtained were determined to be within the acceptable limits (Hair et al., 1998). The values obtained are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis

Dimensions and factors	FL	EV	VE	Item-to-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha
Perceptions of CSR					
ECO	0.585-0.794	4.772		0.41-0.590	0.70
LEG	0.533-0.734	2.213	54.377	0.328-0.520	0.61
ETH	0.560-0.708	1.698		0.420-0.549	0.73
PHI	0.683-0.822	1.104		0.623-0.707	0.84
Consumer trust	0.693-0.858	2.557	63.914	0.502-0.614	0.81
Purchase intention	0.779-0.863	2.740	68.490	0.62-0.731	0.85

Note: FL: Factor Loadings, EV: Eigenvalues, VE: % Variance Explained, economic (ECO), legal (LEG), ethical (ETH), philanthropic (PHI)

One of the methods used to assess convergent and discriminant validity is exploratory factor analysis. Accordingly, the factor loadings of items within the similar structure that are higher than 0.50 provide

convergent validity, and those that are lower than 0.30 provide discriminant validity (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Pursuant to explanatory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis was applied so as to analyse

Table 4. Results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Observed variables	t Values	FL	Significance	AVE
Perceptions of CSR				
ECO	08.82-14.89	0.48-0.77	$p < 0.01$	0.51
LEG	07.99-13.80	0.44-0.73	$p < 0.01$	0.52
ETH	10.62-14.37	0.55-0.71	$p < 0.01$	0.54
PHI	15.15-17.17	0.66-0.71	$p < 0.01$	0.65
Consumer trust	09.41-13.07	0.61-0.83	$p < 0.01$	0.74
Purchase intention	13.29-16.60	0.77-0.86	$p < 0.01$	0.87

$\chi^2_{(258)} = 579,15$ $p = 0,000$; RMSEA = 0,056; SRMR = 0,054; NNFI = 0,93; CFI = 0,94, GFI = 0,89

the adaptive values of the measurement model. As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis, the values of the measurement model were determined to have good fit. The variance values explained for each implicit variable, t value and factor load value are shown in Table 4.

The means, standard deviations and bivariate correlation values regarding the research variables are reported in Table 4. No statistically significant relationship between CSR and trust and purchase intention was

identified. It was determined that there is only a statistical relation between the philanthropic dimension and trust and purchase intention ($p < 0.05$). All of the relationships between the variables are shown in Table 5.

Structural Model

Covariance structure analysis was used in order to test the hypotheses developed on the basis of the literature. The fit indices obtained as a result of the analysis show that there is congruence between the

Table 5. Correlation Matrix

Variables (N = 395)	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. ECO	4.20	0.62	1					
2. LEG	4.17	0.63	0.406*	1				
3. ETH	3.97	0.62	0.250*	0.436*	1			
4. PHI	4.09	0.70	0.234*	0.249*	0.349*	1		
5. Consumer trust	3.45	0.75	0.077	0.061	0.053	0.084	1	
6. Purchase intention	3.29	0.97	0.018	0.012	0.012	0.104**	0.444*	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; ** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 6. Path Results

Construct/Structural path	t values	Path Coeff.	R ²	Hypothesis result
Perceptions of CSR, trust and intention				
H₁ Perceptions of CSR → Trust				
H _{1a} ECO → CONSUMER TRUST	0.95	0.08		Not supported
H _{1b} LEG → CONSUMER TRUST	0.62	0.07	0.01	Not supported
H _{1c} ETH → CONSUMER TRUST	0.99	0.10		Not supported
H _{1d} PHI → CONSUMER TRUST	0.43	0.03		Not supported
H₂ Perceptions of CSR → Intention				
H _{2a} ECO → PURCHASE INTENTION	0.11	0.00		Not supported
H _{2b} LEG → PURCHASE INTENTION	0.11	0.01	0.05	Not supported
H _{2c} ETH → PURCHASE INTENTION	1.08	0.10		Not supported
H _{2d} PHI → PURCHASE INTENTION	2.05	0.14		Supported
H₃ Consumer trust → Purchase intention				
	7.72	0.49	0.24	Supported

Model Fit ($\chi^2_{(259)} = 613.27$; $p = 0.00$; RMSEA = 0.059; SRMR = 0.056; NNFI = 0.92; CFI = 0.93; GFI = 0.89).
Significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

model and the data. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between CSR perceptions and trust. Moreover, no significant relationship was determined between CSR perceptions and purchase intention, except for in relation to the philanthropy variable ($\beta=0.14$, $p<0.01$). It was determined that consumer trust is a good explanation for purchase intention ($\beta=0.49$, $p<0.01$). The values of the path results are shown in Table 6.

Conclusion

This study was developed in order to measure whether consumers' perceptions of CSR affect their trust and purchase intention. To this end, the results reveal that consumers' definitions of CSR focus primarily on two definitions. According to the consumers in our sample, CSR is a responsibility that corporates should take in order to mitigate their effects on society, while society expects corporates to do business in a way that meets ethical, legal, commercial and social expectations.

The results obtained as a result of the factor analysis were consistent with the study of Maignan (2001), and the same dimensions were determined. Accordingly, the consumers perceived CSR according to four categories - namely economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic - as has been outlined in the literature. The study did not generally support the expected estimates, since only two hypotheses were supported. In accordance with this, it was observed that consumers' perceptions of corporate economic, legal, and ethical responsibilities do not affect trust in corporations. It was revealed that consumers' perceptions of corporates' economic, legal, and ethical responsibilities do not affect purchase intention, though their perceptions of philanthropic responsibilities of corporates do. The result that consumer trust affects purchase intention positively is also supported by H₃. The effect of corporate trust on purchase intention has been highlighted in various studies in the literature (e.g. Becerra & Korgaonkar, 2009; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

The results obtained regarding perceptions of CSR and purchase intention have parallel characteristics with the studies of David (2005), Sen and Bhattacharya (2001), and Carrigan and Attalla (2001). According to these studies, the effect of CSR on purchase intention is quite low, and even ineffective. What does impact the effect is elements such as consumers' individual values, perceptions, and level of knowledge of CSR, or the concordance level of corporates with consumers' characteristics.

Studies on CSR perceptions and expectations regarding trust have yielded varying results. In a study conducted by Pivato et al. (2008) it was found that CSR does develop trust; however, in a study conducted by Yoon et al. (2006) it was seen that as long as consumers do not trust the pro-social position of corporates, corporates will not be rewarded for their CSR efforts.

In this regard, corporates are required to strengthen their corporate image so as to earn consumers' trust by using other market components. The study also revealed that corporates may be able to bring about a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions by including more philanthropic activities in their CSR efforts.

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