

THE ROLE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN CONSUMER TRUST AND PERCEPTION OF COMPANY IMAGE



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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility is an issue to which businesses attach great importance today. They coordinate their activities in such a way that they are useful for the environment and society. The purpose of this study is to research how corporate social responsibility influences business image and customer trustworthiness. Furthermore, the study intends to investigate the relationship between corporate image and consumer credibility.

We used an online survey with the appropriate sample to obtain data for this topic. This study evaluated corporate social responsibility, business image, and consumer trust in Kosovar food firms across three instruments. According to the study's findings, social responsibility benefits both company image and consumer credibility, and there is a considerable positive association between corporate image and customer credibility. Due to time and cost restrictions, the sample was limited to survey participants.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend that corporate executives pay more attention to the use of social responsibility, as this factor has a direct influence on corporate image and customer credibility, as well as managing the interplay between these two factors.

1. Introduction

contributing to satisfying people's needs and contributing to the development of natural resources and human capital, in addition to focusing on profit. It is an area where companies must give their all to ensure both harmony in the workplace and in the external environment that is affected by the company's activities. It has been proven that CSR has an impact on the growth of a company's reputation; but, how does this affect consumer confidence and what image the firm generates in them? (Berényi & Deutsch, 2021).

The current commitment of companies to social responsibility measures has a direct impact on securing customer trust. When a company cares about society and the environment, consumers are more likely to buy its products because they believe they also contribute to human well-being. It also strengthens and secures

the company's image in the market as a company that ensures safety and works well for all stakeholders (Berényi & Deutsch, 2021).

The importance and influence of CSR reporting in the global business environment continues to evolve across industries. This is related to mandatory reporting by the government or stakeholders demanding more detailed reporting to fully understand the company profile (LaVan et al., 2021). The determination of business strategy has a significant impact on the financial performance and corporate actions of organizations. Therefore, the interdependence between CSR and business strategy is widely recognized (Berényi & Deutsch, 2021).

In today's economic environment, when firms are required to focus on their impact on society and the environment in addition

to their profitability, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become more and more important. Consumers are more inclined to support and positively view businesses that participate in CSR initiatives, according to studies. Consumers are more likely to respond favorably to CSR activities that are pertinent to the company's core business and expressed in an open and honest way, according to a study by Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010). The main objective of this research is to get a clear picture of how much citizens value companies that behave in a socially responsible manner. In terms of social responsibility, a questionnaire survey was conducted, and respondents were also asked questions about the use of social responsibility in Kosovar food companies and the value of corporate image and consumer loyalty.

A food firm in Kosovo called Albi has made investments in programs that support regional agriculture, give people access to safe and wholesome food, and preserve the environment. "We are not simply a food company, but also a firm that cares about the wellbeing of people and the safety of food," the company said in a statement (Albi, n.d.).

The Kosovo food industry still has to deal with issues like income inequality and a lack of the essential technologies to increase food production, nevertheless. It is crucial for food businesses to exercise social responsibility, participate in the growth of Kosovo's food sector, and focus on raising the standard of their goods (Musa et al., 2019).

Another food firm in Kosovo, Fshati, has supported regional farmers and exploited local resources to manufacture high-quality, fresh food. The business is dedicated to creating a food supply chain that is sustainable and has a good effect on the environment and nearby communities (Fshati, n.d.). By studying these companies, we obtain a deeper grasp of the relationship and influence of social responsibility on product credibility and the direct impact on the company's image.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming a hot topic among academics and industry professionals as they see it as a good way to build long-term partnerships with customers (Mohammed & Rashid, 2018).

In recent years, corporate social responsibility (hereafter, CSR) has been recognized as an effective strategic marketing technique. There are two reasons for the increased interest in CSR. On one hand, customers expect more from companies than a high-quality product at a reasonable price, and when they compare identical

items, they choose socially responsible companies. On the other hand, focusing on non-economic variables can give a company a competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2006). There are a number of reasons for today's emphasis on corporate social responsibility.

Criticism of the company has increased dramatically in recent years. Corporate social responsibility refers to the idea that companies have obligations to all social groups, except shareholders, that go beyond what is required by law or a union contract (Jones, 1980). It has been scientifically established that there is an indirect link between CSR and brand loyalty via the mediating role of functional and symbolic representations. The results show that legal and ethical obligations, as the two basic characteristics of NSP, promote brand loyalty by building positive functional and symbolic representations (He & Lai, 2014).

Therefore, corporate legal responsibility enhances a more functional image that consumers perceive as a symbolic image, while ethically responsible behavior influences a symbolic image rather than a functional image (He & Lai, 2014).

Looking back at previous empirical studies, the business justification for social responsibility and the reciprocal relationship between corporate social performance (CSR) and corporate financial performance (CFP) remain the most controversial issues in society (Barnett, 2007). If CSR has a universal and meaningful impact on customers, we need to be clear about the meaningful impact of socially responsible companies on the bottom line (Castaldo et al., 2009). Changing societal expectations have led companies to pay more attention to social responsibility in social terms, as they need to consider the potential impact of CSRs on policy and stakeholder interactions. This is particularly important in times of economic uncertainty (Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2010).

2.2. Customer Reliability

In some ways, consumer confidence is a subjective concept. There is no single explanation of what it means, nor is there an established technique for evaluating it (Merkle et al., 2003). Customers characterize the quality of service, and each customer considers the standard of care to be significant (Saleem & Raja, 2014). Thus, the customer is associated with a company's activity as the basis for building a brand's credibility. The priority a company gives to social responsibility has a direct impact on this scenario.

Previous research has shown that CSR has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty. Therefore, Rodrigues et al. (2011)

extended this work by experimentally investigating how CSR, including legal forms and ethical commitments, improves brand loyalty via the mediating role of functional and symbolic representations. Companies increasingly need intriguing alternatives that reinforce the symbolic strength of their brand. Corporate social responsibility policies could be one of these options. Consumers choose companies and brands that practice active social responsibility.

When social responsibility and brand image are linked, the same consumers adopt certain behaviors. These attitudes make customers more loyal and willing to pay a premium for the brand (Rodrigues et al., 2011). Consumers' views are influenced by their identification with the brand, but not by their actions, loyalty, or willingness to pay a higher price for the brand (Rodrigues et al., 2011).

Consumer loyalty and attitude are significantly and positively related to corporate social responsibility (CSR). In both attitude and action, there is a clear link between perceived service quality and loyalty. As a result, there is also a positive relationship between attitude, loyalty, and behavior (Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011).

2.3. Company Image

Aaker (1996) defines brand image as "the way people perceive the brand."

For marketers, brand image is a crucial concept. Numerous studies have confirmed that image issues influence purchase decisions (Dolich, 1969). A product is more likely to be used and loved if its image matches the user's current or desired self-image (Sirgy, 1985). According to several studies, one of the main incentives for including CSR in strategy is the ability to differentiate a company from its competitors (Porter & Kramer, 2006) and strategies to increase its competitiveness (Lee, 2008). Today, companies use their branding to define and tell their story and build their image. Because consumers associate products and services with their corresponding brands, the image of a successful company is a significant economic advantage. Brands serve as the foundation for a company's positioning and differentiation. In addition, the synergistic benefits derived from the power of a brand enable the creation of services and goods (Rodrigues et al. 2011). Brand image refers to a comprehensive view of the brand and emphasizes the person's thoughts and the ideas that the individual has about the product or service. It denotes the maximum expression of consumer loyalty and willingness to pay a premium price (Rodrigues et al. 2011).

A strong brand has many advantages. A well-designed advertising campaign for a company leads to more positive thoughts and perceptions about the brand image among consumers. An advertising effort that emphasizes a brand's connection to a better society has a high degree of loyalty (Kaur & Agrawal, 2011).

2.4. Kosovar Food Producers

Food safety is part of the customer's perceived (subjective) quality of a food product and is considered an essential component of food quality (Peri, 2006).

"Quality confidence" is defined as the informational stimulus related to product quality that customers can determine with their senses prior to consumption (Steenkamp, 1990). Food safety is a reliable attribute because it is not known before purchase whether the food is safe. Nor can safety be inferred from post-purchase experiences (Grunert, 2005), unless the customer becomes ill and the illness can be traced to the food with some certainty. Local foods are considered safer and of higher quality. Of course, consumer patriotism is vital to Kosovo residents (Haas et al., 2021).

Miftari (2009) found that the majority of Kosovar consumers had positive attitudes toward domestic (as opposed to foreign) dairy products, indicating an overriding patriotism among consumers regarding food. Domestic dairy products, according to Kosovo customers, were safer and of higher quality than imported dairy products (Haas et al., 2021).

A previous study found that consumers consider provenance, food safety certifications, and private labels as important tools for determining food safety and quality (Haas et al., 2016). Organic products (one type of food certification) are used by consumers as an indicator of quality. The extent to which people accept organic certification as an indicator of quality depends on their environmental concerns, trust in local producers, and ethnocentrism (Thogersen et al., 2019).

Based on a review of the literature, the following three options were proposed:

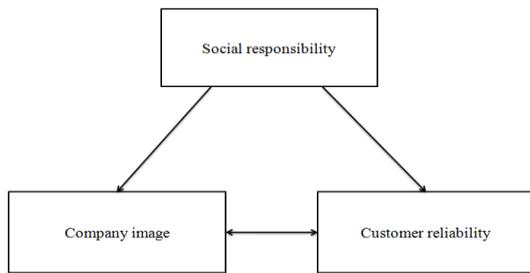
H1: Corporate social responsibility improves brand image.

H2: Business responsibility influences customer credibility positively.

H3: A positive association exists between brand image and customer credibility.

The following is the research theoretical model:

Figure 1. Model of conceptual research



Source: Author, 2022

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

The study was conducted using a questionnaire, which was distributed to 303 Kosovo people (consumers). The participants in the research were potential consumers who could use Kosovar foods. The questionnaire was completed online, and only those who could access the link placed on social media were included in the research. Table 1 presents the sample's descriptive data.

3.2. Instruments

We utilized Habel's (2016) engaged CSR meter, which comprises of eight questions, to measure social responsibility (statements).

Using a Likert measure, responses were graded from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. "Kosovo food corporations investigate environmental sustainability," for example, is one of these assertions.

Swaen and Chumpitaz's (2008) confidence gage was used to gauge consumer trust in the firm. This measure consists of six statements (questions) scored on a Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. One of these comments would be, "The goods of these firms provide me a sense of security". The company's image was assessed by adapting the Kim et al. (2017) scale, which consists of five assertions" (statements). The Likert scale was used to assess whether (1) I disagree to (5) I completely agree. For example, "I believe Kosovar food firms are safe," is one of these assertions.

The questionnaire also includes six demographic items with a nominal numerator.

3. Data analysis

SPSS 26 and Amos 23 were used to analyze the data. Validity, reliability, linear regression analysis, and correlation are among the statistical studies done.

Table 1. The sample's descriptive statistics (n = 303)

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	125	41.3
	Female	178	58.7
Age	21-30	184	60.7
	31-40	61	20.1
	41-50	40	13.2
	51-60	16	5.3
	Over 60	2	0.7
Education	Primary School	9	3.0
	High School	60	19.8
	Bachelor	156	51.5
Occupation	Master & Doctorate	78	25.7
	Employed In The Public Sector	57	18.8
	Employed In The Private Sector	108	35.6
	Unemployed	41	13.5
	Student	85	28.1
	Housewife	9	3.0
Marital Status	Retired	3	1.0
	Single	157	51.8
	Married	126	41.6
Monthly Income	Other	20	6.6
	Under 300 Euros	140	46.2
	301-600 Euro	102	33.7
	601-900 Euros	28	9.2
	901-1200 Euro	14	4.6
Over 1200 Euros	19	6.3	

Table 1 summarizes the sample's characteristics. Men outnumbered females by a 58.7% to 41.3%. Most of the participants are aged 21-30 with 60.7%. At the level of education, 50.5% have a bachelor's education level and 25.7% have a master's and doctorate level. In the private sector, 35.6% of the participants are employed, in the public sector 18.8% and 28.1% of the participants are students. Regarding marital status, 51.8% of the participants are single, while 41.6% of them are married. Regarding the level of income, 46.2% of the participants earn less than 300 euros per month, while 33.7% of them earn 301-600 euros per month.

4.1. Reliability and validity of research

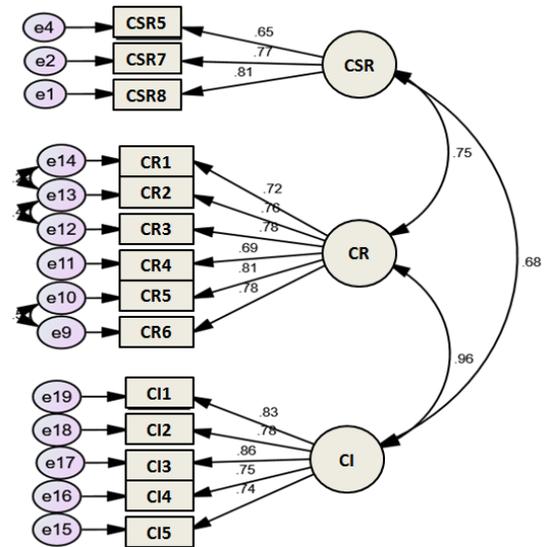
The validity of the measure was tested using confirmatory factor analysis. The findings of the confirmatory factor analysis are summarized in Figure 2.

Social responsibility: of the 8 (eight) items on this aspect, 5 (five) were removed and only 3 (three) were utilized. These questions were removed because they had a low burden on that factor and so were left.

No questions were removed from the other two categories, business image and customer reliability. Thus, 5 (five) questions were used to assess the firm's image, and 6 (six) questions were

used to assess customer reliability. The questions that were shown to be linked were those that assess customer trustworthiness. The following questions were found to be related: question 14 with question 13, question 13 with question 12, and question 10 with question 9.

Figure 2. A visual representation of the confirmatory factor analysis results.



Source: Author, 2022

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis results

Variable		Weights	CR	AVE	MSV
CSR	CSR8	.806	0.785	0.552	0.566
	CSR7	.766			
	CSR5	.647			
CR	CR6	.776	0.888	0.570	0.924
	CR5	.811			
	CR4	.687			
	CR3	.776			
	CR2	.757			
	CR1	.716			
CI	CI5	.738	0.894	0.629	0.924
	CI4	.754			
	CI2	.777			
	CI1	.835			
	CI3	.856			

Source: Author, 2022

The CFA findings are summarized in Table 2. The table covers CR (each factor's reliability), AVE (Average Variance Extracted or Convergent Validity), and MSV (Maximum Share Variance or Discriminatory Validity).

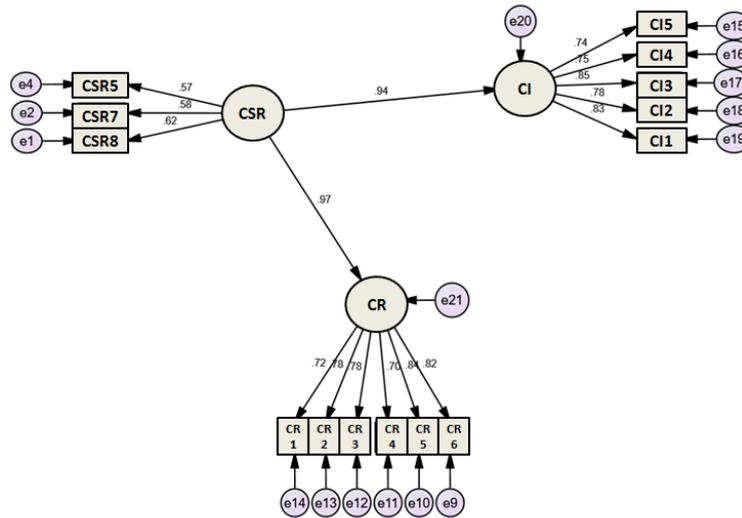
These numbers are greater than 0.50 and so are acceptable. Demonstrate that the meters are both trustworthy and accurate. Regression weight and convergent validity suggest that the scales employed are extremely reliable, and the AVE values for the three

variables are all more than 0.50. As a result, our model is both trustworthy and accurate.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

The Amos software was used to evaluate hypotheses using linear regression analysis.

Figure 3. Implementing regression analysis visually.



Source: Author, 2022

Table 3. The findings of a linear regression study in relation to hypothesis testing.

Parameter	Weights	The lowest level of reliability	The highest level of reliability	P
CSR→CI	.944	.909	.968	.013
CSR→CR	.973	.921	.997	.021

Source: Author, 2022

Regarding the first hypothesis, the regression analysis findings show that corporate social responsibility has a 94.4 percent influence on the company's image, and this impact is significant ($p=0.013<0.05$). As a result, our research's initial hypothesis is accepted.

In terms of the second hypothesis, the regression analysis results indicate that corporate social responsibility has a 97.3 percent influence on customer reliability, which is statistically significant ($p = 0.021<0.05$). As a result, the second hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4. Model testing results for the link between CR and CI.

Parameter	Weights	The lowest level of reliability	The highest level of reliability	P
CR→CI	.939	.905	.967	.014

Source: Author, 2022

The outcomes of the correlation study between customer dependability and corporate image are presented in Table 4. Customer reliability and corporate image have a 93.9 percent positive and very high relationship, and this relationship is significant ($p = 0.014 < 0.05$). The third hypothesis is deemed acceptable.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to investigate the relationship between these three factors (social responsibility, customer reliability, and corporate image). The effect and relationship that these three factors have with one another is also investigated. Based on the conclusions of the aforementioned writers, such as Jones (1980), the influence of social responsibility in today's business world and corporate commitment to this problem have emerged. The impact of social responsibility on a company's image has also been

demonstrated, making it look more serious and powerful in the market. The authors, He and Lai (2014), observed a beneficial impact in their study and validated this influence.

Furthermore, the research confirmed the positive influence that social responsibility has on customer reliability, based on the findings of Rodrigues et al. (2011), where this influence exists and plays a significant role in the assessment of consumers when they buy things from certain companies.

Moreover, it has been shown that there is a relationship between a company's image and consumer trustworthiness, two aspects whose development and success also depend on each other. Thus, if a company has a good reputation in the market, it influences customers to behave in a more trustworthy way when making a purchase, and vice versa, if customers have confidence in a company, this has the effect of further strengthening the company's image in the market alongside its competitors.

Managerial implications

It is important to emphasize that managers should also pay more attention to these three variables. Even though they are the responsible individuals who carry out the different operations in the company, they are also the people who must show the willingness to carry out actions related to social responsibility while being in contact with the owners.

Any company that is developing or anticipates future growth and expansion should have a department dedicated to this sector, and all actions should be overseen by competent management. It is worth investing in this sector not only to reduce costs for the company, but also to understand the other side of the coin in terms of marketing benefits.

Companies have a number of actions to strengthen their CSR involvement and improve their reputation as socially conscious organizations. According to research, the following tactics can be successful:

Recognize and rank societal issues: The social concerns that are most important to businesses and their stakeholders should be identified and given the highest priority by them. By doing so, they may direct their efforts toward those areas where they will have the greatest influence and forge a clearer sense of direction (Matten et al., 2008).

Create a thorough CSR strategy: Businesses should create a thorough CSR strategy that includes precise goals, targets, and performance indicators. This can assist them in transparently and

responsibly measuring and communicating their progress (Carroll et al., 2010).

Integrate CSR into fundamental company operations:

Organizations should integrate CSR into their operational procedures and decision-making frameworks. This can ensure that social and environmental concerns are taken into account in all areas of the business rather than being a secondary concern (Carroll et al., 2010).

As a result, the image of the company in the market will improve, and customers will have more confidence in the brand.

Research Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The sample size used for the analysis limits the results of the study. Due to the global epidemic, the questionnaire was conducted online. Therefore, the sample size is only as large as the number of people who were able to access it by distributing the link to complete the questionnaire. Despite the fact that the study was conducted with clients (public, private, and students), the majority of participants were young. The hypotheses studied have been confirmed.

However, it is suggested that future studies investigate and evaluate how the use of social responsibility affects the internal organization of the company. What is the impact on employee emotions and organizational performance? How do employee emotions affect organizational performance? Since this is a new topic that plays an important role in corporate marketing, I think it should be considered more and evaluated in a broader framework to properly understand and evaluate the impact that social responsibility seems to have on corporate operations and on the environment and society in general.

List of measurement items

Corporate Social Responsibility (Habel, 2016)

Food companies value environmental sustainability.

Food companies consciously act in the interest of the environment.

They regularly donate a portion of the proceeds to charity.

Kosovar food companies donate money to people in need.

Kosovar food companies are socially responsible for their employees.

They take care of their employees outside of the legal framework. Kosovar food businesses engage in local projects to support the community.

Kosovar food businesses care about the people in the communities where they operate.

Consumer Reliability (Swaen and Chumpitaz, 2008)

The products of these companies give me a sense of security.

I believe in the quality of the products of Kosovar food companies.

Buying products from Kosovar food companies is a guarantee of quality.

These companies are interested in their customers.

Kosovar food companies are honest in dealing with their customers.

These companies are honest with their customers.

Company image (Kimet et al., 2017)

I think Kosovar food companies are safe companies.

I think these companies value consumer rights.

I have a good impression of Kosovar food companies.

I think Kosovar food companies have a good image in the minds of consumers.

I think that the value of products and services offered by Kosovar food companies is high.

Demographic questions

Gender?

Age?

Education?

Professions?

Marital status?

Monthly income?

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