

An Empirical Study on the Consumer Perception towards CSR of the Indian Corporate Sector- (Spotlighting Selected Companies CSR Activities in Chennai Only)

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Abstract

Purpose: Corporate Social Responsibility is the idea that a company should play a positive role in the community and consider the environmental and social impact of business decisions. CSR is a light ignited to the life of poor and needy people since it lights the life of these people by aiding them. This paper unravels the perception of Consumer towards CSR.

Methodology: The research employs a structured questionnaire as its primary investigative tool, tapping into the insights of 126 enthusiastic consumers in the Chennai city. Convenience and snowball sampling have been used. And to validate the data percentage analysis and correlation have been used.

Expected Outcome: Ultimately, this empirical study aims to enrich our understanding of how the consumers perceive the CSR in Chennai City and also CSR activities of the selected companies

Findings: The study contributes to the existing literature by shedding light on the Consumer perception towards CSR in Chennai City. This study reveals that CSR influences consumer to purchase a product and CSR has a positive influence among the consumers in Chennai City.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Environmental, Business decisions, Consumers and Poor and needy people.

I. INTRODUCTION

CSR Definition

Carroll, ‘Corporate Social Responsibility involves the conduct of a business so that it is economically profitable, law abiding, ethical and socially supportive’.

Philip Kotler and Nancy Lee define CSR as “a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources”

Wood defined CSR as “the basic idea of corporate social responsibility is that business and society are interwoven rather than distinct entities”.

Shell defined CSR as “we all need to assess the impact our business makes on society and ensure that we balance the economic, environmental and social aspects of everything we do”.

Indian Companies Act 2013, “CSR is the process by which an organization thinks about and evolves its relationships with stakeholders for the common good, and demonstrates its commitment in this regard by adoption of appropriate business process and strategies”

Corporate Social Responsibility is an activity undertaken by companies to not just grow profits, but also to take a dynamic and positive role in the world around them. The term is also associated with the related term corporate citizenship.

CSR is an approach that adopts the idea that a company can do favorable things to the world and make a difference to develop social order. It’s a topic that can involve the board of directors in an organization, as CSR reflects company culture and business practices. Social responsibility is a wide concept, it includes human aspects, such as having moral labor practices both internally and as well as externally. CSR has also long been associated with the concepts of community engagement and philanthropy.

The concept of CSR remains on the ideology of business giving return to society as their business develop. Companies take resources in the form of raw materials, human resources etc. from the society. By engaging in CSR activities, the companies are giving return to the society.

The Corporate Social Responsibility does not only fulfill the social obligations of the businesses, it also assists them bring sustainable growth with its customer eventually becoming loyal for their social involvements.

Many people misunderstood; the CSR is mere donations. Actually, CSR is a self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable to itself, its stakeholders and the public. Companies can be conscious of the kind of impact they are having on all aspects of society including ethical, economical, philanthropic and environmental.

Selected companies CSR activities

1. Tata Consultancy Service

The main vision of TCS is to empower communities by connecting people to opportunities in the digital economy, build equitable, sustainable and inclusive pathways to opportunities for all- especially youth, women and marginalized groups. TCS focus on education, skilling, leading to creation of livelihood through employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities, TCS also supports health and wellness, water sanitation and hygiene for the marginalized people. In education and skilling area, TCS equip youth, women and marginalized groups with skills to be successful in 21st century opportunities, resulting in creation of employment and entrepreneurship and leading to enhancement of livelihood. TCS also invest in conservation efforts and support relief efforts to communities at the time of natural and man-made disasters. TCS also implements programs that create large-scale social transformation, while focusing on the key challenges and issues in the community. For this, it leverages an engagement model that makes use of its intellectual, technology, human and financial capital.

Award – ‘TCS wins Corporate Social Responsibility Award for Ignite my future in school program’

2. Reliance

The main vision of Reliance is to transform the rural areas, empowering villages, also focuses on health, education, sports for development, disaster relief through working with communities and implement development programmers. Reliance has spent a whopping amount of Rs.1271 crores on CSR activities in the financial year 2022-2023. And during the covid-19 times, four million plus free vaccinations were provided to employees, extended families and general communities. Reliance CSR activities include a) community and public health projects including preventive and public healthcare initiative and support community health outreach programmers through static and mobile health care. b) Promoting institution of eminence, scholarship and educational support to backward students, infrastructure development for primary schools, anganwadis. c) Reliance foundation youth sports programmed, Reliance foundation young champs programmed and Grassroot sports promotion programmed are conducted to develop the sports among the marginalized people. d) Gender and women empowerment programmed to empower women.

Award – “Reliance Foundation Digital Extension Services for Disaster Management” was selected for the CII – DX (Digital Transformation) 2022 under the category of “Innovations in CSR”. Reliance Foundation was awarded the Golden Peacock award for its initiatives across the country.

3. Infosys

The objectives of Infosys CSR are alleviating hunger, poverty and malnutrition, to protect the environment, and to support communities, stakeholders and society. Infosys focus area is eradicating extreme hunger, poverty and malnutrition, promoting preventive healthcare and sanitation and making available safe drinking water. Strengthening rural areas by improving accessibility, housing, drinking water, sanitation, power and livelihoods and thereby creating sustainable villages. Promoting gender equality and empowering women, setting up homes, hostels and day care centers for women and orphans, setting up old age homes. Ensuring environmental sustainability, ecological balance, protection of flora and fauna, animal welfare, agro-forestry, conservation of natural resources and maintaining the quality of soil and protecting national heritage, art and culture, including the restoration of buildings, sites of historical importance and developing traditional arts and handicrafts.

Award –Infosys Foundation in the financial 2022-2023 report has won the bronze award, under the Corporate Social Responsibility Report category at the 37th International ARC Awards.

4. HCL

HCL aim to create more equitable and sustainable communities where it operates. Our foundation is our source code – the codified, structured, scalable blueprint – for socioeconomic and environmental development. Our 450-strong team is breaking the cycle of poverty and regenerating local environments. We transform lives and spread smiles. Beyond India, we empower our people around the globe to deliver social impact and support the most vulnerable by focusing on the building blocks that nourish society. Our activities focus on the environment, education and health and well-being. To protect the environment, HCL is taking action and playing their part to mitigate the effects of pollution. And educating the future generation is another important activity done by HCL for marginalized people. HCL foundation CSR spent Rs.216 crores in the financial year 2022.

Award – HCL Technologies wins the National CSR award for its urban poverty alleviation program.

5. Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL)

The purpose is to make sustainable living commonplace. The objective of HUL is to set the direction for the CSR activities of the company by defining the governance, implementation and monitoring framework of the activities to ensure effectiveness. Focus area are promoting and encouraging healthy and hygienic habits, focus on nutrition, advocacy for behaviour change, sanitation and cleanliness. Environmental sustainability, ecological, protection of flora and fauna, conservation of natural resources, measures to prevent climate

change and creating water positive, zero waste to landfill and carbon neutral villages. Strengthening rural areas by promoting and enhancing alternate livelihoods, empowering women entrepreneurs, promoting gender equality, economic empowerment. Managing and responding to disasters, if any, measures for disaster recovery, undertaking relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction measures and activities.

Award – Hindustan Unilever Limited was awarded the ‘CSR Shining Star Award’ in the covid category presented by the Honourable Governor of Maharashtra Shri Bhagat Singh Koshyari.

Review of Literature

According to Amy C.M. Yeo and Steve Carter in their ‘Consumer perception towards corporate social responsibility practices (2020): a study of the Malaysian banking sector’ aims to investigate how banks customers perceived CSR practices in the banking industry in Malaysia. The results indicated that consumer awareness tended to be positively correlated to CSR practice and it was also one of the most important constructs contributing to the prediction of CSR with the exception of knowledge of consumers and purchasing decision.

Linking human values to consumer CSR perception: The moderating role of consumer skepticism (2020) by Santhiya Ramasamy, Karpal S. Dara Singh, Azlan Amran and Mehran NejatiAjibishesh examined the effect of human values on consumer CSR perception towards cosmetic companies. Also, skepticism is investigated in this paper. This study found that human values such as self-enhancement and openness to change have a significant influence on consumer CSR perception. And also revealed that consumer skepticism was also found to moderate the relationship between human values of openness to change, self-transcendence and conservation towards consumer CSR perception.

The impact of CSR on brand image: A survey amongst Gen Z consumer’s perception toward a supermarket chain in Vietnam (2020) by Ho Thi Hai Thuy and Ha Hien Minh consists of literature review on CSR theories, concepts of brand image and quantitative analysis of the relationship between them. The study’s finding revealed that, in order to enhance the brand image, a company needs to maintain and improve ethical responsibilities including ensure the quality of the products and services are safe. Ethical and philanthropic responsibilities are cues for companies to developing brand image toward Gen Z consumers.

According to Kristina Harrison and Lei Huang in their ‘Not all corporate social responsibility is created equal: A study of consumer perceptions of CSR on firms post fraud’ (2020) aims to provide marketers with

the implications of using different types of post-fraud CSR in order to help improve the consumer's general attitudes toward the firm, and consequently, repair the firm's damaged image. The study revealed that firms may wish to target consumers differently when communicating post-fraud CSR messages.

'The effect of CSR on corporate image, customer citizenship behaviors and customers' long- term relationship orientation' (2020) by Minjung Kim, Xuemei Yin and Gyumin Lee investigates the effect of multidimensional CSR activities on customer's corporate image, customer citizenship behavior and long-term relationship orientation. The study results indicate that economic, ethical, legal and philanthropic had a positive effect on corporate image and on consumer citizenship behavior (making recommendation, helping other consumers, and providing feedback).

The effects of corporate social responsibility on consumer loyalty through consumer perceived value (2019) by David Servera-Frances & Lidia Piqueras-Tomas analyses how consumers perceive the CSR actions carried out by retailing firms. This study demonstrates that investment in CSR policies increases consumer value, satisfaction and loyalty to the company. This study finds that CSR policies increase consumers' perceived value towards the company as well as trust, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty.

Sankar Sen, Shulli Du and CB Bhattacharya in their 'Corporate social responsibility: a consumer psychology perspective' (2016), attempted to provide an integrative sense for our extant understanding of consumer reactions to CSR. This paper discussed the several aspects of CSR. This paper finds that consumers respond more positively to a company's CSR when its products are perceived as stand-alone brands.

Longinos Margin, Pedro. J. Cuestas and Sergio Romain in their 'Determinants of consumer attributions of Corporate Social Responsibility', analysed why consumers make attributions of CSR that are either positive (values-driven or strategic motive) or negative (stakeholder-driven or egoistic motives). This study's main contribution is the integration of several variables- corporate ability, company-cause fit interpersonal trust, and corporate hypocrisy-into a framework and the analysis of their effect on positive and negative consumer CSR motives.

'Engaging consumers with corporate social responsibility campaigns: The roles of interactivity, psychological empowerment and identification' (2021) Sun Young Lee, Yeuseung Kim and Young Kim explores the mechanism through which CSR campaigns that solicit consumer participation benefit companies more than do non-participatory campaigns. Two studies were conducted for this study. Study one demonstrated that actively participating consumers in CSR campaigns were more likely to consider the company's motives public-serving rather than self- serving, evaluated the

company more favorably and had higher purchasing intention. Study two showed that psychological empowerments and consumer-company identification can explain the positive effects of perceived interactivity. Participatory campaigns have a positive relationship with purchase intention of consumers.

'The Formation Mechanism of Consumer Perceived Consumer Social Responsibility Authenticity: An Empirical Study of Chinese Consumers' (2020) by Jing Yu, Changjun Jiang, Xiaohong Zhung, Sanggyun Na and Zongmin Cui attempted to understand the mechanism of Consumer Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility which could make it better able to play its role in several ways. The consumer perceived senior managers involvement, consumer perceived CSR commitment as a whole and consumer perceived strategy-driven motive and consumer perceived value-driven motive are the three independent variables. The study revealed that three variables can directly affect CPCSRA.

Consumer perception of corporate social responsibility and purchase behaviour – Akanksha Shukla, Geetika Goel and Nidhi Tiwari investigate whether the consumers perception of CSR has an impact on their purchase behaviour. In this study CSR perception of consumers has been categorized into four dimensions namely Instrumental Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR), Normative Corporate Social Responsibility (NCSR), Non voluntary Corporate Social Responsibility (NVCSR) and Legal Corporate Social Responsibility (LCSR). ICSR and NCSR are found to positively impact purchase intention and willingness to pay whereas LCSR negatively impacts purchase behavior and NVCSR has no influence on consumers.

'Role of CSR in the consumer decision making process (2017) by Sudepta Pradhan attempts to clarify the process by which consumers use their perceptions of CSR to formulate their purchase decision. This study conducted in-depth interviews from consumers. The study revealed that the evaluation of CSR initiatives is an intricate, logical and structured process where consumers consider factors that are valued by them. This study provides a better insight in the intention – behaviour gap. There were consumers who believed in the concept of CSR and were willing to purchase from a CSR engaged firm and others fail to purchase CSR engaged firm even after knowing the concept of CSR.

India-specific corporate social responsibility-consumer perception scale (2021) by Ruch Tewari, Ekta Sharma and Anupam Singh attempts to present a novel, statistically validated, India-specific CSR-consumer perception scale (CSR-CPS). This study was carried out in two phases. Phase one included identifying CSR attributes from the past literatures and another phase consist of 750 customers of different industries. This study finds that consumer's trust and satisfaction towards the company's products and services are framed based on

their perception of the company's corporate social responsibility.

'The Relationships Between Corporate Social Responsibility, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Consumer Rights Awareness and Repurchase Intention'(2017) by Kamarudeen Babatunde Bello investigated a model of direct and indirect relationships between perceived CSR, service quality, customer satisfaction, consumer rights awareness and repurchase intention. The findings revealed that consumer's perceived CSR directly influenced service quality, satisfaction and repurchase intentions. While service quality and satisfaction were indicated as having partial mediating effects on the relationship between perceived CSR and repurchase intention.

'The effect of perceived CSR effort on consumer brand preference in the clothing and footwear sector (2020) by Mohamad Ali Achabou explored the influence of perceived corporate social responsibility effort on consumer preference in the case of brands with different CSR histories in the clothing and footwear sector. This study finds that in spite of sensitivity of the respondents to the social and environmental conditions involved in the manufacture of the shoes they purchase, they mainly preferred Nike – regardless of its shorter CSR history. Customer recognition of a greater CSR efforts by atangonia does not seem to change this preference.

Research Gap: Many researches were conducted on CSR, but on company point of view, only countable of finger studies have been taken place on consumer perception towards CSR. As far as Chennai is concern very few studies have taken place. This study fills that gap by attempting to understand the perspectives of consumer towards CSR engaged companies in Chennai. Furthermore, this paper attempted to identify whether the brand image, trust, loyalty etc. towards a CSR engaged company enhances among the consumers. This study is an attempt to find whether CSR has an influence over the purchase decision of the consumer.

Statement of problem: On July 2023, Niti Aayog reported 14.9% of poverty, helping these people is not so easy for the Government single handedly, so it's the duty of every Indian citizen to help them out by providing them their needs. Individuals can help only a few people but if they join together, they can save a community. Therefore, CSR was introduced in companies to help the local community people. A company's CSR activities include charitable giving, reducing carbon practices, equality, eradicating poverty etc. From CSR the local community people will be getting benefits and their standard of living would develop. There after the benefitted people may become the consumer of the that company, later they may also become an opinion leader in order to help the company back, eventually a large group of people will become their consumers. Hence this study investigates the perception of the consumer towards the CSR

engaged company. Which will be very useful for the company, this will motivate the company to help more.

Objectives

- To investigate the factors influencing consumers to purchase CSR engaged company products in Chennai City.
- To analyse the risks experienced by consumers in purchase of CSR engaged company products in Chennai City.
- To explore whether Company's goodwill enhances among the consumers towards CSR engaged companies.

Hypothesis

1. H₀ – There is no significant influence of CSR over the purchase of products. H₁ – There is a significant influence of CSR over the purchase of products.
2. H₀ – There is no significant influence of CSR risks over the purchase of products. H₁ – There is a significant influence of CSR risks over the purchase of products.

Methodology

This paper is empirical and conceptual in nature. The study is Analytical and Descriptive in nature.

Sources of Data Collection:

Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used. Primary data has been collected through structured questionnaire.

Secondary data were relied upon books, journals, newspaper and websites.

Sampling technique: Convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques have been used to collect the data.

Sample size: Questionnaire circulated to 180 respondents but we got only 126 responses.

Scope of the Study: The scope of the study is restricted only to Chennai city.

Limitations

- Is purely based on the response given by the respondents.
- With only 126 responses collected from the city cannot be considered as a complete representation of the population of the country.
- This study is limited to Chennai City only.
- The perception of 126 respondents cannot be generalized.

Tools of the analysis: Percentage analysis, regression and rank correlation analysis have been used to analysis the data.

Table 1
Analysis and Interpretation

S.no	Demographic Factor		Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	78	62
		Female	48	38
2	Age	Less than 20	31	25
		20 to 28 years	64	51
		29 to 39 years	12	10
		40 to 50 years	9	7
		51 years above	10	8
3	Educational qualification	Higher Secondary	12	10
		Under Graduate	48	38
		Post Graduate	54	43
		Professional	10	8
		Others	2	2
4	Marital status	Single	92	73
		Married	34	27
5	Occupation	Student	85	67
		Employed	7	6
		Business	9	7
		Professional	9	7
		Others	16	13
6	Monthly Family Income	0-20 thousand	51	40
		20-40 thousand	30	24
		40-60 thousand	14	11
		60 thousand above	31	25

Table 2
Factors influencing consumers to purchase CSR engaged company products

S.no	Questionnaire	Statistical inference r (Correlation)
1	Fair Pricing	0.92
2	Quality product	0.87
3	Empowering consumers through ethical purchasing	0.82
4	Eco-friendly products	0.84
5	Clean air and water, benefitting consumer health	0.79
6	Reduced emission of harmful gas	0.80
7	Recycle of products	0.88
8	Consumer protection	0.82
9	Safety product	0.75
10	Disclosing information about the company	0.71
11	Protecting consumer information	0.73
12	Poverty alleviation efforts	0.69
13	Community development	0.70
14	Access to basic needs	0.84
15	Disaster relief	0.73
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1	Fair Pricing	0.92
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8	Consumer protection	0.82
9	Safety product	0.75
10	Disclosing information about the company	0.71
11	Protecting consumer information	0.73
12	Poverty alleviation efforts	0.69
13	Community development	0.70
14	Access to basic needs	0.84
15	Disaster relief	0.73

From the above table we come to know that males are the leading respondents with 78 out of 126, remaining 48 are females, as far as age is concern 20 to 28 years are more in numbers with 64 followed by less than 20 years with 31, 51 years above 10 and remaining 9 comes under 40 to 50 years old. According to Educational qualification Post graduate stands with 54 respondents, followed by Under graduate 48, Higher secondary 12, Professional 10 and remaining 2 with others. As per marital status, most of the respondents are single with 92 and remaining 34 are married. According to occupation, there are 85 students, followed by 16 others, 9 business, 9 professional and remaining 7 employed. Finally comes Monthly family income, 0 to 20 thousand stands top with 51, followed by 60 thousand above 31, 20 to 40 thousand with 30 and remaining 14 comes under 40 to 60 thousand.

Factors influencing consumers to purchase CSR engaged company products

From the above table we are trying to understand the relationship between the CSR and consumer purchase of CSR engaged company products. For this study we have used correlation. Fair Pricing is the highly correlated with 0.92, followed by Recycle of products with 0.88, Quality product with 0.87, Eco-friendly products with 0.84, Access to basic needs with 0.84, Empowering consumers through ethical purchasing with 0.82, Consumer Protection with 0.82, Reduced emission of harmful gas with 0.80, Clean air and water, benefitting consumer health with 0.79, Safety product with 0.75, Protecting consumer information with 0.73, Disaster management with 0.73, Disclosing information about the company with 0.71, Community development with 0.70 and the least correlated is Poverty alleviation efforts with 0.69.

Null hypothesis is rejected and Alternative hypothesis is accepted Therefore, there is a significant influence of CSR over the purchase of products.

Table 3

Risks involved in consumer purchase of CSR engaged company products

S.no	Questionnaire	Statistical inference r (correlation)
1	Lack of companies CSR activities awareness among the consumers	0.95
2	No evident CSR benefit	0.77
3	Additional expenses pass on to consumers	0.76
4	High operating cost results in increased product price	0.84
5	Some companies make false or misleading claims	0.84

6	Lack of sincerity in company's CSR effort	0.82
7	Lack of CSR leads to losed trust	0.68
8	Some companies engage in CSR scam	0.81
9	Consumers may face dilemmas if companies engage in CSR but have controversial practices	0.71
10	Global CSR efforts may neglect addressing specific local consumer concerns	0.74

From the above table we are trying to understand the relationship between CSR and risk involved in purchasing CSR engaged company products. Correlation has been used in this study. Lack of CSR awareness among the consumer strongly correlated with 0.95 followed by High operating cost results in increased product price with 0.84, Some companies make false or misleading claims with 0.84, Lack of sincerity in company's CSR efforts with 0.82, Some companies engage in CSR scam with 0.81, No evident CSR benefit with 0.77, Additional expenses pass on to consumers with 0.76, Global CSR efforts may neglect addressing specific local consumer concerns with 0.74, Consumers may face dilemmas if companies engage in CSR but have controversial practices with 0.71 and the least correlated is Lack of CSR leads to lose trust with 0.68. Null hypothesis is rejected, Alternative hypothesis is accepted. There is significant influence of CSR risks over the purchase of products.

Table 4
Factors enhances among the consumers towards the CSR engaged company

S.no	Questionnaire	Agrees	Rank
1	Company's reputation	102	1
2	Trust	99	2
3	Brand image	95	3
4	Loyalty	91	4
5	Competitive advantage	73	5

From the table we try to understand whether CSR engaged company enhances the following among the consumer, Company's reputation gets the first rank with 102, Trust gets the 2nd rank with 99 agrees, Brand image gets 3rd rank with 95, Loyalty gets 4th rank with 91 agrees and Competitive advantage gets last rank with 73 agrees.

Findings

It has been found that most of the consumers consider CSR performance of the company to purchase its product, so CSR should be taken seriously by the company since consumers have an eye on the CSR performance. In this study we also found that majority of the consumer feel that CSR is really benefit to the society. In addition, the study reveals that CSR influences consumer to purchase CSR engaged company products. CSR have humongous benefits over the society with some loopholes in it, which has to be restricted by the Indian Government. Overall CSR is considered to be a beneficial activity to the society.

Suggestions

- a) All CSR engaged companies need to create an awareness regarding their CSR activities to the people.
- b) Most of the CSR engaged companies strive to help global people, so local people are neglected, but local people should be given preference.
- c) The Indian Government should encourage the CSR engaged companies to donate more by giving exemptions and tax benefits.
- d) The Government of India should set up a committee to view the companies CSR activities and to mitigate the CSR scams.
- e) Most of the CSR engaged company might have conflicts between business interests and social responsibility; there shall be a proper balance between the business interests and social responsibility.
- f) Indian Government should increase the minimum CSR percentage from 2% to 5% since inflation has raised over the years.

II. CONCLUSION

Today's modern consumers are very intelligent, they have a clarity on what they purchase, the tendency to purchase a product by glancing the CSR activities have emerged among the consumers. Consumers expectation is accelerating every day, also their expectation towards the CSR performance of the company have climbed. So, companies should fulfill all the aspects of CSR namely economic, ethical, philanthropic and environmental aspects. Big establishments should concentrate on their social responsibility solemnly. Since big establishments which make of one thousand crores are less in numbers, medium and small-scale companies should also engage in CSR so that many local area needy people will get benefited. If all the companies help their local community, it will enhance the living standard of the local community by encompassing social development, job creation, inclusive growth, infrastructure enhancement, environmental sustainability etc. collectively contribute to the India's overall economic progress.

Scope For Future Study

- This same study can be conducted with a large sample size.
- This study can be conducted in other metro political cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

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