Corporate Social Responsibility's Impact on Purchase Intention: The Role of Involvement

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Abstract: As education levels rise, consumers become more aware of their consumption choices, and the flow of information becomes increasingly transparent, the significance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has grown in public and corporate spheres. This heightened attention reflects a growing consensus on the pivotal role CSR plays in shaping consumer behaviors, particularly their purchase intentions. In this evolving landscape, understanding the impact of CSR on consumer purchase decisions has become critically important for businesses aiming to align their values with consumer expectations and foster loyalty. This study leverages expectation theory and rationality theory to construct a comprehensive model that examines the influence of CSR on consumer purchase intentions. By delving into how consumers perceive CSR activities and the extent to which these perceptions influence their willingness to buy products from socially responsible companies, the research aims to provide valuable insights for businesses looking to enhance their CSR strategies. The research methodology included the distribution of questionnaires to a broad audience, resulting in 426 valid responses. Through a rigorous analytical process involving exploratory factor analysis for reliability, alongside correlation and regression analyses, the study sought to validate the hypothesis that CSR and consumer involvement have a positive impact on purchase intentions. Notably, the study also explored the moderating effect of consumer involvement in the relationship between CSR perceptions and purchase intentions. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between CSR initiatives and consumer purchase intentions, underscoring the importance of companies engaging in socially responsible practices. Moreover, the degree of consumer involvement was found to enhance the positive impact of CSR on purchase intentions, suggesting that more engaged consumers are likely to place greater value on CSR efforts when making purchasing decisions.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); Involvement; Purchase Intention

1. Introduction

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) traces its roots back to the early 20th century in developed nations across Europe and the United States. As globalization deepened, international trade activities intensified, ushering in a new era where CSR became a central issue for businesses worldwide. Scholars argue that although the free market mechanism has catalyzed the development of CSR, it has also given rise to significant challenges, including widening income disparities, environmental degradation, and the erosion of workers' rights (AlSuwaidi et al., 2021; Saka & Olanipekun, 2021).

These growing concerns have underscored the need for a balanced approach where businesses not only pursue economic gains but also take into account their environmental and social impacts. This holistic view suggests that the pursuit of profit should not come at the expense of societal welfare and environmental sustainability.

Historically, the rise of CSR can be attributed to various factors, including the increased awareness and activism among consumers, regulatory pressures, and a growing recognition among businesses about the long-term benefits of sustainable practices. As consumers became more informed and concerned about the ethical aspects of their purchases, companies recognized the necessity of adopting CSR practices to maintain their reputational capital and secure consumer loyalty (Wang & Zhang, 2020).

In this context, CSR initiatives have become instrumental for companies in building a positive brand image, which is crucial for earning consumer trust and fostering strong purchase intentions (Long et al., 2020). Consumers are increasingly looking for more than just high-quality products or services; they seek assurance that their purchases do not contribute to social or
environmental harms. This shift in consumer expectations has led businesses to view CSR as a strategic imperative, rather than a mere philanthropic gesture.

Moreover, the relationship between businesses and consumers is evolving. There is a growing perception that socially responsible behavior signifies a cooperative relationship aimed at safeguarding long-term interests. When consumers believe that a company's operations could potentially impose significant risks, they become more cautious in their purchasing decisions, emphasizing the importance of CSR in mitigating perceived risks and enhancing consumer confidence (Carrington & Neville, 2015).

The impact of globalization has not been confined to developed countries. China, with its meteoric rise as a global economic powerhouse, has also witnessed the burgeoning importance of CSR. Despite remarkable progress in economic terms, China's rapid development has unveiled various societal and environmental challenges, notably a glaring deficiency in corporate social responsibility among its enterprises. In response to these challenges and aligned with the new economic normal, there has been a concerted push within the country to elevate the role of CSR. This shift is seen as essential not only for enhancing the competitiveness of Chinese enterprises but also for fostering a positive corporate image and strengthening their core competencies.

In contemporary China, the emphasis on CSR extends beyond mere compliance with regulations. It is increasingly viewed as a strategic component that can drive innovation, improve risk management, and open up new business opportunities. For instance, Chinese companies are investing in sustainable practices and technologies, community development projects, and employee welfare initiatives, recognizing that such investments can yield significant dividends in terms of brand loyalty, consumer trust, and operational efficiencies.

Furthermore, the global dimension of CSR cannot be overstated. As Chinese companies expand their footprint worldwide, their CSR practices come under international scrutiny. Adhering to global CSR standards is not only a matter of ethical obligation but also a strategic necessity to compete effectively on the world stage. This alignment with global norms is facilitating a shift in perception, positioning Chinese firms as responsible global citizens committed to sustainable development.

In conclusion, the evolution of CSR from a Western concept to a global imperative reflects a broader recognition of the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. As businesses and societies grapple with the complexities of globalization, CSR emerges as a vital framework for ensuring that growth and development are equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. For enterprises worldwide, and particularly in China's dynamic market, embracing CSR is not just a moral choice but a strategic imperative for future success.

2. Literature review and hypothesis

Corporate social responsibility refers to the commitment of enterprises to carry out business practices voluntarily through their internal policies and resources, so as to maximize long-term community economic and social benefits (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). CSR activities of enterprises will directly or indirectly affect consumers' purchase intentions (Amatulli et al., 2018). When the record of CSR activities performed by enterprises has a positive impact on consumers' evaluation of enterprises, and when consumers' support and recognition of CSR is high, enterprises' CSR activities have a greater impact on consumers' evaluation of enterprises. The influence of corporate CSR activities on the purchasing intention of consumers with high CSR supporters will have a positive impact on the evaluation of enterprises. At the same time, CSR has a positive impact on consumers' purchasing decisions, that is to say, if an enterprise has a good image, customers will increase their purchasing intention. The purchasing intention of consumers is often used to demand for products in the future, to predict future advertising and promotion activities of enterprises, and to evaluate the rationality of a series of activities currently carried out by enterprises. Therefore, for the development of enterprises, it is extremely important to study the purchasing intention of consumers.

Consumers' corporate attitudes and purchase intentions increase as their awareness of CSR increases (Sen et al., 2006). According to the research of Creyer and Ross (1997), when enterprises show some moral behaviors, consumers are more willing to pay relatively large costs to purchase corresponding products. Lichtenstein, Drumwright and Braig (2004) verified based on experimental analysis that CSR behavior has an impact on consumers' thinking perception in terms of corporate product marketing and non-profit donation.
Grimmer and Bingham (2013) adopted empirical analysis and took participation in environmental protection as a classic example to study the differentiated responses of different consumer groups to CORPORATE social responsibility. The research results confirmed that enterprises with high environmental performance had stronger purchase intentions.

Based on the theoretical research in the above literature, it can be found that when enterprises start to actively fulfill their social responsibilities, consumers’ own active purchase intention presents an upward trend, which generates a benign supporting force. According to expectation theory, rationality theory and rational behavior theory, consumers’ social expectations of enterprises will influence enterprises’ sense of identity to a certain extent, and then change consumers' attitude towards enterprises, forming a positive effect and affecting consumers' purchase intention. At the same time, This purchase intention will be affected by the opinions of external groups and attitudes of consumers themselves. Therefore, based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1: Corporate social responsibility helps to improve consumers' purchase intention.**

Consumers' evaluations of enterprises come from corporate associations (Berens et al., 2007), which are composed of corporate capabilities and ethical behaviors (Marin et al., 2009). The purchasing behavior of consumers will be influenced by his association with enterprises (Deng et al., 2011). Good corporate social responsibility image and information can help enterprises win the trust and recognition of consumers, so that consumers can develop loyalty to enterprises and their products (Oeberseder et al., 2014).

However, if consumers have a deep understanding of an enterprise's products and doubt the product or the behavior of the enterprise, such doubt will lead to negative word of mouth (Skarmeas et al., 2020). Therefore, consumers will be deeply involved in the product information and actively collect information by means of collecting consultation and understanding product information before purchasing products. If the product or brand information can make consumers feel satisfied, satisfied and moved, consumers will be motivated to buy.

Based on the theoretical research in the above literature, it can be found that when consumers have a strong interest in a product, their own active purchase intention presents a rising trend, which generates a benign supporting force. The degree of involvement will lead to consumers' stronger cognition of the attribute differences between different products. Meanwhile, consumers will strongly believe that products are important and become more loyal to brands. Therefore, based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H2: The degree of consumer involvement helps to improve the purchase intention of consumers.**

The degree of product involvement significantly affects consumers' responses to many marketing or advertising stimuli; Alternatively, the degree of involvement can significantly affect the degree of mental and physical effort invested by consumers in the purchase process (Kapferer & Laurent, 1986; Michaelidou & Dibb, 2008; Behe et al., 2015). When consumers want to meet the needs of a product or a brand, they will invest more in the product or the source of the brand, and different competitive product attributes will make consumers have different levels of involvement. With the increase of consumers' demand for a product, the degree of involvement will also increase, which usually has a positive influence. The difference in the degree of involvement will affect consumers' purchase intention and the difference in the purchase decision process (Blackwell et al., 2001).

Comparatively speaking, customer value refers to the relative evaluation by customers on the company's performance and effectiveness in terms of its competitive position in the whole industry, while customer satisfaction refers to a person's belief and hope to achieve emotional pleasure. For consumers, satisfaction is a process of psychological comparison. When the service value is consistent with the expectation or the consumers are satisfied with the fair treatment (Hong, 1995), it means that customer satisfaction should be the value that the customers get equal to the expectation.

**H3: The degree of involvement has a interfering effect on the relationship between CSR and purchase intention.**

This research model is based on the attribution theory and stakeholder theory. From the perspective of consumer involvement degree, the correlation between corporate social responsibility and consumer purchase intention is discussed. Then, according to the degree of involvement as a moderating variable, it discusses what factors affect why and how consumers choose socially responsible behaviors. Accordingly, the following research framework is proposed, as shown in figure 1.
3. Objectives

On the basis of expectation theory and rational behavior theory, as well as by summarizing the deficiency of existing research, this study summarizes three research objectives for discussion, which are described as follows:

1) The relationship between corporate social responsibility and consumers' purchase intention.
2) The relationship between consumer involvement degree and consumer purchase intention.
3) The moderating relationship between the degree of consumer involvement in corporate social responsibility and consumer purchasing intention.

4. Materials and methods

4.1 Methodology Overview

1. Literature Research Method

Literature research serves as the foundational method of this study. By leveraging existing literature, this approach enables a comprehensive exploration of the mechanisms through which CSR impacts consumer purchase intentions. The method involves meticulous data arrangement, synthesis of materials, and content analysis. Specifically, this study focuses on consumers who have previously purchased products from Erke, aiming to dissect the multifaceted influence of CSR. This necessitates a deep dive into existing research on consumer purchase intention factors, CSR, and its consumer impacts, thereby identifying research gaps and formulating the study's core questions and contents. This groundwork is crucial for establishing a solid research base.

2. Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire survey method complements the literature research by gathering primary data directly from respondents. The study meticulously crafts its questionnaire design to cover corporate social responsibility, consumer involvement, and purchase intention. Drawing from authoritative scales featured in well-regarded journals, the questionnaire is meticulously tailored to align with the specific needs of this research. The data collected through this rigorous process are pivotal for the subsequent analysis.

4.2 Measurement Scales and Reliability

Corporate social responsibility is evaluated using a comprehensive CSR scale proposed by Yeo, Lee, and Carter (2018), encompassing economic, legal, ethical, philanthropic, and environmental dimensions. Each dimension is measured using five items on a Likert scale, demonstrating high reliability and validity (KMO = 0.963, Cronbach's α = 0.956). Purchase intention is assessed via a 5-item Likert scale, influenced by scales from Yeo et al. (2018) and Shabib and Ganguli (2017), ensuring robustness (KMO = 0.945, Cronbach’s α = 0.832). The involvement scale, inspired by the work of Blackwell et al. (2001), consists of 10 questions on a Likert scale, exhibiting strong reliability (KMO = 0.886, Cronbach’s α = 0.901).

4.3 Demographic Insights and Survey Findings

The demographic distribution of the survey respondents mirrors the broader societal structure in China, with a balanced gender ratio, a predominant age group of 18-25 years (52.58%), and a significant representation of individuals with college education (43.19%). The occupational distribution among participants reflects the diversity of the Chinese workforce, and the income levels reported are consistent with China's current economic landscape. A notable outcome of the survey is the significant impact of Erke's philanthropic actions on consumer purchase behavior, with 43.19% of respondents citing the company's donation activities as a key purchase driver. This finding underscores the potent influence of CSR activities on consumer decisions, particularly in instances where companies demonstrate a commitment to social welfare. Furthermore, the survey reveals that a substantial majority of consumers (77.70%) were first-time buyers of Erke products, highlighting the challenges Erke faces in building lasting customer relationships and brand loyalty in a competitive market.

The survey's demographic consistency with the general population enhances the representativeness of the findings, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of CSR, consumer involvement, and purchase intention. This comprehensive analysis not only contributes to the academic discourse on CSR but also offers practical implications for businesses seeking...
to navigate the complex interplay between corporate responsibility and consumer behavior.

5. Results and discussion

The average value of corporate social responsibility is 4.083, the average value of purchase intention is 3.936, and the average value of involvement is 3.846. The correlation analysis is shown in Table 1, and the correlation preliminarily verifies the hypothesis.

Table 2 presents three models, all of which choose consumers' purchase intention as the dependent variable and Model 1 as the control variable, introducing various demographic background variables. Based on model 1, independent variables and moderating variables were added in Model 2 to test the main effect. In Model 3, in addition to the variables examined in the previous two models, the interaction terms of independent variables and moderating variables in this study were put into the regression formula of each table respectively, and the hypotheses were tested in this model.

The findings from the analysis of Model 2 in this study underscore the significant impact of both corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the degree of consumer involvement on purchase intentions. The positive coefficients for CSR (β=0.324, p<0.05) and involvement degree (β=0.222, p<0.05) not only corroborate Hypotheses 1 and 2, respectively, but also highlight the intrinsic value that consumers place on the ethical and engagement practices of corporations. This revelation is crucial for understanding the dynamics of consumer behavior, especially in an era where ethical considerations are increasingly influencing purchasing decisions.

Expanding upon these foundational insights, Model 3 introduces a moderating regression framework to explore the interactive dynamics between CSR and the degree of consumer involvement. The introduction of a two-factor interaction term, as hypothesized, significantly enhances the model's explanatory power, with R² increasing to 33.1% (p<0.001). This notable enhancement in model performance underscores the complexity of the relationship between CSR and purchase intentions, revealing that the effect of CSR on consumer behavior is not uniform but rather contingent on the level of consumer involvement.

The significant interaction effect (β=0.348, p<0.05) observed between CSR and involvement degree supports Hypothesis 3, indicating that consumer involvement acts as a critical moderator in the CSR-purchase intention nexus. This finding suggests that the impact of CSR on purchase intentions is amplified among consumers who are more deeply engaged or involved with the brand or its products. Such consumers, likely due to a higher level of interest and information processing, may be more receptive to CSR initiatives, thus enhancing the positive influence of CSR on their purchasing decisions.

This nuanced understanding of the moderating role of involvement offers valuable implications for marketers and corporate strategists. It implies that CSR initiatives could yield more significant benefits in terms of bolstering purchase intentions if companies can simultaneously engage consumers and foster higher levels of involvement. This could involve strategies that not only highlight the company's CSR efforts but also actively involve consumers in these initiatives, thereby creating a more interactive and engaging brand experience.

In summary, the empirical evidence presented in this study provides robust support for the theorized relationships between CSR, consumer involvement, and purchase intentions. It underscores the importance of CSR in shaping consumer attitudes and decisions, and highlights the pivotal role of consumer involvement in modulating these effects. For companies striving to enhance their market positioning and foster sustainable consumer relationships, these insights underscore the critical importance of integrating CSR into broader marketing and engagement strategies.

Table 1. Correlation Analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility</td>
<td>4.083</td>
<td>0.885</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>3.846</td>
<td>1.043</td>
<td>0.148**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intention</td>
<td>3.936</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td>0.343**</td>
<td>0.335**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p<0.01
Table 2. Regression Table of Moderating Effects of Involvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Variable</th>
<th>M1 β</th>
<th>M2 β</th>
<th>M3 β</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Salary</td>
<td>-0.020</td>
<td>-0.049</td>
<td>-0.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons to attract consumption</td>
<td>-0.036</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>-0.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether it is the first purchase</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corporate Social Responsibility</th>
<th>0.324***</th>
<th>0.188**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>0.222***</td>
<td>0.147**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interaction Effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corporate Social Responsibility × Involvement</th>
<th>0.348***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj R²</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.369***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.405***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

6. Conclusions

This study explores the relationship between the three variables. Through literature review, it creates an association model between explanatory variables and explained variables, and then uses the degree of involvement as the connection between the two variables. The relationship between the three variables was tested by using the network questionnaire data, and the hypothesis was tested. With the help of SPSS 24.0, the relationship between the three was analyzed to verify the hypothesis and the following conclusions with practical significance and reference were obtained. Corporate social responsibility can help improve consumers' purchasing intention, similar to Amatulli et al.’s (2018), Sen et al.’s (2006) and Grimmer et al.’s (2013) results. When the record of CSR activities performed by enterprises has a positive impact on consumers' evaluation of enterprises, and when consumers' support and recognition of CSR is high, enterprises' CSR activities have a greater impact on consumers' evaluation of enterprises. The influence of corporate CSR activities on the purchasing intention of consumers with high CSR supporters will have a positive impact on the evaluation of enterprises. At the same time, CSR has a positive impact on consumers' purchasing decisions, that is to say, if an enterprise has a good image, customers will increase their purchasing intention.

Through empirical analysis, this paper proves that the degree of involvement helps to improve consumers' purchase intention, which is similar to the research results of Scholars Oeberseder et al. (2014), Deng et al. (2016) and Skarmeas et al. (2020). Consumers' evaluation of enterprises comes from enterprise association, which is composed of enterprise ability and enterprise moral behavior. And consumers' purchasing behavior will be affected by his association to the enterprise. Good corporate social responsibility image and information can win consumers' trust and recognition of the enterprise, so that consumers can create loyalty to the enterprise and its products, and then improve the purchase intention.

Through empirical analysis, this paper shows that the degree of involvement positively moderates the relationship between CORPORATE social responsibility and purchase intention. The results are similar to those of Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999), Sen and Bhattacharya (2001), And Vlachos et al. (2010). Consumers pay attention to the behavior of enterprises, but this is not the primary reason for consumers to purchase behavior. Good corporate social responsibility image and information can win consumers' trust and recognition of the enterprise, so that consumers can have loyalty to the enterprise and...
its products, and also affect consumers’ purchase intention and recommendation intention.

7. Recommendations for future research

1) Enhancing consumers' expectations of corporate behavior and corporate social responsibility can promote positive responses to internal social responsibility (thoughts) and positive external responses (purchase intentions). Business participants need to properly allocate marketing resources, balance market interests and short-term sales performance, and balance all stakeholders to establish a good social image and ensure the sound development of the company.

2) Companies need to provide CSR information in a timely manner in order to have a positive impact on social responsibility behavior and customer purchase behavior, and successfully gain corporate responsibility trust. Social responsibility improves the efficiency and effectiveness of information dissemination. The results of this study hope that more and more companies will realize that CSR information can attract the attention of expanding customers in a timely manner and improve the visibility and purpose of the company. For example, if a company in the industry association can provide customers with accurate information about corporate social responsibility, it will help increase the impact of corporate social responsibility on customers’ daily purchasing behavior.

3) Brand image is the impression of customers on enterprise products, brand image is very important for the development of the company. A good brand image means that the company's products are of high added value, and if the company's service is guaranteed, it will gain a good reputation. In the consumer group, maintaining such an excellent brand image should be an important goal of enterprise management. As a company, it can vigorously strengthen its publicity activities to improve its reputation and inform customers of the advantages of its brand as much as possible. Companies can use social media to create corporate videos or sponsor events to participate in marketing campaigns to grab customers' attention.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References


