# The Relationship among Corporate Social Responsibility, Consumer-Company Identification, Brand Prestige, and Purchase Intention

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## Abstract

This study analyzes relationships between corporate social responsibility, consumer-company identification, brand prestige, and purchase intention. A self-report survey yields data for 252 college students. After confirming reliability and validity of survey questionnaire, the structural equation modeling was used for tests the model. Results were summarized as follows: (a) CSR image has a significant positive effect on brand prestige and consumer-company identification. (b) Brand prestige has a significant positive effect on consumer-company identification. (c) Consumer-company identification has a significant positive effect on purchase behavior. (d) Consumer-company identification mediates the effect of CSR image on consumers' purchase intention. This outcome reveals that CSR image creates consumers' identification with the company, which may enhance consumers' purchase intention.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, consumer-company identification, brand prestige, purchase intention

## 1. Introduction

The last two decades have seen growing important placed on research in corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Malik, 2015). In recent years, CSR is getting considerable attention not only from scholars but also from consumers (Park, Lee, & Kim, 2014). Researches indicate that CSR can increase brand value, bolster consumer loyalty, and escalate sales revenue (Jeong, Paek, & Lee, 2013; Lee, Lau, & Cheng, 2013). Moreover, CSR can also facilitate the company to differentiate their products from industry competitors and establish a clean-cut brand prestige (Malik, 2015). In simple terms, a firm can boost their sales and profitability through practicing CSR initiatives.

An increasing number of consumers have made their purchase decisions by observing the company's CSR practices or ethical behaviors (Davies, Lee, & Ahonkhai, 2012; Grimmer & Bingham, 2013). When conscientious consumers find out that the company with a good CSR reputation, they tend to reward the company (e.g., Carrotmob, word-of-mouth, buying products); once consumers discover that the company was "doing badly", they would like to adopt punish behavior to reflect consumers' indignation (e.g., complain, boycott, and protest) (Sweetin, Knowles, Summey, & McQueen, 2013). Not only had consumers spread burnished or tarnished word of mouth, they had also empowered consumer movement in an enthusiastic way. As Smith (1995) pointed out, we are now living in the "ethics era".

Nevertheless, even though researchers addressed those benefits the companies can obtain from practicing CSR. When it comes to consumers' purchasing behavior, these studies appear to contradict one another; some have been suggested that CSR has a positive impact on consumers' purchase behavior (Lee & Lee, 2015; Mohr & Webb, 2005), and some addressed that CSR only has minor impact (Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001). However, the effect of CSR still remains unclear.

Over the past 20 years, there are numerous corporate social irresponsibility events (e.g., gutter oil, contaminated food) in Taiwan. Dishonest enterprises made a fortune by selling conscienceless goods. It triggered Taiwanese consumers to organize a boycott activism spontaneously. Besides, more and more consumers chose buycotting to replace boycotting, which reflected that "Carrotmob" would be a novel form of future ethical consumption (Hoffmann & Hutter, 2012). Since consumers have the power to choose either carrot or stick, it is important to

understand what factors affect Taiwanese consumers' purchase behavior.

This research tends to investigate how do CSR image, brand prestige, and consumer-company identification affects consumers' purchase intention.

## 2. Literature Review

Due to product diversification and consumer awareness in today's product market, consumers change their loyalty easily. More and more companies trying to build long-term relationships with consumers. Corporate social responsibility became an effective marketing strategy that companies using to enhance their image, reputation, identification, and purchase intention (Mohr & Webb, 2005; Lee & Lee, 2015; Saeidia, Sofiana, Saeidia, Saeidia, & Saaeidi, 2015). Several studies have suggested that CSR could not only increase brand prestige, but also mediate the relationship between CSR and brand performance (Lai, Chiu, Yang, & Pai, 2010; Saeidia et al., 2015). Based on the literature review, the present study address 6 hypotheses, the theoretical model (see Figure 1) are proposed.

Steenkamp, Batra and Alden (2003) defined brand prestige as "the relatively high status of product positioning associated with a brand" (as cited in Baek, Kim & Yu, 2010). Helm (2011:657) defines corporate reputation "is a socially shared impression—a collective construct—because it relies on an individual's perception of how other people view the firm". A growing number of companies adopted CSR initiatives to increase their prestige (Curras-Perez, Binge-Alcaniz & Alvarado-Herrera, 2009; Lai et al., 2010; Pomering & Johnson, 2009). Park et al. (2014) adapted Carroll's four CSR responsibilities (economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic) to test the relationship among CSR responsibility, consumer trust, and corporate reputation, found out that economic and legal CSR initiatives had a direct positive effect on corporate reputation. Moreover, Saeidia et al. (2015) found that reputation and competitive advantage mediating the relationship between CSR and firm performance. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H1. CSR image has a positive influence on brand prestige.

In order to maintain their customers, the company needs to make consumers identified with them; and further, consumers will support the company. This process was deemed consumer-company identification, which is, how consumers defined themselves, based on the role as being a consumer of the company and perceived organizational identity (Curras-Perez et al., 2009; Einwiller, Fedorikhin, Johnson, & Kamins, 2006). Bhattacharya and Sen (2003, p. 77) defines consumer-company identification as "the relationships are based on consumers' identification with the companies that help them satisfy one or more key self-definitional needs". Empirical studies show a positive relationship between CSR image and consumer-company identification (Lii & Lee, 2012; Marin & Ruiz, 2007). Hence, it is proposed:

H2. CSR image has a positive influence on consumer-company identification.

Johan and Ulf (2007) suggest that CSR image has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention. Lee and Shin (2010) noted that corporate social contribution and local community contribution affect consumers' purchase intention. Moreover, Sweetin et al. (2013) provide an interesting research, found that consumers had higher purchase intention to social responsible company than socially irresponsible company. On the contrary, Oberseder, Schlegelmilch and Gruber (2011) find that though consumers have positive attitude toward socially responsible companies, it may not affect their actual purchase behavior. The effect of CSR image remains unclear. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H3. CSR image has a positive influence on consumer's purchase intention.

Kuenzel and Halliday (2008) confirm that brand prestige positively affects consumers' brand identification. Also, Kuenzel and Halliday (2010) address that consumers have a higher level of brand identification when they perceive a reputable brand. Moreover, Lii and Lee (2012) testing CSR reputation (prestige) as a moderator of the relationship among CSR initiatives, consumer-company identification, and brand attitude, found that CSR initiatives have a significant effect on consumer-company identification and brand attitude. Hence, it is proposed:

H4. Brand prestige has a positive influence on consumer-company identification.

Elbedweihy and Jayawardhena (2014) summarize that brand prestige as an important antecedent of consumer's purchase intention. Tseng and Chen (2008) confirm that the higher consumer perceived brand prestige, the higher consumer purchase intention. Furthermore, Moslehpour, Pham, and Yumnu (2014) found that perceived brand prestige positively affects consumer purchase likelihood. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H5. Brand prestige has a positive influence on consumer's purchase intention.

Wu and Tsai (2007) found that consumer-company identification positively influences consumer purchase intention. Curras-Perez et al. (2009) and Bigne-Alcaniz, Curras-Perez, Ruiz-Mafe and Sanz-Bla (2010) also confirm that consumer-company identification positively affects consumer's purchase intention. Moreover, Perez (2009) reports that company attitude and company commitment are the mediators between CSR-based consumer-company identification and purchase intention. Hence, it is proposed:

H6. Consumer-company identification has a positive influence on consumer's purchase intention.

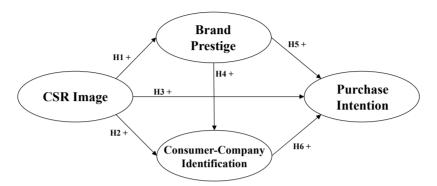


Figure 1. Conceptual model

## 3. Methodology

The sample consisted of undergraduate college students who were recruited via convenience sampling in central Taiwan. The populations of general consumers were hard to define, so this research focuses on college students as target consumers who had goods shopping experiences. Moreover, marketers regard college students as a major target group to expand and keep (Tarnanidis, Owusu-Frimpong, Nwankwo, & Omar, 2015). Thus, the sampling of college students met the purpose of this study. Participants answered survey questionnaire of the scales for CSR image, consumer-company identification, brand prestige, and purchase intention. The respondents rated the issues on a scale from one to seven where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 7 represented "strongly agree". Those variables were defined as follows.

### 3.1 Instruments

The CSR image scale (4 items) was adapted and modified from a scale by Curras-Perez et al. (2009), the scale received high internal reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .871$ ). The consumer-company identification (5 items) scale was adapted and modified from a scale by Perez, Rodriguez and Bosque (2013), the scale received high internal reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .942$ ). The brand prestige scale was adapted and modified from Mael and Ashforth's (1992) three-item scale, the scale received high internal reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .841$ ). Finally, the purchase intention was adapted and modified from Putrevu and Lord's (1994) three-item scale, the scale received high internal reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .860$ ).

### 4. Results

A total of 280 students participated in this research. Twenty-eight (0.1%) participants did not provide full data and were removed from the sample. The total effective sample is 252. While 49% (n = 124) of the sample were male, 51% (n = 128) were female.

### 4.1 CFA

Amos 22.0 was used to confirm the structure model relationships through confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). During the fit process through CFA, three items (CSR1, CCID1, and CCID2) were eliminated. The CFA results showed a good fit of the confirmatory measurement model ( $\chi^2_{(48)} = 83.002$ , p = .001;  $\chi^2/df = 1.729$ ; NFI = .961; CFI = .983; RMSEA = .054). Table 1 displayed the indicators calculated to verify properties and the main goodness-of-fit indexes.

### 4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 showed the profiles of participants. Descriptive statistics concerning CSR image, consumer-company identification, brand prestige, and purchase intention were presented in Table 3. As shown, the mean value of CSR image was 4.28 (SD = 1.15); that for the consumer-company identification was 4.50 (SD = 0.08); that for brand prestige was 5.60 (SD = 0.96); and the value for purchase intention was 4.69 (SD = 1.25). The Pearson

product moment correlations between variables were also displayed in Table 3. The correlations between all constructs are, as expected, positive at a significant level.

## 4.3 Estimation of Structural Relationships

Full model analysis was performed using the maximum likelihood test and structural relationships. Parameter estimates were accessed using SEM, and the Cronbach's coefficient was set at  $\alpha = .05$ . To begin with the offending estimates were used to examine whether (a) the estimated coefficients were larger or close to one (typically with a threshold of .95) or (b) the standard error was overly large or assumed a negative value. The offending variance in this study was fitted statistic requirement. Thus, the fit of indicator to each construction could be further examined.

Factor	Item	Loading	Standard Errors	CR	AVE
CSR image (CSR)					.728
	csr2	.817	.055	16.222	
	csr3	.801	.052	16.711	
	csr4	.939			
C-C identification (CCID)					.763
	cci3	.925	.055	16.680	
	cci4	.886	.059	16.714	
	cci5	.808			
Brand prestige (BPR)					.639
	bpr1	.800	.104	11.672	
	bpr2	.879	.112	12.342	
	bpr3	.713			
Purchase Intention (PIN)					.679
	pin1	.833	.050	16.177	
	pin2	.773	.051	14.456	
	pin3	.865			

## Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis

#### Table 2. Descriptive statistics of participants

	Ν	Valid percentage (%)	
Gender			
Male	124	49	
Female	128	51	
Monthly allowance			
NT\$2,001 - 4,000	68	27.0	
NT\$4,001 - 6,000	69	27.4	
NT\$6,001 - 8,000	64	25.4	
above NT\$8,000	51	20.2	

#### Table 3. Descriptive statistics of variables

	Number of items	Cronbach's a	Mean	SD	А	В	С	D
A) CSR	3	.887	4.28	1.15	1.00			
B) CCID	3	.901	4.50	0.08	.42**	1.00		
C) BPR	3	.841	5.60	0.96	.57**	.53**	1.00	
D) PIN	3	.860	4.69	1.25	.38**	.90**	.46**	1.00

\*\**p*<.01.

The square multiple correlations and the index fit of the model were shown in Table 4 and 5 respectively. As can be seen, all fit indices were within a satisfactory range. The fit indices were (a) absolute fit measures of the SRMR (<.05), RMSEA (<.08), (b) relative fit measures of the non-normed fit index (NNFI >.95), the CFI (>.95), and (c) parsimonious fit measures of the parsimony normed fit index (PNFI >.50), the parsimony GFI (PGFI >.50), and  $\chi^2/df$  (<3.0). Hence, these indices suggest a good model fit in this study.

Index	Accept Value	Value	Results
$\chi^2$		83.002	
Degrees of freedom	-	48	
Absolute fit measures			
SRMR	<0.05	.0426	Accepted
RMSEA	<0.08	.054	Accepted
Relative fit measures			
NNFI	>.95	.977	Accepted
CFI	>.95	.983	Accepted
Parsimonious fir measures			
PNFI	>.50	.961	Accepted
PGFI	>.50	.583	Accepted
$\chi^2$	<3.0	1.729	Accepted

## Table 4. Index of the fit of the model

## Table 5. Results of Squared multiple correlations

Factor	Item	Squared Multiple Correlations	
CSR image (CSR)			
	csr2	.667	
	csr3	.642	
	csr4	.881	
C-C identification (CCID)		.300	
	cci3	.855	
	cci4	.785	
	cci5	.652	
Brand prestige (BPR)		.329	
	bpr1	.640	
	bpr2	.805	
	bpr3	.508	
Purchase Intention (PIN)		.804	
	pin1	.693	
	pin2	.598	
	pin3	.748	

The hypotheses of this study were tested using SEM estimation. Table 6 shown the standardized coefficients for the structural relations tested, contained the direct, indirect, and total effect and the levels of signification. Our results exhibited that the effect of CSR image on brand prestige were statistically significant ( $\beta = .57$ , p<.01), thus validating H1. The effect of CSR image on consumer-company identification was significant and direct ( $\beta = .18$ , p<.05), which supports H2. The effect of the CSR image on purchase intention was insignificant ( $\beta = .02$ , p>.05), and thus, H3 is rejected. The effect of brand prestige on consumer-company identification was significant ( $\beta = .03$ , p>.05), and thus, H5 is rejected. Finally, the consumer-company identification positively affected purchase intention ( $\beta = .90$ , p<.01), thereby supporting H6. Our results revealed that consumer-company identification partially mediated the effect of CSR image on purchase intention. The consumer-company identification (the level of indirect effect = .245, p<.05) positively mediated the relationship.

Table 6. Results of hypotheses test (indirect effect and total effect)

Urmothosis noths		Standardized coefficient			
Hypothesis paths	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Results	
H1: BPR ← CSR	.573**	.000	.573	Supported	
H2: CCID $\leftarrow$ CSR	.176*	.245*	.421	Supported	
H3: PIN ← CSR	.017	.365	.383	Rejected	
H4: CCID ← BPR	.427***	.000	.427	Supported	
H5: PIN ← BPR	026	.000	.360	Rejected	
H6: PIN ← CCID	.903***	.000	.903	Supported	

\**p*<.05, \*\**p*<.01.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study proposed a model of CSR image, consumer-company identification, brand prestige, and purchase intention derived from previous studies. The hypotheses were tested using SEM and the goodness-of-fit of the overall model. All the models exhibited adequate fit in this study. Findings and hypotheses are discussed as follows.

First, hypothesis 1 proposes that CSR image has a positive influence on brand prestige, which was supported. This finding ties in with earlier work by Pomering and Johnson (2009). Also, hypothesis 2 proposes that CSR image has a positive influence on consumer-company identification, which was supported. This is consistent with earlier research by Lii and Lee (2012). However, hypothesis 3 proposes that CSR image has a positive influence on consumer's purchase intention, which was rejected. The finding is differentiated from the research by Johan and Ulf (2007). There are a number of possible explanations for this result. First explanation for CSR image cannot affect consumer's purchase intention is the fact that consumers positive CSR attitude may not transferred into purchase behavior (Oberseder et al., 2011). The second explanation for this could be that young consumers attach little importance to CSR. The last explanation is that the company may not promote their CSR achievements zealously to consumers.

Second, hypothesis 4 proposes that brand prestige has a positive influence on consumer-company identification, which was supported. This finding ties in with earlier work by Kuenzel and Halliday (2008). However, hypothesis 5 proposes that brand prestige has a positive influence on consumer's purchase intention, which was rejected. The finding is differentiated from the research by Tseng and Chen (2008). A partial explanation for this may lie in the fact that the target brand we chose was a foreign brand which may not attract consumers.

Finally, hypothesis 6 proposes that consumer-company identification has a positive influence on consumer's purchase intention, which was supported. This is consistent with earlier research by Wu and Tsai (2007). Furthermore, the results confirm that consumer-company identification mediates the effect of CSR image on consumers' purchase intention. In conclusion, CSR image creates consumers' identification with the company, which may enhance consumers' purchase intention.

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