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**CSR ad impact on purchase intention**

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## CSR ad impact on purchase intention

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**Abstract:** The study investigates the impact of CSR-oriented ad on customer purchase intention from the perspective of an economy brand. Convenience sampling was employed aiming at respondents having brand awareness and involvement in the purchase of similar product category of competing brands. The hypothesis was confirmed by applying regression analysis and satisfying all required assumptions. Findings revealed the moderate positive effect of CSR-oriented ad on customer purchase intention, though it is considered a significant contribution as convincing the high-income group to purchase a low-end brand even with little margin is a motivating factor. Further, in general, the majority of respondents expressed their opinion for more CSR activities. As for limitations, the chosen brand might be considered low or economical among the sample chosen in this study, but it might have a better perception in other countries.

**Keywords:** CSR; purchase intention; brand revitalisation; COVID-19; consumer behaviour.

**JEL codes:** M310, M370.

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**Biographical notes:** Syed Ali Abbas completed his PhD in Management Sciences from the Turība University, Latvia and Master's in Business Management from SAMK, Finland. He is currently serving the Beaconhouse National University Lahore in the capacity of an Assistant Professor. He has also been involved in Erasmus and pedagogy assignments at the University of Economics and Management, Prague in 2017 and Poznań University of Economics & Business, Poland in 2018. He has presented at multiple conferences across Europe (Poznań, 2017; Berlin, 2018; Kaunas, 2019; Riga, 2019). He has also completed a research course at the BI Norwegian Business School, Norway. His research interests include the domain of higher education branding, entrepreneurship and followership studies. He is also the HEC Approved PhD Supervisor.

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## 1 Introduction

In an era where organisations are trying every bit to promote their brand image, practices like CSR are no more a surprise. Though it is significant to understand the concept of CSR which is about returning something back to the environment from where

organisations are earning (Green, 2011), the implication of CSR for its motives has always been a debatable point. Why do companies do it, what are the actual motives, is it important to target your market by emotionally incorporating CSR, etc., are some of the questions that will continue to dissect marketing scholars. However, the concern of this study is beyond this debate. Here, the author aims to check the impact of specific CSR-oriented ad on customers' decision-making process. What makes this study different is that the advertisement under observation depicts a product that has been branded as an economy brand in the past, and targets middle- and low-income groups. Though, nothing wrong in targeting a product to any specific income or status group, but it is actually the brand image that links the usage of its conventional soap bar from public toilets to ill-managed fuel stations' lavatories, further incorporating its usage in trains' water closets to crowded bus stations in sample region where this study has been carried out. This image and usage have unfortunately made this product a priority in these places and has a certain image related to it. Though from last decade or so, the brand aimed to change its image through brand revitalisation techniques ranging from change of packaging to variation in its traditional fragrance, ad campaigns were also modernised to adjust to the new target market. Although, it did aid the cause but still for a brand to come out of decades old image may require a little more (Aaker, 2012). In this very context, a recent ad from the brand caught the attention of many due to its content in the pandemic scenario of COVID-19. Not rare to mention that COVID-19 has witnessed a kind of devastation that was heard in stories earlier (Lieberman, 2020), it did shake humanity in a manner that concepts like care, cooperation, and serving the needy got the limelight. While COVID-19 made the corporate world to act as a socially responsible entities this brand came up with a campaign like no one other. Or one must acknowledge it was a campaign that could have been scarce also focusing on research gap in CSR strategies. The content of the ad demonstrated a famous brand ambassador with a statement mentioning that "often you people have seen me promoting this brand but now would suggest you wash your hands with any soap." Though the colour scheme, logo on the top corner, or other marketing formalities were fulfilled routinely for promoting the own soap, the statement made was new and had an impact. This points out the research gap as well because previous CSR ads and campaigns are found to focus on charity programmes, donations, giveaways, etc., Dutta and Singh (2013) studying the ads where competing brands are also promoted is going to be a novel practice, which have not been researched thoroughly in CSR literature. The impact on customer minds about competition and effectiveness of ad communication contributing to the cause of competing brands could be an interesting problem to discuss as the study proceeds. Whether these kinds of ads develop positivity (word-of-mouth – WOM) about marketed products or not lead to the following set of questions (irrespective of discussing the intention of the brand), if the very campaign can prove to be vital for this brand's image. Can becoming so much socially responsible even by making competition irrelevant make customers conscious of the brand? Can ads like these contribute to brand revitalisation or campaigns encompassing social responsibility convert customers to buy an economy brand compromising their social standing as far as the usage of branded items are concerned? These aforementioned concerns are some of the objectives of this study to be dealt with the acquired set of data.

## 2 Literature review

The initiation of CSR as a concept is linked to around six decades ago, though its demand is ever increasing and getting the momentum from latest past (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). Though, agreeing upon its single common definition is still a debate (Roitto, 2013), the concept of CSR surrounds community welfare, development, and enhancement with a corporate contribution. As per Mazurkiewicz (2004), the different perspectives of CSR ranges from an organisation's capability to maintain good relationships with its internal partners to its business tasks to state benefits and to further incorporating its benefits to society in general. While the effect of CSR activities is obvious on a country's economy as well (Bueble, 2009), its impact being observed by ad campaigns is a discussion of concern in this study, especially when the brand itself is nearly promoting competing brands without naming them. This brave move by the brand accounts for demanding CSR practices, if being valued by the customers as well.

Generating positive WOM is the ultimate objective for brand longevity (Alkhawaldeh et al., 2017). Positive WOM may be termed as a multiplier of the marketing effort as one good customer review may compel others to seek out the very brand. Not only it aids brand image but contributes to brand recall for overall brand strength (Batra et al., 2012). As brand strength accounts for multiple factors ranging from sales data to corporate value, etc., Markovic et al. (2022) believe that CSR is a multiplier to brand authenticity which can be achieved through positive WOM. Positive WOM works in a chain while further ensuring brand loyalty to the next level (Hess and Story, 2005). The essence of positive WOM leads to a high retention rate of customers, thus fulfilling the marketing philosophy that not only attaining is important, but it is also the customer detainment as well. This positive influence of CSR ad and its impact on customers' WOM can be a significant scientific contribution of this study to CSR literature.

Continuing the phenomenon of CSR influenced WOM leading to the purchase intention of customers, Morea et al. (2022) discuss the positive impact of CSR on circular economy as well, as CSR practices is directly proportional to economic well-being also. Ajzen (1991) terms purchase intention as the customer intent when s/he makes up mind about a particular purchase. Though this purchase decision can be an outcome of multiple factors ranging from price to product/service durability and from branding to being user-friendly, etc., CSR orientation can be one such factor that may till customer's mind towards the purchase. This is where employing CSR practices become even more significant (Franco et al., 2021) so as in the campaign under observation in this research. As per Kotler's (2001) marketing knowledge, the purchase decision involves the following five steps, i.e.:

- 1 Need recognition – A state when a customer feels the need for a product.
- 2 Information search – A stage when the customer makes effort to search about the product/services s/he is looking for. This further involves info from traditional to digital sources.
- 3 Evaluation of alternatives – A point when a customer is weighing about pros and cons between substitutes as per his requirements.
- 4 Purchase – A stage after the evaluation of alternatives when the customer has actually gone for the intended product/service.

- 5 Feedback – It is the post-purchase stage of the customer when s/he has experienced the product where s/he will be sharing his opinion about it with others.

It will be interesting to analyse the impact of CSR ad on buyer's mind; especially in the context of the economy brand. Where might this CSR ad impact can be experienced most in the above mentioned five stages, is going to be a good value addition in CSR research studies.

The acronym of AIDA model by Strong (1925) accounts for awareness, interest, desire and action. The AIDA model aims at developing the ad content which enables message generation covering all these four domains. The ad played in the questionnaire meets the designated requirement for all these elements, i.e., awareness was generated about COVID-19 being a serious issue to be taken care of. It was made sure via the ad that COVID-19 is a serious thing to deal with and that washing hands using soaps, and that even again and again is not less than mandatory. The second factor 'I for interest' was met by conveying an emotional speech enlightening the use of any soap. Here, the brand ambassador ensured that any soap is beneficial to avoid the widespread of disease. The third factor 'D as desire' encompasses a message source as a renowned brand ambassador. Not only the content of the ad was convincing only, the ambassador used to convey the message is nearly a household name for the target audience having a fan following of all age groups. Interestingly, the brand ambassador was also the most sought-after celebrity on Instagram at the time the ad was played. So, the element of desire was met pretty well in terms of content, the message, medium, and the message source, whereas 'A as action' is an outcome of all the former factors to convince the customer that using soap is one of the solutions to ensure health and safety. It can be said that this AIDA model has been implicated well in the ad made by the brand to better execute the effect of CSR ad on customers' mind.

**Figure 1** AIDA model (see online version for colours)



Source: Strong (1925)

Table 1 further shows previous studies measuring CSR and its impact. The commonality between all these studies surround factors associated with CSR encompassing welfare, community development, competitive advantage, morality and consumer buying behaviour. This entails that over different decades, CSR as a concept is being appreciated and being practiced in increasing pattern.

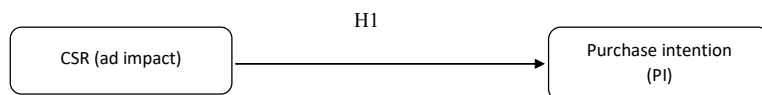
**Table 1** Previous studies

<i>Author/s</i>	<i>Description</i>
Davis (1960)	CSR is about informed decision making which is beyond profit motive.
Dahlsrud (2008)	Worked on 5 CSR dimensions, i.e., environmental responsibility, social responsibility, economic responsibility, humanitarian responsibility and responsibility towards stakeholders.
Danko et al. (2008)	Stakeholders to play their positive role encompassing economical and legal fit.
Carroll and Shabana (2010)	CSR refers to opting for different strategies for societal welfare.
Gupta and Hodges (2012)	Practicing CSR may enable companies to stand out in competition.
Perry and Towers (2013)	CSR activities bring satisfaction to employees and management altogether.
Vahdati et al. (2015)	CSR is directly proportional to consumer buying behaviour.
Carroll (2016)	CSR is about ethical considerations along with economic viability.
Sharma et al. (2018)	The CSR driven morality impacts consumer purchase intention to great extent.
Bianchi et al. (2019)	CSR contributes to corporate reputation and purchase intention.
Gupta et al. (2021)	CSR through social media add value to brand admiration and effects purchase intention.

*Source:* Prior studies

The above discussion encompassing significance of CSR and its probable impact on consumer purchase intention leads to the proposition of following hypothesis; also depicted as Figure 2:

H CSR oriented ad has significant effect on consumer purchase intention.

**Figure 2** Conceptual framework

*Source:* Author's construction

### 3 Methodology

The study is cross-sectional research based on an observational approach as respondents were shown a video clip to record their sudden response to the ad content. To serve the purpose, the questionnaire was kept to limited items to avoid fading effect of emotions. Tailored with 14 items, the initial set of questions was adapted from Tong and Hawley (2009) aimed at usage and brand awareness aspects, followed by a researcher made middle section about CSR ad impact, since it discussed specific ad and emotional connect. The third portion, which comprised WOM and purchase intention, was adapted

from Wang et al. (2011), whereas the last few questions were targeted at the overall impact of CSR activities in general. The validity and reliability of items are achieved via respective statistical analysis (Cronbach alpha and confirmatory factor analysis) to be performed in the coming section. Convenience sampling was used considering general awareness of the brand being a household name. The number of respondents accounts for 128 and the response rate was 70%. The population comprises Pakistan where the brand is familiar in the masses and is restricted to specific income groups and certain professions (discussed in the intro part). Taking the higher income group as respondents was a move to ensure the validity aspect as getting their response about an economy brand and its probable image and use will be detrimental in assessing the ad impact in a rather convincing way.

## 4 Findings and analysis

### 4.1 Respondents demographics

Table 2 and Table 3 depict an overview of respondents' demographics in terms of gender mix and age. Though the gender mix represents a balanced score, the age dynamics show considerable variations as respondents above 25 years represent 45% of the sample. This 45% may imply respondents' capability in purchase decision-making as the higher the age, the greater the probability of being employed. This may also be touted as one of the minor limitations of the study that there exists a set of respondents that may not be fully involved in the buying process, though counter to this an argument can be made that since the product under observation is economy and counts for a lower price, therefore respondents being itself involved in purchasing might not be that important, but his/her view can be.

**Table 2** Gender

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
Valid	Female	58	45.3	45.3	45.3
	Male	70	54.7	54.7	100.0
	Total	128	100.0	100.0	

*Source:* Own calculations

**Table 3** Age

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
Valid	18–24	71	55.5	55.5	55.5
	25–31	39	30.5	30.5	85.9
	32–38	12	9.4	9.4	95.3
	39 and above	6	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	128	100.0	100.0	

*Source:* Own calculations

## 4.2 Reliability and validity

Table 4 represents scores for internal consistency of data achieved through the Cronbach alpha test. The items with a value over 0.70 ensure reliability.

**Table 4** Reliability statistics

<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	<i>N of items</i>
0.793	14

*Source:* Own calculations

Table 5 demonstrates 0.75 KMO value, thus concluding that the sample size is at a meritorious level and it is good to proceed with factor analysis for further analysis.

**Table 5** KMO and Bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.751
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	355.302
	Df	28
	Sig.	0.000

*Source:* Own calculations

As per Table 6, all the factor loadings account for > 0.5 ensuring the item reliability with that of variables. Though, items were taken from previous studies for purchase intention, the developed questions for CSR ad impact with such higher loading ensure data credibility to a further extent.

**Table 6** Rotated component matrix

	<i>Component</i>	
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>
After seeing the ad, I will recommend this brand to others	0.865	
After seeing the ad, I will start buying this brand	0.841	
After seeing the ad, I will speak good about this brand	0.708	
After seeing the ad, I would not mind paying extra to buy this brand	0.685	
The ad content makes me think socially responsible		0.816
The ad has an emotional attachment		0.812
The ad made me think positive of the brand		0.607
The displayed ad had a social appeal		0.563

Notes: Extraction method: principal component analysis.

Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalisation.

Rotation converged in three iterations.

*Source:* Own calculations

## 4.3 Descriptive analysis

Table 7 demonstrates mean values for items related to CSR impact on consumer psychology and implementation of CSR activities on the company's overall image in respondents' opinion. Evident from the scores of the below-listed questions, the mean



values over 4 shows that CSR activities should be employed by companies with good potential. Customers believe that it should be made mandatory for all organisations to opt for corporate social responsibility practices in the best of their capacities. Not only the image part, but it will add to the sales of the companies as well. The standard deviation values are also not far from 1, showing the data is not scattered as well.

**Table 7** Descriptive statistics

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. deviation</i>
In general, part of the companies' earnings should be devoted to social causes	128	1.0	5.0	4.047	0.7823
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) contributes to enhanced company image	128	1.0	5.0	4.281	0.6391
CSR should be a necessary practice of business entities	128	1.0	5.0	4.328	0.7221
CSR may contribute to increase sales of companies	128	1.0	5.0	4.086	0.8232
Valid N (listwise)	128				

*Source:* Own calculations

#### 4.4 Hypothesis testing

Table 8 shows the model summary for hypothesis, i.e., CSR ad has a significant effect on consumer PI. Though, the result ( $R = 0.40$ ) accounts for a moderate correlation between the variables but considering this study for an economy brand and convincing the higher income group to buy this brand is still a significant development. Table 7 gives an overview of the necessary statistical values.

**Table 8** Hypothesis testing

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Result</i>
CSR ad impact → purchase intention	0.40	24.377	4.937	0.403	0.000	Supported

*Source:* Author's own construction

Table 8 demonstrates that the significance value is less than 0.05 and there exists a moderate positive statistically significant relationship between CSR ad impact and consumer purchase intention, so the null hypothesis is rejected which results in the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

## 5 Conclusions

As per the outcome of empirical findings, it can be stated that CSR has a definitive impact on company image which has also been proved quite a few times in other studies. The greater the CSR practices the higher the concerned image of a company is portrayed (Pagan et al., 2022). This positive image backed by positive WOM contributes to the overall sales of firms as well (Garanti et al., 2022). This positive effect of WOM leading

to purchase intention is supported by hypothesis in this study and is also reflected in the works of Bianchi et al. (2019). The novel aspect of this study, i.e., CSR ad impact should continue to be practiced as an outcome of these unique ads where competitive brands are also promoted, is a courageous marketing move that can be adopted in campaigns of other businesses as well. In contrast, if advertisements promoting the use of competing brands serve the cause for competitors and customers begin to trust competitors more, competitors may initiate frontal and flank attack strategies and gain a competitive advantage that would otherwise have been difficult to implement. However, from the perspective of the company under observation, these innovative marketing campaigns may contribute to positive feelings as depicted in the results of this study, i.e., Hypothesis 1, the magnitude of the effect may not be similar to convince customers to purchase the economy brand. Therefore, companies relying wholly on CSR, especially ones for profit motive, should not compromise quality, clearly implying that it is ultimately the quality of products/services that ensures long-term competitive advantage. However, the positive WOM backed by CSR ad is a catch that these companies should exploit for future sales. This effect of CSR on positive WOM corresponds to the study of Andreu et al. (2015). Therefore, it is finally concluded that more CSR oriented ads and practices bear the element of emotional appeal and that innovative strategy development towards CSR can benefit company and society al together.

## **6 Limitations**

The cultural aspect in the sample region where target audience relates the brand attributes with social classes, as the results might show variation in regions where products' attributes are limited to product usage and benefits only. Also, data collected in the context of COVID-19 might account for emotional perception which in today's time can show deviation. As a result, the nature of the study, being cross-sectional research, may differ from longitudinal research.

## **7 Implications for future research**

The CSR ad-oriented research can be applied in other fields to further check the implication of the results. Economy brands may extend their strategic development process towards CSR orientation whereas scholars may incline their research towards the blue ocean strategy and different phases of the product life cycle can be targeted with various sets of CSR strategies. There can be an option of further research where competing brands might find new avenues of collaboration thus contributing to the development of new theories and practices of marketing.

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