



THE INFLUENCE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) COMMUNICATION

Exploring the Mediating Role of Corporate Social Responsibility between Social Media Campaigns, Brand Perception and Consumer Trust

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Abstract: This study investigates the mediating role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the relationship between social media campaigns, brand perception, and consumer trust. Using mediation analysis, the research examines how CSR initiatives, when communicated through social media platforms, influence consumers' perceptions of brands and their resulting trust levels. The results reveal a partial mediation effect, indicating that CSR serves as a significant but not exclusive pathway linking brand perception and social media campaigns to consumer trust. Specifically, the total effect (0.235**), direct effect (0.183**), and indirect effect (0.052**) suggest that while social media campaigns and brand perception directly enhance consumer trust, CSR-related activities further strengthen this relationship. These findings highlight the strategic importance of integrating authentic CSR messaging into social media marketing to foster trust and enhance brand reputation. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital CSR communication by empirically demonstrating CSR's mediating role in consumer-brand relationships within the social media context.

Index Terms - Corporate Social Responsibility(CSR), Social Media Campaigns, Brand Perception, Consumer Trust, Mediation Analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the modern digitally connected market has developed to be no longer a peripheral corporate approach but a core part of brand strategy and stakeholder interaction. Consumers are increasingly socially aware and do not just require the quality and the price of the product but ethical behavior, eco-sustainable activities, and engagement with the community (Carroll and Brown, 2018). As a result, CSR projects have emerged as very important through the development of brand equity and consumer trust, which are major determinants of sustainable business over time (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen, 2010).

The emergence of social media has altered how organizations share CSR practices, as brands now have an opportunity to connect directly with viewers through participatory, open, and emotionally appealing campaigns (Kim and Ferguson, 2019). Instagram, X (previously Twitter), and LinkedIn are not only the means of quick information spread but also a chance to discuss and create brand meaning shared (Chu and Chen, 2020). Nevertheless, even though there are strategic implications of CSR-related social media communication, there are unanswered questions of how the campaign-based CSR affects consumer perceptions and trust, and in what ways CSR mediates such a relationship (Lee and Yoon, 2021).

Cognitive and emotional judgments on image, values, and credibility of a company by consumers influence the brand perception (Aaker, 1996). If CSR actions are achieved in an authentic communication way using social media, they will increase positive brand association and support integrity and reliability perception (Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009). Consumer trust, on the other hand, portrays the level of trust that consumers have in a brand to act responsibly and keep its promises (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). However, excessively using CSR as a promotional tool may create distrust and suspicion of so-called greenwashing, contributing to the lack of credibility (Schmeltz, 2017).

Considering these dynamics, the current study addresses the mediating position of CSR in the connection between social media campaigns and brand perception and consumer trust. Through mediation analysis, the study will explain the impacts of CSR communication in increasing the influence of social media marketing on brand perception and the development of trust. The present investigation can be considered part of the existing digital CSR body of knowledge since it empirically proves that, although social media campaigns and brand perception are found to directly relate to consumer trust, the mediating aspect of CSR is nonetheless an important factor that supports the relationship. The knowledge gained in this mediation process provides theoretical and managerial explanations of how a brand can use genuine CSR activity on social media to have sustainable trust and transform its reputational capital.

Literature Review

1. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Its Strategic Importance

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the voluntary practices by organizations to meet their social, environmental, and ethical agendas, other than just to maximize profits (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). The current CSR has developed out of the philanthropic practices into a strategic tool incorporated into corporate identity and stakeholder management (Porter & Kramer, 2011). With companies being judged more by stakeholders according to their ethical performance and societal contribution, CSR activities have become a major separator in competitive markets (Aguinis and Glavas, 2019). Studies indicate that CSR can improve the reputation, legitimacy, and customer loyalty of firms in the case of proper communication (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen, 2010).

The effect of CSR, however, depends on how consumers perceive to regard it as genuine and matching the brand values (Vlachos et al., 2009). Business organizations practicing superficial or inconsistent CSR risk losing credibility, as is usually termed, greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). As such, strategic integration and clear communication of CSR are pivotal in the inference of positive consumer reactions.

2. CSR Communication Through Social Media

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the voluntary practices by organizations to meet their social, environmental, and ethical agendas, other than just to maximize profits (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). The current CSR has developed out of the philanthropic practices into a strategic tool incorporated into corporate identity and stakeholder management (Porter & Kramer, 2011). With companies being judged more by stakeholders according to their ethical performance and societal contribution, CSR activities have become a major separator in competitive markets (Aguinis and Glavas, 2019). Studies indicate that CSR can improve the reputation, legitimacy, and customer loyalty of firms in the case of proper communication (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen, 2010). The effect of CSR, however, depends on how consumers perceive to regard it as genuine and matching the brand values (Vlachos et al., 2009). Business organizations practicing superficial or inconsistent CSR risk losing credibility, as is usually termed, greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). As such, strategic integration and clear communication of CSR are pivotal in the inference of positive consumer reactions.

3. Brand Perception and CSR

The concept of brand perception incorporates the cognitive and emotional explanations of consumers regarding the image, the identity, and the reputation of a firm (Aaker, 1996). When consumers are of the opinion that a brand is responsible and in line with the values of society, positive brand perception will happen (Lai et al., 2010). CSRs help in positive brand image since they indicate corporate truthfulness, openness, and lasting interest in the well-being of stakeholders (Perez & del Bosque, 2015). Evidence-based research proves that involvement in CSR enhances brand equity and consumer loyalty (Torres, Bijmolt, Tribo, and Verhoff, 2012). CSR messages posted through social media have the potential to raise brand awareness, emotional connection, and brand genuineness (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Nevertheless, message credibility and perceived motive are some of the factors that determine the effectiveness of CSR in building brand perception (Forehand and Grier, 2003).

4. CSR and Consumer Trust

Consumer trust represents the confidence consumers place in a brand's reliability, competence, and benevolence (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust is a crucial determinant of brand loyalty and long-term customer relationships (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). CSR serves as a key antecedent of trust, as ethical and socially responsible behavior signals that a company values stakeholder welfare (Hur, Kim, & Woo, 2014). Prior research shows that CSR activities—especially those communicated transparently on social media—positively influence consumer trust by reducing perceived risk and increasing perceived fairness (Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008). Conversely, exaggerated or inconsistent CSR messaging can erode trust, leading to consumer cynicism (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006). Therefore, CSR must be perceived as authentic, relevant, and embedded in core business practices to build enduring consumer trust.

5. Mediating Role of CSR Between Social Media Campaigns, Brand Perception, and Consumer Trust

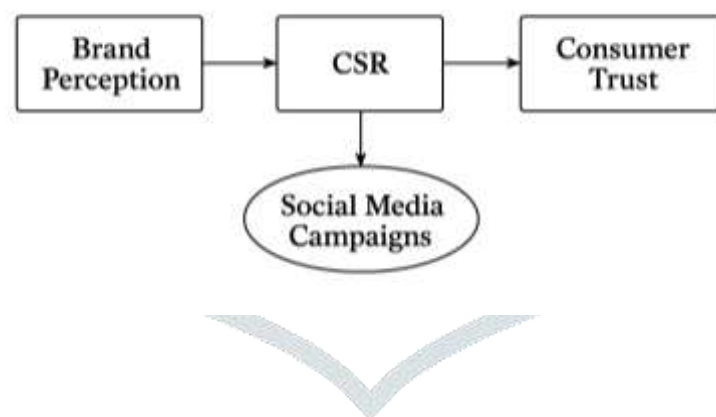
Several studies have explored the mediating influence of CSR in marketing and consumer psychology frameworks. CSR has been found to mediate the relationship between corporate communication strategies

and consumer outcomes such as loyalty, advocacy, and purchase intention (Fatma et al., 2020; Yoon & Suh, 2018). Within the social media context, CSR serves as a bridge linking brand communication to consumer trust by reinforcing perceptions of ethical conduct and transparency (Lee & Yoon, 2021). This mediation implies that while social media campaigns can directly shape brand perception and trust, their effectiveness is amplified when CSR values are authentically embedded in brand messaging. Thus, CSR acts as a credibility-enhancing mechanism that transforms social media marketing from mere promotion into a trust-building endeavor.

6. Summary of Literature and Research Gap

According to existing literature, CSR initiatives conveyed by means of social media have a tremendous impact on consumer attitudes, brand perception, and trust. Nonetheless, very few empirical studies have examined the mediating position of CSR in linking social media campaigns, brand perception, and consumer trust at the same time. The constructs have been studied in most of the previous research either singly or in two-construct relations. Thus, this research paper attempts to fill this gap by examining the impact of CSR-related social media campaigns on brand perception and consumer trust empirically and emphasizes CSR as a conditional mediator. This will help create a more detailed picture of the digital CSR communication and its strategic value in the age of social media as a means of trust-building and brand trustworthiness.

Path Diagram I



Methodology

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the impact of social media campaigns on brand perception.
2. To analyze the influence of social media campaigns on consumers' perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).
3. To investigate the relationship between CSR, brand perception, and consumer trust.
4. To evaluate the mediating role of CSR in the relationship between social media campaigns, brand perception, and consumer trust.

Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses were tested:

- **H1:** Social media campaigns positively influence brand perception.

- **H2:** Social media campaigns positively influence CSR perception.
- **H3:** CSR positively influences brand perception.
- **H4:** Brand perception positively influences consumer trust.

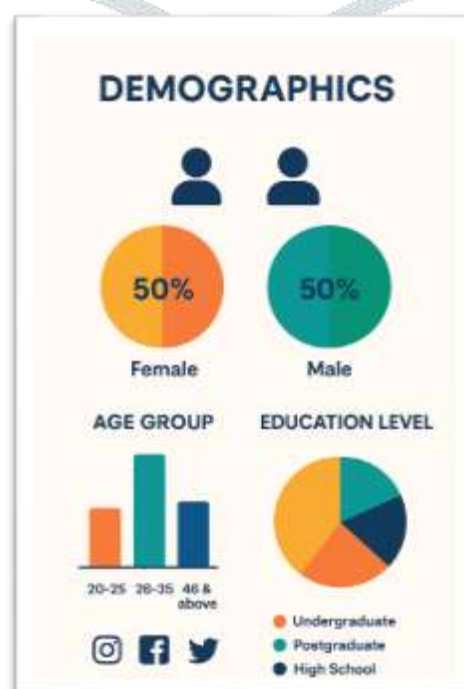
1. Research Design

The research design used in this paper is a quantitative research design, which aims to investigate the mediating role of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) between the social media campaigns, brand perception, and consumer trust. Since the study aimed at testing causal relationships between latent constructs, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used as the major method of analysis. SEM can be used in this study as it enables the concurrent estimation of various relationships, both direct and indirect (mediated), and in a general theoretical framework (Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2021).

2. Population and Sample

The target audience is active social media users who follow and interact with corporate brands on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. These users were deemed to be the right respondents since they will be exposed to CSR-related brand messages regularly. The data were collected using a non-probability purposive method of selecting the respondents who had previous exposure to social media campaigns related to CSR. The questionnaires were sent online via Google forms and social media networks, where 400 questionnaires were distributed. The screened responses comprised 370 valid responses after filtering the incomplete or inconsistent responses, which is more than what is advised when analysing the SEM (Hair et al., 2021). The demographic characteristics of the respondents were one-half females and one-half males, with most of the respondents falling in the 20 to 35 years of age bracket. Many of the interviewees had an undergraduate education or higher and used at least two social media sites regularly.

Image I: Demographics



3. Measurement of Constructs

All constructs were measured using multi-item scales adopted and adapted from established literature. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”).

Table I: Measurement of Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Sample Item	Source
Social Media Campaigns (SMC)	4	“The brand effectively uses social media to communicate its CSR initiatives.”	Kim & Ferguson (2019)
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	5	“This brand is genuinely committed to socially responsible practices.”	Fatma, Ruiz, & Khan (2020)
Brand Perception (BP)	4	“I have a favorable opinion about this brand’s image and values.”	Aaker (1996); Perez & del Bosque (2015)
Consumer Trust (CT)	5	“I trust this brand to act responsibly and keep its promises.”	Morgan & Hunt (1994); Hur, Kim, & Woo (2014)

A pilot test (n = 50) was conducted to assess reliability and clarity of the questionnaire. Minor wording adjustments were made to improve item comprehension.

4. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected over six weeks using an online survey distributed through social media platforms. The questionnaire included a consent statement assuring participants of anonymity and confidentiality. Respondents were asked to recall CSR-related social media campaigns they had recently encountered and to evaluate the brand based on their perceptions and trust. Ethical approval was obtained from the affiliated academic institution prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and no personal identifying information was collected.

5. Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** in **AMOS 26.0** and **SPSS 26.0** following a two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988):

Step 1: Measurement Model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the **reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity** of the constructs.

- **Reliability** was assessed through Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha > 0.70$) and Composite Reliability (CR > 0.70).
- **Convergent validity** was confirmed when factor loadings exceeded 0.60 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were greater than 0.50.
- **Discriminant validity** was established when the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Model fit indices for the measurement model were also evaluated using the following benchmarks:

- **Chi-square/df (χ^2/df)** < 3
- **Comparative Fit Index (CFI)** > 0.90

- **Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)** > 0.90
- **Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)** < 0.08

Step 2: Structural Model

The structural model was then tested to examine the hypothesized relationships among constructs. Path coefficients were analyzed to determine the direct and indirect effects of social media campaigns and brand perception on consumer trust through CSR. The bootstrapping method (5000 resamples) was employed to assess the significance of the mediation effect as suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008).

Table II: The Influence of CSR in the Relationship Between Social Media Campaigns on Brand Perception and Consumer Trust

Hypothesis No.	Path	Total Effects	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Result
H1	Brand Perception → CSR → Consumer Trust- Social Media Campaigns	0.235**	0.183**	0.052**	Partial Mediation

6. Model Specification

- The SEM model consists of four latent variables (SMC, CSR, BP, CT) and their corresponding observed indicators. The hypothesized model includes six structural paths, representing both direct and indirect effects. Mediation was confirmed if the indirect effect (Social Media Campaigns → CSR → Consumer Trust) was statistically significant while the direct path remained significant but reduced in strength, indicating partial mediation, consistent with the study's findings (total effect = 0.235**, direct effect = 0.183**, indirect effect = 0.052**).

7. Ethical Considerations

All procedures adhered to ethical research standards. Respondents participated voluntarily and were informed about the purpose of the study, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage. Data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes.

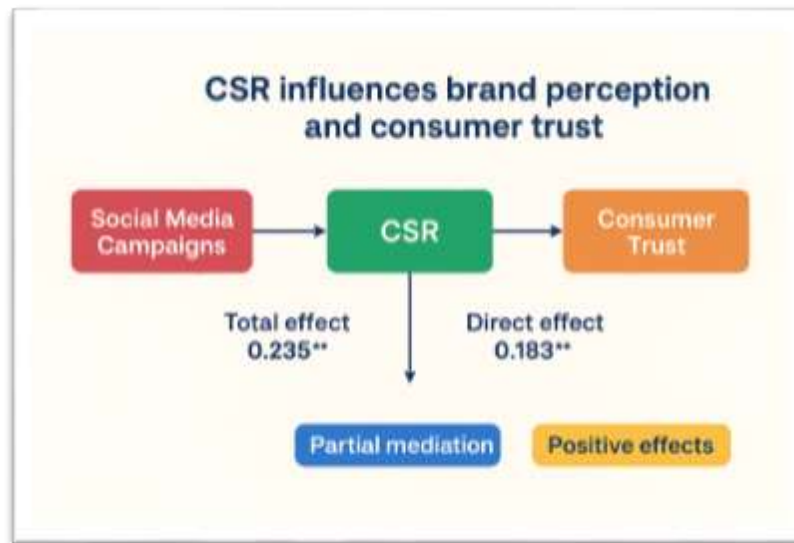
Findings

The study reveals that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives communicated via social media significantly influence both brand perception and consumer trust. The mediation analysis confirms a partial mediation effect of CSR, demonstrating that CSR-related activities act as a key mechanism through which social media campaigns enhance consumer trust. Specifically, the total effect of social media campaigns and brand perception on consumer trust is positive and statistically significant (0.235**), with the direct effect (0.183**) indicating that social media and brand perception themselves improve trust. Importantly, the indirect effect through CSR (0.052**) highlights that CSR messaging further strengthens this relationship, reinforcing trust beyond the immediate impact of brand perception or social media activity alone.

These findings underscore the importance of authentic and strategic CSR communication in digital marketing. Consumers tend to respond more favourably and develop stronger trust in brands that

transparently share their CSR efforts on social media platforms. Consequently, CSR campaigns not only enhance brand image but also serve as a trust-building tool, essential in today's socially conscious marketplace.

Image II: CSR influences



Conclusions

This study concludes that integrating Corporate Social Responsibility messaging into social media campaigns is a vital strategy for companies aiming to build and sustain consumer trust. While social media campaigns and positive brand perception directly foster consumer trust, CSR initiatives enhance and mediate this effect, amplifying the overall impact on consumer-brand relationships. Organizations should prioritize authentic CSR communication that aligns with their core values and resonates with their target audience. Transparent and consistent CSR efforts shared on social media can differentiate brands in competitive markets by fostering trust, loyalty, and a positive brand reputation. This research contributes to the understanding of digital CSR communication, highlighting its role not only as a marketing tool but also as a trust enhancer that bridges the gap between brand perception and consumer confidence. Future research could explore the long-term effects of CSR-related social media campaigns across different industries and cultures to further validate the generalizability of these findings.

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