

The Impact of CSR Perception on Willingness to Buy in the Food and Beverage Industry: Mediating Effects of Brand Identity

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Abstract. This study takes Chinese consumers who often purchase food and beverage as the research object to explore the mechanism of the impact of perceived enterprise social responsibility on consumers' willingness to buy, analyzing the mediating role of brand identity in the relation between the two. 328 valid data were collected through questionnaire survey, and SPSS was used for regression analysis and mediation effect test. After data processing and testing, this study concludes that the perception of CSR has a direct positive impact on the willingness to purchase, and also indirectly enhances the purchase intention of consumers through brand identity. In addition, among the different dimensions of corporate social responsibility, willingness to buy is most influenced by moral responsibility, followed by the benevolent, financial and legal responsibility, which provides relevant theoretical and practical basis for enterprises to formulate CSR strategy and brand marketing strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In the modern business environment, enterprises increasingly cry for corporate social responsibility to support their sustainable operation and development, not only contributing to social welfare, but also bringing potential benefits to the company itself (Tai & Chuang, 2014). As consumers become more aware of social responsibility, they are inclined to support and purchase products from companies that have demonstrated excellence in CSR practices (Pomeroy and Dolnicar, 2009). By focusing on the foodservice industry, this study aims to delve into how CSR perceptions affect consumers' purchase intentions and explore the mediating role of brand identity in this process.

1.2 Research problems and purposes

The core objective of this study is to answer the following major questions:

How does corporate social responsibility shape or drive consumers' purchasing preferences?

What kind of bridge and catalyst does brand identity play in the way that enterprise social responsibility influences willingness to buy?

2. Literature review

2.1 Enterprise social responsibility

The definition of enterprise social responsibility means a company's social obligation to go beyond the minimum legal requirements in its operations (Cornelius et al., 2008). Previous researches illustrated that CSR has a significant impact on willingness to purchase, but the specific mechanism still needs to be further explored.

2.2 Purchase intention and brand identity

Purchase intention signifies the positive tendency of consumers to choose a specific product or service (Chang & Wildt, 1994). Brand identity demonstrates that consumers have a strong sense of identity and a close emotional bond with a brand (Nandan, 2005). Although the existing academic literature has extensively explored how CSR directly affects consumers' purchase intentions (Kim et al., 2004), in recent years, more and more studies begin to study the specific impact of CSR on the process of brand identity building (Canta Honores and Barcellos-Paula, 2024), and the driving effect of brand identity on willingness to purchase (Tian et al., 2011). However, the integration of the three relationships is insufficient, especially lack of empirical analysis on China's food and beverage industry.

2.3 Research hypothesis

Based on the above comprehensive analysis, the following hypotheses are constructed:

H1: CSR perception (charity, ethics, law, economy responsibility) positively willingness to buy;

H2: Consumers' brand identity can positively promote willingness to buy;

H3: The relationship between brand identity intermediary CSR and purchase intention.

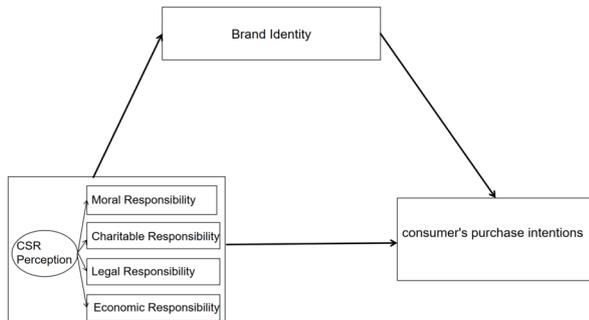


Figure 1. CSR perception (charity, ethics, law, economy responsibility) positively willingness to buy

3. Research methods

3.1 In this study, a mature scale is used and some items are moderately modified. We collect data through questionnaire survey, and a total of more than 300 effective data sets were collected for quantitative analysis. The population data is as follows.

Descriptive statistics of sample characteristics							
categorization	sample size	percentage (%)	categorization	sample size	percentage (%)		
gender	male	129	39.3	education level	high school and below	45	13.7
	female	196	59.8		vocational degree	41	12.5
	other	3	0.9		bachelor degree	208	63.4
age	under 18 years old	5	1.5		master degree or above	34	10.4
	18-30 years old	176	53.7		monthly salary	less than 3,000 yuan	99
	31-45 years old	106	32.3	3001-5000 yuan		60	18.3
	46-60 years old	36	11.0	5001-7000 yuan		51	15.5
	over 60 years old	5	1.5	7001-10000 yuan		64	19.5
above 10000 yuan				54		16.5	

Figure 2. The population data is as follows.

4. Research results

SPSS is used to process the data, and the specific results are as follows.

4.1 The effect of CSR on willingness to buy

Direct effect: CSR perception significantly positively influenced willingness to buy ($\beta=0.316$, $p<0.01$).

Indirect effect: The mediating effect of brand identity is significant ($\beta=0.622$, $p<0.01$).

4.2 Differences in the role of different CSR dimensions

Ethical responsibility is the strongest driver of willingness to buy ($\beta=0.425$), followed by charitable responsibility ($\beta=0.375$), financial responsibility ($\beta=0.328$) and legal responsibility ($\beta=0.276$).

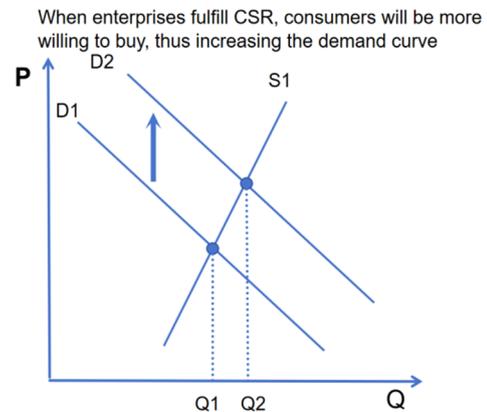


Figure 3. Ethical responsibility is the strongest driver of willingness to buy ($\beta=0.425$)

5. Research findings

5.1 Direct impact of CSR perception on willingness to buy

The study found that CSR perception can directly affect consumers' willingness to buy. Consumers' positive perceptions of a company's charitable, ethical, legal and economic responsibilities all contribute to their willingness to buy.

5.2 Mediating role of brand identity

Brand identity plays a significant mediating role between CSR perception and willingness to buy. Consumers' positive perception of CSR will enhance their brand identity and thus increase their willingness to buy. Specifically, different types of CSR (such as charitable responsibility, ethical responsibility, etc.) have a partial mediating effect on willingness to buy through brand identity.

5.3 Different CSR types have different influences on willingness to buy

The research results demonstrate that among the four dimensions of corporate social responsibility that affect willingness to buy, moral responsibility shows the most prominent influence, followed by benevolent responsibility, while financial responsibility and legal responsibility also play a certain role, but their impact is relatively minor, suggesting that consumers value ethical and charitable behavior when choosing food and beverage products.

6. Application and Suggestion

6.1 Concerns of modern consumers

This study shows that contemporary consumers are increasingly concerned about corporate CSR behavior and regard it as an important basis for decision-making. Brand identity plays a crucial role in consumers' purchase decision-making process, which connects consumers' perception of CSR with their willingness to buy and becomes an indispensable link between the two.

6.2 New perspective of enterprise marketing strategy

This finding provides a new perspective for companies to develop marketing strategies, which should not only enhance their brand image through CSR activities, but also use CSR as a new driving force to drive consumer purchases. By combining brand communication strategies with well-planned CSR activities, companies can stand out in a highly competitive market.

6.3 Policy Recommendations

Governments and relevant agencies should encourage enterprises to actively participate in CSR activities and provide them with necessary support and guidance. Promote the popularization and improvement of CSR practices in the foodservice industry through the development of relevant policies and standards.

7. Research limitations and future prospects

7.1 Limitations

This study mainly pays attention to consumer group of the food and beverage industry, but the sample size is relatively small, which can weaken the general applicability of the findings. At the same time, the study focused primarily on CSR perceived by the foodservice industry, so the application potential of the research results in a wider range of scenarios or different fields may be subject to certain constraints and limitations.

7.2 Future Outlook

In the future, by increasing the number of samples and further expanding the research field, the accuracy and wide applicability of the research results can be improved, so as to make the research conclusions more comprehensive. Meanwhile, cross-cultural comparative studies can be conducted to reveal the similarities and differences among consumers' CSR perception, brand identity and willingness to buy under different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the research content can be deepened to explore the influence of other factors, such as educational level and consumer preference, on these three relationships.

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