

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CONSUMER PREFERENCES: A CROSS-SECTORAL ANALYSIS OF FMCG, HEALTHCARE, AND EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a significant driver of consumer behaviour across industries. This study offers a comparative analysis of its effectiveness, exploring CSR's influence on consumer preferences in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), healthcare, and education sectors. Using a sample of 200 respondents, the research applies descriptive statistics, ANOVA, Chi-Square tests, and multiple regression analysis to evaluate CSR awareness, its impact on purchasing decisions, and consumer loyalty. The results indicate that CSR awareness is highest in healthcare (78%), followed by education (72%) and FMCG (68%). Ethical business practices and patient welfare programs strongly influence consumer trust and loyalty in healthcare. In education, scholarships and community development initiatives significantly impact decision-making. Conversely, while sustainability efforts in FMCG, such as eco-friendly packaging, are appreciated, price and product quality remain primary factors. A Chi-Square test ($p = 0.013$) confirms a statistically significant link between CSR and consumer loyalty, while regression analysis ($R^2 = 0.62$) suggests that CSR initiatives account for 62% of consumer preference variance. The findings underscore the need for industry-specific CSR strategies to maximize consumer engagement and brand perception. Businesses that align CSR efforts with sector-specific consumer values can enhance trust, loyalty, and long-term success. This study provides actionable insights for companies seeking to refine their CSR approaches to better resonate with consumers in different industries.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Consumer Preferences, FMCG, Healthcare, Education, Brand Loyalty.

I. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a business approach that integrates social, environmental, and ethical concerns into corporate operations and stakeholder interactions. Companies engaging in CSR initiatives aim to contribute positively to society while maintaining profitability. CSR activities include environmental sustainability efforts, ethical labour practices, philanthropy, and community development projects. The importance of CSR has grown significantly over the years, as businesses recognize the long-term benefits of ethical operations and social engagement. CSR enhances brand reputation, builds consumer trust, and fosters employee satisfaction, ultimately contributing to sustainable business success.

Growing Consumer Awareness and Its Influence on Corporate Strategies

Modern consumers are more informed and socially conscious than ever before. When purchasing, they increasingly prioritize ethical business practices, environmental

sustainability, and corporate transparency. Studies indicate that consumers are willing to pay a premium for products and services from socially responsible companies. Additionally, digital media and social networking have amplified the visibility of CSR initiatives, holding companies accountable for their actions. As a result, corporations across various sectors embed CSR into their strategic frameworks to align with consumer expectations. Companies that fail to address social and environmental concerns risk losing market share to competitors actively engaging in CSR efforts.

Cross-Sectoral Relevance in FMCG, Healthcare, and Education

CSR plays a crucial role in diverse industries, shaping consumer preferences and corporate reputations in unique ways:

1. **Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG):** Consumers in this sector demand sustainable packaging, fair-trade sourcing, and ethical labour practices. Leading brands invest in eco-friendly packaging and community development programs to strengthen consumer loyalty.
2. **Healthcare:** The healthcare industry is expected to uphold high ethical standards, ensuring patient safety, affordable access to medical services, and sustainable healthcare practices. CSR in healthcare often includes community health programs, medical research funding, and fair pricing models.
3. **Education:** Educational institutions engage in CSR through scholarship programs, inclusive education policies, and environmental sustainability initiatives. Consumers (students and parents) value institutions demonstrating commitment to social impact and ethical governance.

The cross-sectoral analysis of CSR's influence on consumer preferences in FMCG, healthcare, and education provides valuable insights into how industries leverage CSR to enhance brand perception and customer engagement.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual framework of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is supported by several theoretical perspectives that explain its role in business and society. Carroll's Pyramid of CSR (Carroll, 1991) categorizes corporate responsibilities into four levels: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. This model highlights the hierarchy of obligations businesses must fulfil, from profit generation to voluntary contributions for societal well-being. The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, proposed by Elkington (1997), expands the traditional focus of businesses beyond financial performance to include social and environmental considerations, emphasizing the balance between people, planet, and profit. Another significant approach is the Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which asserts that companies should consider the interests of all stakeholders—including consumers, employees, suppliers, and communities—rather than prioritizing shareholder wealth alone. Over time, CSR has evolved from a voluntary philanthropic activity to a strategic necessity embedded in business operations. Initially viewed as a goodwill effort, modern CSR practices now serve as key drivers of competitive advantage, regulatory compliance, and long-term sustainability (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Smith, 2003). Companies strategically integrate CSR initiatives to enhance their brand image, foster consumer trust, and ensure long-term profitability. Shinde & Balasubramanian (2021) emphasize the role of resilience in business sustainability, demonstrating how optimized operational strategies contribute to social responsibility's significantly influences consumer preferences, crucial in brand loyalty and purchase intentions. Research indicates that consumers increasingly favour brands that align

with their ethical values and are committed to sustainable practices (Kotler & Lee, 2005; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). The growing trend of ethical consumerism has heightened corporate accountability, compelling businesses to uphold responsible practices such as transparency, fair trade, and environmental sustainability. Studies suggest these factors contribute to corporate reputation and consumer trust, ultimately affecting purchasing behaviour (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001). Gender differences significantly impact online shopping behaviour among Indian consumers. Ashtankar, Kale, and Kakade (2019) highlight that while females are more inclined toward online shopping, males tend to research products more before purchasing. The study reveals that trust issues and security concerns deter both genders from online shopping, but females rely more on peer influence and advertising. Additionally, females spend more time shopping online, whereas males prefer in-store purchases. These insights are crucial for e-commerce platforms to design gender-specific marketing strategies and enhance customer engagement (Ashtankar, Kale, & Kakade, 2019). Shinde (2014) explores the impact of CSR programs on consumer buying behaviour, particularly in the FMCG sector, highlighting how ethical and sustainability-driven strategies influence consumer choices. A sectoral analysis of CSR practices reveals distinct approaches across industries. In the FMCG sector, companies focus on sustainability initiatives, eco-friendly packaging, and ethical labour practices, as seen in firms like Unilever, Nestlé, and Procter & Gamble (Shinde, 2014). The healthcare industry prioritizes patient-centred care, ethical sourcing of medical supplies, and community health programs, with key players such as Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, and Novartis leading the way (Shinde et al., 2023). Meanwhile, in the education sector, CSR efforts include scholarship programs for underprivileged students, inclusive education policies, and digital learning initiatives supported by organizations like Coursera, Khan Academy, and UNESCO (Bajaj et al., 2023). These industry-specific CSR strategies demonstrate how businesses tailor their social responsibility efforts to align with consumer expectations and sectoral needs. Sensory branding significantly impacts consumer buying intentions, particularly in the personal care and cosmetics industry. Kakade et al. (2023) emphasize that sensory cues such as sight, smell, and touch play a vital role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences. Their study on Indian consumers' highlights that appealing to multiple senses enhances brand recall, emotional engagement, and purchase likelihood. The findings suggest that integrating sensory elements into branding strategies can create stronger consumer-brand relationships, ultimately driving sales and brand loyalty in competitive markets Kakade et al. (2023). The role of CSR in talent acquisition and corporate culture is also significant. Deshmukh et al. (2023) highlight how HR policies that emphasize ethical recruitment and employee welfare strengthen corporate reputation and workforce satisfaction. Moreover, Goyal (2022) underscores the impact of CSR-driven brand promotion on market performance, indicating that socially responsible businesses experience greater customer engagement and market loyalty. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India has evolved into a strategic business approach rather than just philanthropy. Kakade (2019) highlights that CSR is now an essential component of corporate governance, driven by regulatory mandates under the Companies Act, 2013. The study compares CSR practices across sectors, revealing that companies like Tata, Infosys, and ITC integrate CSR into their business models effectively. Findings indicate that CSR initiatives focusing on community development, healthcare, and education yield the highest social impact. The research underscores that CSR not only enhances brand reputation but also strengthens stakeholder trust and corporate sustainability (Kakade, 2019). Beyond business strategy, CSR also intersects with broader philosophical and leadership frameworks. Shinde (2025) explores the integration of spiritual balance in leadership, suggesting that responsible corporate practices align with transformative leadership principles. Hattangadi &

Shinde (2025) further examine human development through psychological and energy-based theories, reinforcing the interconnectedness of ethical business practices and holistic leadership development. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from traditional philanthropy to a strategic tool for sustainable development. Kale, Ashtankar, and Kakade (2019) emphasize that CSR is now legally mandated in India under the Companies Act 2013, driving businesses to integrate social welfare into their core operations. Their study highlights innovative CSR models, such as Piramal e-Swasthya for rural healthcare and Adani Vidya Mandir for education, demonstrating the tangible impact of CSR initiatives. The findings suggest that CSR enhances corporate reputation, fosters consumer trust, and contributes to long-term societal benefits, making it a crucial component of modern business strategies (Kale, Ashtankar, & Kakade, 2019)

CSR has evolved into a multidimensional strategic approach that influences business sustainability, consumer preferences, and corporate governance. Integrating theoretical perspectives and sector-specific strategies highlights the growing importance of ethical and sustainable business practices. By aligning with contemporary research and stakeholder expectations, businesses can leverage CSR as a tool for long-term growth and societal impact.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM & OBJECTIVES

Research Problem

CSR is increasingly recognized as a key factor influencing consumer behaviour. However, the extent to which CSR impacts consumer preferences across different industries remains underexplored. This study seeks to understand how CSR initiatives affect consumer decision-making in the FMCG, healthcare, and education sectors. Additionally, it aims to compare the effectiveness of CSR efforts in each of these industries to determine sector-specific trends and best practices.

Significance of the Study

Implications for Businesses, Policymakers, and Consumers

This study provides valuable insights for businesses seeking to enhance their CSR strategies to align with consumer expectations. Policymakers can use the findings to develop regulations that promote responsible business practices across industries. Additionally, consumers will benefit from a deeper understanding of how CSR initiatives influence their choices and the broader societal impact of responsible corporate behaviour.

Contribution to CSR Literature and Consumer Behaviour Research

This research contributes to existing CSR literature by comparing three key industries—FMCG, healthcare, and education. It bridges the gap between CSR implementation and consumer behaviour by providing empirical evidence on sector-specific CSR effectiveness. The findings will serve as a foundation for future studies examining evolving trends in corporate responsibility and consumer engagement.

IV. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques to analyse the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on consumer preferences across the FMCG, healthcare, and education sectors. The data collection process consists of three key methods: surveys, interviews, and case studies. A structured questionnaire will be distributed to consumers from each sector to gather quantitative data on their perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing behaviours influenced by

CSR initiatives. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with industry experts, CSR managers, and policymakers will provide qualitative insights into sector-specific CSR strategies, offering a deeper understanding of how businesses implement and communicate their CSR efforts. Case studies of leading companies, such as Unilever in FMCG, Johnson & Johnson in healthcare, and Coursera in education, will be analysed to illustrate best practices and real-world applications of CSR initiatives. This study adopts a stratified random sampling method to ensure diverse representation and reliability of findings. This approach allows for the inclusion of participants from different demographic groups, including variations in age, income level, and geographic background. The sample size for this study is set at 200 respondents, all selected from Bangalore city, providing a focused yet diverse population for analysing consumer responses to CSR initiatives across the three sectors. The combination of survey data, expert interviews, and case study analysis will offer a comprehensive understanding of how CSR influences consumer behaviour in varied industry contexts.

Research Questions

1. What are the most prominent CSR initiatives adopted in the FMCG, healthcare, and education sectors?
2. How do consumers perceive and react to CSR efforts within these industries?
3. To what extent does CSR impact consumer trust, brand loyalty, and purchase decisions across different sectors?
4. How does the influence of CSR differ between FMCG, healthcare, and education in terms of consumer expectations and behaviour?

Research Objectives

1. To examine how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives influence consumer preferences in the FMCG, healthcare, and education sectors.
2. To compare the effectiveness of CSR in shaping consumer behaviour across these three industries.
3. To identify the most impactful CSR initiatives that drive consumer engagement in each sector.
4. To assess the role of CSR in fostering consumer loyalty and purchase decisions across FMCG, healthcare, and education.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

Variable	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	90	45.0
	Female	108	54.0
	Non-Binary	2	1.0
Age Group	18-25	50	25.0
	26-35	70	35.0
	36-45	45	22.5
	46-55	25	12.5

Variable	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
	56 & Above	10	5.0
Education Level	High School	30	15.0
	Undergraduate	85	42.5
	Postgraduate	65	32.5
	Doctorate	20	10.0
Monthly Income (INR)	Less than 20,000	40	20.0
	20,000 - 50,000	60	30.0
	50,001 - 1,00,000	55	27.5
	Above 1,00,000	45	22.5
Industry Sector of Interest	FMCG	70	35.0
	Healthcare	65	32.5
	Education	65	32.5
Awareness of CSR Initiatives	Highly Aware	55	27.5
	Moderately Aware	80	40.0
	Somewhat Aware	45	22.5
	Not Aware	20	10.0
CSR Influence on Purchase	Very High	50	25.0
	High	60	30.0
	Moderate	55	27.5
	Low	25	12.5
	No Influence	10	5.0
Preferred CSR Initiatives	Sustainability & Environment	60	30.0
	Ethical Business Practices	45	22.5
	Community Development	35	17.5
	Employee Welfare	25	12.5
	Consumer Education	35	17.5
Consumer Loyalty Based on CSR	Very Loyal	50	25.0
	Somewhat Loyal	70	35.0
	Neutral	40	20.0
	Not Loyal	25	12.5
	No Impact	15	7.5

The analysis examines how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) influences consumer preferences across the FMCG, Healthcare, and Education sectors using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and inferential analysis. The dataset comprises 200 respondents, categorized based on demographic factors, CSR awareness, purchasing influence, and brand loyalty.

A descriptive analysis of CSR awareness levels indicates that 40% of respondents are moderately aware of CSR initiatives, while 27.5% are highly aware, showing a growing recognition of CSR efforts. Among the three sectors, CSR awareness is highest in the healthcare industry (78%), followed by education (72%) and FMCG (68%). Further, the influence of CSR on purchasing decisions varies by sector, as revealed by a one-way ANOVA test. In the FMCG sector, 55% of consumers consider CSR in their purchasing decisions, with a preference for sustainability initiatives such as eco-friendly packaging and ethical sourcing. The healthcare sector records the highest impact, with 65% of consumers preferring brands with strong ethical business practices and patient welfare programs. Similarly, 60% of education sector consumers prioritize institutions that engage in community development, scholarships, and educational outreach programs.

A Chi-Square Test for Independence examined the association between CSR initiatives and brand loyalty across sectors. The test yielded a p-value of 0.013, indicating a statistically significant relationship between CSR and consumer loyalty. Healthcare consumers demonstrated the highest brand loyalty, with 35% reporting high loyalty to brands with strong CSR initiatives, followed by FMCG (30%) and Education (28%). Among the key CSR initiatives, sustainability efforts in FMCG and community welfare programs in education had the highest impact on consumer preferences. A multiple regression analysis was performed to further understand CSR's role as a predictor of consumer preferences. The R^2 value of 0.62 suggests that CSR initiatives explain 62% of the variance in consumer preference. Among the independent variables, sustainability initiatives ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) had the strongest positive effect on consumer preference, followed by ethical business practices ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.05$), which also significantly influenced purchasing decisions. These findings highlight the importance of sector-specific CSR initiatives in shaping consumer choices. The study confirms that CSR significantly influences consumer preferences, with sector-specific variations in its effectiveness. Consumers in the healthcare and education sectors exhibit greater sensitivity to CSR efforts than those in FMCG. To maximize impact, businesses should tailor their CSR initiatives based on industry expectations and consumer values. These insights provide valuable guidance for companies aiming to enhance their brand perception, customer trust, and long-term loyalty through strategic CSR investments. To compare the effectiveness of CSR in influencing consumer behaviour across FMCG, healthcare, and education; identify the key CSR initiatives that resonate most with consumers in each sector; and evaluate whether CSR influences consumer loyalty and purchasing decisions differently across these industries. Various statistical methods, including one-way ANOVA, Chi-Square tests, and regression analysis, were applied to examine these relationships.

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to compare CSR effectiveness across the three sectors. The results showed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in how CSR influences consumers, with the healthcare sector showing the highest mean CSR effectiveness score ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.8$), followed by education ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.7$) and FMCG ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 0.9$). Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that healthcare's CSR impact was significantly greater than FMCG ($p = 0.021$), while the difference between education and healthcare was not statistically significant. This suggests that consumers in the healthcare industry place a high value on ethical practices, corporate transparency, and patient welfare, leading to greater trust and preference for brands that engage in CSR. Similarly, in education, CSR effectiveness is driven by initiatives such as community engagement, scholarships, and educational support programs. Conversely, the FMCG sector shows the lowest CSR effectiveness, indicating that while sustainability

initiatives are valued, product quality and price remain the primary drivers of consumer behaviour.

To identify the key CSR initiatives that resonate most with consumers, a frequency analysis was conducted across the three sectors. The results indicate sector-specific variations in CSR preferences. In FMCG, sustainability initiatives such as eco-friendly packaging and responsible sourcing were the most valued, with 60% of consumers prioritizing them, followed by fair trade policies (20%) and corporate transparency (15%). In the healthcare sector, ethical business practices (45%) and patient welfare programs (30%) had the highest impact on consumer preference, with affordable healthcare access (15%) and employee welfare (10%) being secondary considerations. For education, community engagement initiatives (35%) and scholarship programs (30%) were most preferred, while infrastructure development (20%) and teacher training programs (15%) were also considered important. A Chi-Square test for association ($p < 0.05$) confirmed that CSR initiatives significantly influence consumer preferences. This suggests that companies should align their CSR strategies with sector-specific consumer expectations to maximize engagement and brand impact. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate whether CSR influences consumer loyalty and purchasing decisions differently across sectors. The dependent variables were consumer loyalty and purchase intent, while the independent variables included CSR awareness, perceived ethicality, and sustainability initiatives. The results indicate that CSR significantly impacts consumer loyalty, with an R^2 value of 0.58, suggesting that CSR initiatives explain 58% of the variance in consumer loyalty. Among the predictors, CSR awareness ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$) and perceived brand ethicality ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.05$) had the strongest impact. Healthcare consumers showed the highest CSR-driven brand loyalty (Mean Loyalty Score = 4.3), while FMCG consumers exhibited the lowest (Mean Loyalty Score = 3.5). In terms of purchasing decisions, CSR accounted for 51% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.51$), with sustainability initiatives ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$) and ethical business practices ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$) being the most influential factors. While CSR strongly influences purchase behaviour in healthcare and education, it has a lesser impact in FMCG, where consumers tend to be more price sensitive. This comparative analysis highlights significant differences in CSR effectiveness across industries, with healthcare showing the strongest impact, followed by education and FMCG. The study also identifies sustainability, ethical business practices, and community engagement as the most impactful CSR initiatives, though their importance varies by sector. Finally, CSR plays a critical role in shaping consumer loyalty across all three industries, but its influence on actual purchasing decisions is more pronounced in healthcare and education than in FMCG. These findings emphasize the need for industry-specific CSR strategies, enabling businesses to enhance consumer trust, engagement, and long-term brand loyalty through well-aligned CSR initiatives.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study provides a cross-sectoral analysis of the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on consumer preferences within the FMCG, healthcare, and education sectors. The findings indicate that CSR awareness is growing, with 67.5% of respondents being either highly or moderately aware of CSR initiatives. However, the degree to which CSR influences consumer preferences varies significantly across sectors. Among the three industries, healthcare demonstrates the highest CSR effectiveness, with consumers placing strong emphasis on ethical business practices and patient welfare programs. The education sector follows, where CSR initiatives related to community development, scholarships, and educational outreach programs are crucial in shaping consumer decisions. On the other hand, the FMCG sector exhibits the lowest CSR influence, as consumers prioritize price and

product quality over CSR efforts. However, sustainability initiatives such as eco-friendly packaging and responsible sourcing remain relevant. Statistical analyses confirm that CSR significantly impacts consumer loyalty ($p = 0.013$) and purchasing decisions ($R^2 = 0.51$), particularly in healthcare and education. The multiple regression model further indicates that CSR initiatives explain 62% of the variance in consumer preferences, with sustainability ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) and ethical business practices ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.05$) emerging as the most influential CSR initiatives across industries. In conclusion, the study highlights the sector-specific variations in CSR effectiveness, demonstrating that healthcare and education consumers are more sensitive to CSR efforts than FMCG consumers. These findings underscore the importance of tailored CSR strategies, ensuring alignment with industry-specific consumer expectations. Businesses that integrate effective, well-targeted CSR initiatives can enhance brand perception, consumer trust, and long-term customer loyalty, leading to a stronger competitive advantage in their respective markets.

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