



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, BRAND EQUITY, AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION: EXAMINING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND EQUITY

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship among corporate social responsibility (CSR), consumer-based brand equity, and consumer purchase intention, with particular emphasis on brand equity as the mechanism through which responsible corporate conduct is translated into marketplace behavior. The study adopts a qualitative, conceptual, and literature-synthesis design rather than claiming new survey evidence. Drawing on stakeholder theory, signaling theory, social identity theory, and customer-based brand equity logic, it argues that CSR affects purchase intention through two related routes. First, CSR can directly shape purchase intention when consumers interpret responsible conduct as a relevant ethical or functional cue. Second, and more importantly, CSR can create indirect value by improving brand awareness and associations, perceived quality, trust, reputation, loyalty, and emotional attachment. These brand-equity assets reduce uncertainty and strengthen preference, making purchase more likely. The analysis also identifies important boundary conditions: CSR awareness, perceived authenticity, brand-cause fit, prior reputation, industry sensitivity, consumer values, and skepticism. The paper concludes that brand equity is best understood as a partial and contingent mediator rather than an automatic outcome of CSR. Managerially, CSR produces stronger consumer response when it is material to the firm's stakeholders, consistent with brand identity, sustained over time, and communicated with credible evidence rather than promotional exaggeration.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; brand equity; consumer-based brand equity; purchase intention; CSR authenticity; brand trust; stakeholder theory; mediation

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility has moved from the margins of corporate philanthropy to the center of brand strategy. Firms are increasingly evaluated not only by what they sell, but also by how they treat employees, communities, suppliers, customers, and the natural environment. This change is commercially important because consumers frequently encounter competing brands with similar functional attributes. Under such conditions, social and ethical information can become part of the brand's meaning and can influence preference, willingness to recommend, and intention to purchase. Yet the proposition that CSR increases sales is too simple. Consumers do not purchase responsibility in the abstract; they purchase brands whose responsibility becomes psychologically meaningful. A firm may invest heavily in environmental programs, employee welfare, or community development and still receive little consumer response if those activities are unknown, inconsistent with the brand, viewed as symbolic, or contradicted by other corporate behavior. The key analytical question is therefore not only whether CSR influences purchase intention, but how that influence is transmitted.

Brand equity provides a useful explanation of this transmission process. Consumer-based brand equity represents the incremental value attached to a branded offering because of what consumers know, feel, and expect about the brand. In Aaker's asset-based view, awareness, perceived quality, associations, and loyalty create brand value; in Keller's customer-based framework, strong, favorable, and unique brand knowledge produces differential consumer response. CSR can enter these structures by creating favorable associations, strengthening trust, differentiating the brand, and supporting loyalty. Purchase intention then becomes a downstream behavioral consequence of accumulated brand meaning rather than a simple reaction to a CSR message.

2. Conceptual Background

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility as a Market-Relevant Construct

CSR refers to organizational responsibilities that extend beyond narrow short-term profit maximization and incorporate economic, legal, ethical, social, and environmental obligations toward stakeholders. Carroll's well-known



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framework distinguishes economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities, while stakeholder theory broadens the unit of analysis by asking how corporate decisions affect multiple groups whose support or welfare is connected to the firm. For consumer research, the most important issue is perceived CSR rather than CSR expenditure alone. Consumers respond to the responsibility they can observe, understand, and attribute to the firm. Environmental stewardship, fair labor practices, responsible sourcing, community investment, consumer protection, diversity, and transparent governance can all contribute to CSR perceptions. Their influence depends on visibility and diagnosticity: a responsibility cue matters when consumers regard it as credible information about the company's character or expected behavior.

CSR can operate as a signal under information asymmetry. Consumers usually cannot fully inspect a firm's internal processes, future service quality, or ethical reliability before purchase. Consistent CSR may therefore signal long-term orientation, stakeholder concern, and lower opportunism. However, signaling logic also explains why weak or inconsistent CSR can backfire. When communication is much stronger than underlying performance, consumers may infer impression management or greenwashing rather than responsibility.

2.2 Brand Equity

Brand equity is the value that a brand name and its associated meanings add to a product or service. From a consumer-based perspective, equity exists when knowledge of the brand changes consumer response compared with an otherwise similar unbranded or differently branded offering. The construct is multidimensional: awareness makes the brand mentally available; associations give it meaning; perceived quality provides a judgment of superiority; trust reduces uncertainty; and loyalty reflects durable preference and resistance to switching. CSR can affect several of these dimensions simultaneously. A distinctive social initiative can increase salience and awareness. Responsible conduct can enrich brand associations with warmth, integrity, competence, and citizenship. Fair treatment of stakeholders can strengthen trust, while long-term consistency can support loyalty. Importantly, these effects are not identical. A highly visible CSR campaign may increase awareness without improving trust, while a low-profile but credible labor or sourcing policy may strengthen trust among informed consumers without creating broad awareness.

2.3 Consumer Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is a consumer's stated likelihood or willingness to choose, buy, rebuy, or recommend a product or service. It is not identical to actual purchase behavior, because behavior is also constrained by price, availability, habit, income, social influence, and situational factors. Nevertheless, purchase intention is widely used as a proximal behavioral outcome in marketing research because it captures the direction and strength of consumer preference before a transaction occurs. In the CSR context, purchase intention can reflect both instrumental and value-expressive motives. Instrumentally, CSR may reduce perceived risk by signaling a trustworthy company. Expressively, purchasing a responsible brand can help consumers act consistently with personal values or social identities. Brand equity links these motives by converting dispersed CSR information into a more stable evaluation of the brand.

3. Theoretical Foundations of the Mediation Argument

3.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory explains why CSR can become a source of brand value. A firm that attends to customers, employees, communities, suppliers, and environmental impacts demonstrates a broader pattern of relationship management. Consumers may interpret this pattern as evidence that the company is less likely to exploit stakeholders and more likely to protect long-term relationships. The resulting evaluation contributes to reputation, trust, and favorable brand associations.

3.2 Signaling Theory

Signaling theory is especially useful where consumers face incomplete information. CSR investments can be costly, difficult to imitate consistently, and visible over time. When the signal is credible, consumers infer unobservable qualities such as integrity, reliability, and long-term orientation. These inferences raise brand equity and may lower perceived purchase risk. The signal loses value when CSR claims are vague, unverifiable, or inconsistent with observable corporate conduct.

3.3 Social Identity and Value Congruence

Social identity theory suggests that consumers favor organizations whose identities support a desirable sense of self or group membership. CSR can create identification when consumers see a brand as representing values they endorse. This identification strengthens emotional attachment and loyalty, both of which are central to brand equity. Value congruence therefore helps explain why the same CSR activity can produce strong response among one consumer



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segment and indifference among another.

3.4 Customer-Based Brand Equity Logic

Customer-based brand equity theory provides the most direct mediation mechanism. CSR information changes brand knowledge; brand knowledge changes brand response; and brand response shapes behavioral intention. The mediating variable is therefore not a statistical convenience but a theoretically meaningful store of accumulated consumer perceptions. CSR becomes commercially productive when it alters the memory structures and evaluative judgments that make a brand easier to recall, safer to choose, more distinctive, and more worthy of loyalty.

4. Review of Literature

Early marketing research established that corporate associations affect product evaluations. Brown and Dacin showed that what consumers know about a company can influence responses to its products, creating a foundation for later CSR–brand research. Sen and Bhattacharya further demonstrated that consumers may respond positively to CSR, but the effect varies with individual support for the issue and perceived congruence between the consumer, the company, and the cause.

Hoeffler and Keller argued that corporate societal marketing can build brand equity through stronger awareness, image, credibility, feelings, community, and engagement. This perspective shifted CSR research away from a narrow 'good deeds cause sales' logic toward a brand-building mechanism. Luo and Bhattacharya later connected CSR with market value and highlighted the role of customer satisfaction, suggesting that stakeholder-oriented behavior can create economic value through customer-related pathways.

Empirical work has since examined direct and indirect relationships. Torres and colleagues found that CSR toward multiple stakeholder groups can contribute to global brand equity. Kang and Namkung, studying the restaurant context, reported that ethical, legal, and economic CSR dimensions significantly influenced brand equity, while philanthropic CSR did not show the same effect. This is analytically important because it indicates that consumers may value responsibility connected to core business conduct more strongly than peripheral giving.

Research in developing-market contexts also supports the CSR–brand relationship. Singh and Verma reported a positive relationship between CSR and brand equity among Indian firms, with brand-related variables connected to the pathway. In the automobile context, later work has similarly examined how CSR affects consumer-based brand equity dimensions and how those dimensions relate to purchase intention.

A 2021 Sustainability study using 380 online cosmetics consumers reported that CSR perceptions affected purchase intentions and that brand equity, brand credibility, and brand reputation mediated this relationship. This result is particularly relevant to the present paper because it demonstrates that multiple intangible brand assets can carry the effect of CSR into behavioral intention rather than leaving CSR as an isolated ethical evaluation.

Recent research has expanded the mechanism and methodological range. Work in fashion has shown that economic, social, and environmental CSR dimensions contribute differently to brand equity, corporate reputation, and willingness to pay, with brand credibility playing an important mediating role. A 2025 Scientific Reports study combining sentiment analysis and survey-based structural modeling concluded that CSR positively influenced purchase intention and that brand equity partially mediated the relationship. A 2025 systematic review covering research from 2018–2025 likewise emphasized brand equity, authenticity, CSR–brand fit, and cultural context as recurring mechanisms and boundary conditions.

Across this literature, three patterns stand out. First, CSR generally has a favorable association with brand outcomes, but effect strength varies by dimension and context. Second, brand equity is repeatedly positioned between CSR and behavioral outcomes, indicating that consumers often need to translate responsibility into brand meaning before it affects choice. Third, authenticity, awareness, fit, and skepticism determine whether the translation succeeds.

Table 1. Analytical synthesis of selected CSR–brand equity–purchase intention literature.

Study / context	Core relationship	Main analytical contribution	Implication for mediation
Hoeffler & Keller (2002)	Societal marketing → brand equity	Explains how social initiatives can build awareness, credibility and engagement.	CSR can create brand assets before behavior changes.



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Torres et al. (2012)	Stakeholder CSR → global brand equity	Shows that CSR toward multiple stakeholders contributes to brand value.	Brand equity aggregates stakeholder-related signals.
Kang & Namkung (2018)	CSR dimensions → brand equity	Ethical, legal and economic dimensions were more influential than philanthropy.	Mediation depends on which CSR dimension consumers consider diagnostic.
Sustainability study (2021)	CSR → brand equity / credibility / reputation → purchase intention	PLS-SEM evidence from 380 cosmetics consumers.	Supports indirect paths through intangible brand assets.
Fashion study (2024)	CSR dimensions → brand equity / reputation / willingness to pay	Shows dimension-specific effects and the importance of credibility.	Brand value mechanisms are heterogeneous.
Shen, Li & Zhang (2025)	CSR → brand equity → purchase intention	Reports significant positive paths and partial mediation.	Brand equity transmits a substantial, but not exclusive, share of CSR influence.

5. Research Objectives and Analytical Questions

1. To explain how CSR can influence consumer purchase intention directly and indirectly.
2. To examine brand equity as a mediating mechanism linking perceived CSR to purchase intention.
3. To identify which dimensions of brand equity are most plausibly affected by CSR.
4. To analyze the boundary conditions that strengthen or weaken the CSR–brand equity relationship.
5. To compare the managerial value of symbolic CSR communication with substantive, integrated CSR practice.

6. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design. It does not present new primary survey data and therefore does not report invented regression coefficients, significance levels, or sample statistics. Instead, it synthesizes established theories and selected peer-reviewed studies to evaluate the logic of mediation. This approach is appropriate because the research problem concerns the mechanism linking three mature constructs—CSR, brand equity, and purchase intention—across multiple industries and consumer settings.

The analytical process has four stages. First, the constructs are conceptually separated to avoid treating CSR, brand reputation, brand equity, and purchase intention as interchangeable. Second, the paper maps the causal sequence from CSR perceptions to brand knowledge and evaluation, and from brand evaluation to purchase intention. Third, the paper evaluates boundary conditions such as authenticity, awareness, fit, consumer values, industry, and skepticism. Fourth, the synthesis is translated into propositions and managerial implications.

The attached sample paper uses a comparable conceptual-analytical method: it explicitly describes itself as qualitative, descriptive, and analytical; relies on author-based academic literature; and uses structured tables and illustrative figures rather than presenting original field data. The present paper adopts that research-style organization while applying it to a marketing and consumer-behavior problem.

7. Analytical Framework: CSR → Brand Equity → Purchase Intention

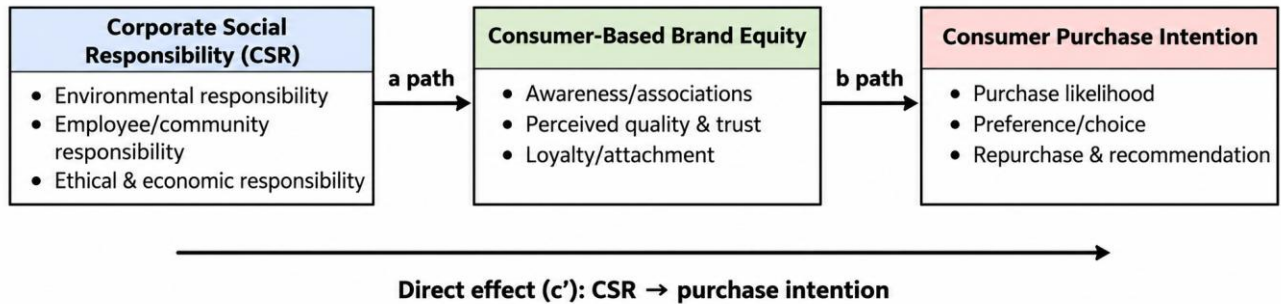


Figure 1. Conceptual mediation framework linking CSR, brand equity, and consumer purchase intention.

Figure 1 represents the central mediation argument. The 'a path' links CSR to brand equity. The 'b path' links brand equity to purchase intention while CSR is conceptually held constant. The direct path (c') captures any remaining influence of CSR on purchase intention that is not carried through brand equity. If both the indirect path and the direct path remain meaningful, the pattern is partial mediation; if the direct path becomes negligible after accounting for brand equity, the pattern approaches full mediation. The framework should not be interpreted as a mechanical sequence in which every CSR action automatically raises brand equity. The first conversion is perceptual: objective corporate practices must become noticed and interpreted as responsible. The second conversion is evaluative: responsibility must alter brand knowledge, trust, perceived quality, differentiation, or loyalty. The third conversion is behavioral: stronger brand equity must be sufficiently relevant to overcome price, convenience, competitive offers, and situational constraints.

An analytical mediation model can be expressed in simplified form as $BE = \alpha + a(CSR) + \varepsilon_1$ and $PI = \beta + c'(CSR) + b(BE) + \varepsilon_2$. The indirect effect is $a \times b$. In an empirical study, mediation would normally be assessed with structural equation modeling or regression-based bootstrapping, with confidence intervals for the indirect effect. The present paper uses these equations only to clarify the theoretical structure; it does not estimate them.

8. How CSR Builds Brand Equity

8.1 Brand Awareness and Salience

CSR can increase brand awareness when responsible initiatives attract media attention, social sharing, partnerships, or community participation. However, awareness alone is a weak form of equity. If consumers remember the campaign but cannot connect it to the brand's core value proposition, the awareness gain may not translate into preference. Effective CSR therefore requires associative linkage: consumers should remember both the initiative and why it is relevant to the brand.

8.2 Brand Associations and Image

CSR has its clearest branding effect through associations. Environmental responsibility may create associations of modernity, care, and future orientation; fair labor practices may signal integrity; community engagement may signal warmth and local embeddedness. These associations strengthen equity when they are favorable, distinctive, and consistent with other brand cues. A mismatch between claimed responsibility and product experience can create cognitive dissonance and weaken the brand.

8.3 Perceived Quality and Competence

The link between CSR and perceived quality is conditional. Responsibility does not automatically prove technical superiority, but consumers may use responsible conduct as a halo cue. A company that appears disciplined in environmental management or stakeholder treatment may also be inferred to have better processes and governance. This halo is more likely when CSR is integrated into product design, sourcing, safety, durability, or service quality rather than presented as unrelated philanthropy.

8.4 Brand Trust and Credibility

Trust is one of the most important bridges between CSR and brand equity. Consumers face vulnerability whenever product claims cannot be fully verified before purchase. Consistent CSR can reduce this vulnerability by suggesting that the firm values long-term relationships and accepts accountability. Credibility strengthens when the company provides specific targets, progress data, third-party verification, and continuity across time. It weakens when



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communication is vague, selectively disclosed, or contradicted by scandals.

8.5 Brand Loyalty and Attachment

CSR can support loyalty when consumers experience value congruence with the brand and when responsible conduct becomes part of the relationship rather than a one-time campaign. Loyalty is especially important for mediation because it transforms favorable attitudes into repeated behavioral preference. Yet loyalty effects may be asymmetric: CSR can reinforce an already satisfactory brand relationship, but it rarely compensates indefinitely for poor product quality, high switching costs imposed unfairly, or unreliable service.

9. From Brand Equity to Consumer Purchase Intention

Strong brand equity increases purchase intention through several mechanisms. First, awareness improves consideration: a brand that comes to mind has a greater chance of entering the choice set. Second, favorable associations create reasons to prefer the brand. Third, perceived quality and credibility reduce uncertainty. Fourth, loyalty lowers the psychological effort of evaluating alternatives. Fifth, emotional attachment can make the purchase identity-expressive rather than purely functional.

The mediating role of brand equity is particularly plausible in markets where CSR attributes are difficult to compare directly. Consumers rarely calculate the social impact of every purchase. Instead, repeated CSR signals become summarized in a broader brand judgment such as 'this is a responsible and trustworthy brand.' Brand equity is therefore a cognitive and affective compression mechanism: it converts complex corporate information into a simpler choice heuristic.

10. Boundary Conditions and Potential Failure of Mediation

10.1 CSR Awareness

A consumer cannot update brand equity using information that is not known. CSR awareness is therefore a basic precondition for many consumer-side effects. Low awareness does not mean CSR is valueless—operational responsibility can still reduce risk or improve employee and supply-chain outcomes—but it limits the specific pathway through consumer-based brand equity.

10.2 Perceived Authenticity

Authenticity concerns whether CSR is perceived as sincere, embedded, and consistent rather than opportunistic. Authenticity strengthens attribution to corporate values; skepticism redirects attribution toward image management. This distinction explains why more communication is not always better. Highly promotional CSR messaging can increase awareness while simultaneously decreasing credibility if consumers perceive self-congratulation or exaggeration.

10.3 CSR–Brand Fit

Fit refers to the perceived relevance between the social issue and the company's identity, products, capabilities, or stakeholder impacts. High fit makes the initiative easier to understand and integrate into brand memory. Low fit can still work when the firm explains a credible historical or strategic connection, but unexplained low-fit initiatives are more likely to appear arbitrary.

10.4 Prior Reputation and Corporate Inconsistency

CSR is interpreted against prior beliefs. A trusted brand receives more benefit of the doubt, while a firm with a history of controversy faces a higher evidentiary burden. When responsible messaging conflicts with labor, environmental, privacy, safety, or governance failures, the contradiction can damage equity more than silence would have. CSR therefore cannot be managed independently of overall corporate conduct.

10.5 Consumer Values, Culture, and Industry

Consumers differ in ethical orientation, environmental concern, political ideology, collectivism, price sensitivity, and issue involvement. Industries also differ in perceived social impact. Responsibility may be more diagnostic in fashion, food, energy, banking, technology, hospitality, and automobiles because stakeholder and environmental consequences are salient. Cultural context can further shape which CSR dimensions consumers prioritize and how openly companies should communicate them.

Table 2. Conditions that strengthen or weaken the mediating role of brand equity.

Condition	When mediation strengthens	When mediation weakens	Managerial implication
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Awareness	Consumers recognize and understand the initiative.	CSR is invisible or confusing.	Build accessible, evidence-based awareness without overpromotion.
Authenticity	Actions are sustained, costly, transparent, and consistent.	CSR appears symbolic, reactive, or exaggerated.	Align claims with verified operations and long-term commitments.
Brand–cause fit	Issue is relevant to product, stakeholders, or brand purpose.	Cause appears random or opportunistic.	Choose material issues and explain the strategic connection.
Prior reputation	Existing trust supports positive interpretation.	Scandals or contradictions trigger skepticism.	Repair core conduct before relying on CSR communication.
Consumer value congruence	CSR matches consumer identity and ethical priorities.	Issue is irrelevant or polarizing for the segment.	Segment communication while maintaining consistent principles.
Product competitiveness	Quality and price are acceptable; CSR differentiates.	CSR is expected to compensate for weak core value.	Treat responsibility as part of the value proposition, not a substitute for quality.

11. Analytical Propositions

- P1. Perceived CSR is positively associated with consumer-based brand equity when CSR activities are visible, credible, and relevant to stakeholders.
- P2. Brand equity is positively associated with consumer purchase intention because it increases consideration, trust, perceived value, and loyalty.
- P3. Brand equity mediates the positive relationship between perceived CSR and consumer purchase intention.
- P4. The indirect CSR → brand equity → purchase intention effect is stronger when perceived CSR authenticity is high.
- P5. The indirect effect is stronger when CSR–brand fit and consumer value congruence are high.
- P6. CSR skepticism and perceived greenwashing weaken the CSR → brand equity path and can reverse favorable brand effects.
- P7. The mediating effect is more likely to be partial than complete because CSR may also influence purchase intention directly through moral satisfaction, social signaling, or perceived risk reduction.

12. Analytical Discussion

The central finding of this analysis is that brand equity provides a coherent explanation for why CSR sometimes influences consumer purchase intention and sometimes does not. CSR is an upstream corporate input; purchase intention is a downstream consumer outcome. Between them lies a set of memory, trust, quality, reputation, and loyalty judgments. Brand equity captures much of this middle layer. This perspective resolves an apparent tension in CSR research. On one hand, many studies report favorable consumer reactions to CSR. On the other hand, managers frequently observe a gap between stated ethical concern and actual buying behavior. The mediation framework suggests that CSR does not need to become the primary purchase criterion to create value. It can work indirectly by making the brand more trusted, distinctive, meaningful, and resilient in the choice set.

The analysis also suggests that the quality of CSR matters more than the quantity of CSR claims. A portfolio of disconnected donations may generate less equity than a smaller number of material, sustained initiatives that consumers can connect to the company's identity and operations. Responsibility becomes a brand asset when it is interpretable. This requires strategic coherence across what the company does, what it says, and what consumers experience. Brand equity should also be treated as multidimensional rather than as a single favorable attitude. CSR may improve trust and associations while leaving perceived quality unchanged; it may strengthen loyalty among existing customers without substantially increasing awareness among noncustomers. Future empirical work should therefore test both a higher-order brand equity construct and its individual dimensions.

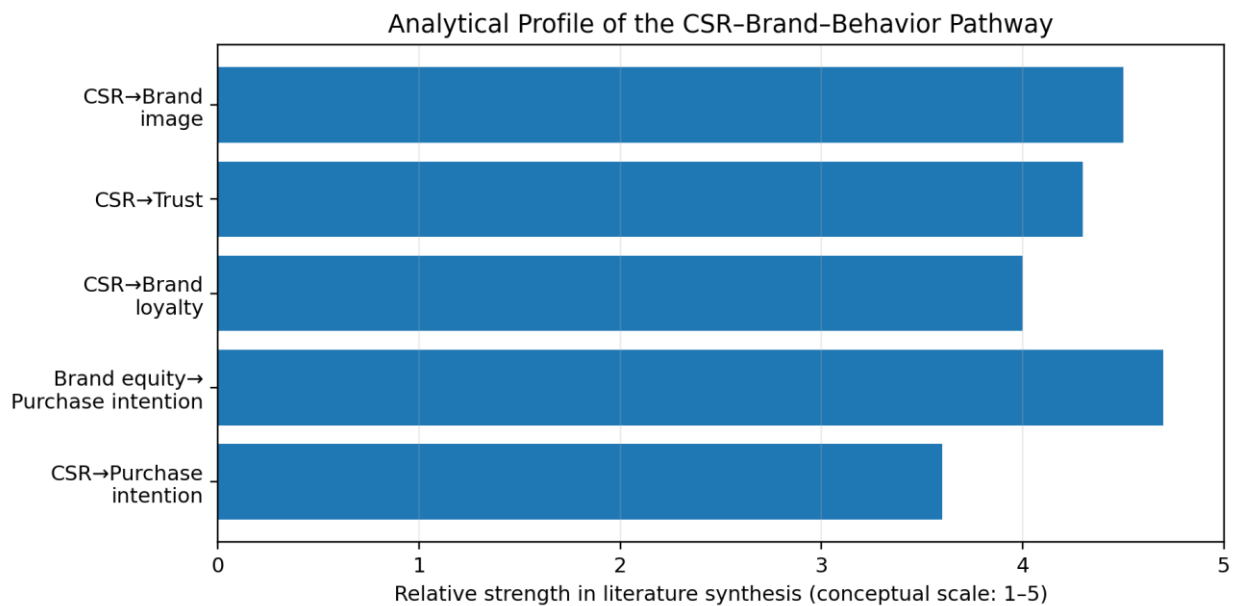


Figure 2. Conceptual literature-synthesis profile of major pathways. Scores are illustrative analytical ratings, not empirical estimates.

Figure 2 summarizes the qualitative pattern emerging from the literature reviewed here. The strongest conceptual link is from brand equity to purchase intention, followed by CSR effects on brand image and trust. The direct CSR-to-purchase path is shown as comparatively weaker because behavioral intention is usually filtered through brand judgments and marketplace constraints. The profile is illustrative and should not be interpreted as a meta-analytic effect-size chart.

13. Critical Evaluation

A major limitation in this field is common-method dependence. Many studies measure CSR perception, brand equity, and purchase intention in the same questionnaire at the same time. Such designs are useful for testing associations but can inflate relationships through shared method variance and do not establish temporal order. Stronger evidence would measure CSR exposure first, brand equity later, and actual behavior or choice subsequently.

A second limitation is the frequent use of purchase intention rather than observed purchase. Intention is theoretically relevant but can overstate ethical consumption because respondents may wish to present themselves as socially responsible. Field experiments, loyalty-card data, online conversion data, and natural experiments can test whether CSR-driven equity translates into real choice under price and convenience constraints.

A third issue is construct overlap. Brand image, reputation, trust, credibility, identification, and brand equity are related but not identical. Models that include many highly correlated mediators risk becoming statistically complex without adding conceptual clarity. Researchers should specify whether brand equity is a higher-order construct containing some of these dimensions or whether the variables are distinct mechanisms.

A fourth issue concerns endogeneity. Strong brands often have more resources to invest in CSR and more communication capacity to make that CSR visible. Consequently, a positive association between CSR and brand equity may partly reflect the reverse pathway from strong brand resources to visible responsibility. Longitudinal and quasi-experimental designs are needed to separate these directions.

Finally, the growing concern about greenwashing changes the meaning of CSR communication. The same communication intensity that once increased awareness may now activate skepticism. The strategic challenge is therefore evidentiary: firms must make claims specific enough to be verified, acknowledge trade-offs, and report progress rather than presenting responsibility as a flawless identity.

14. Managerial Implications

1. Integrate CSR with the brand value proposition. Select issues that are material to the firm's stakeholders and naturally connected to products, operations, capabilities, or purpose.



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2. Build proof before promotion. Use measurable targets, transparent progress, credible certifications where appropriate, and consistent operational behavior to support communication.
3. Manage brand equity dimensions separately. Track whether CSR is improving awareness, associations, trust, perceived quality, loyalty, and advocacy rather than relying on a single image score.
4. Design for long-term consistency. Repeated, coherent behavior is more likely to create durable brand memory than one-off campaigns tied to short-term publicity.
5. Segment without fragmenting. Different consumers care about different issues, but the underlying corporate principles should remain consistent across segments and channels.
6. Measure the mediation chain. In research and dashboards, evaluate CSR awareness and authenticity, brand-equity outcomes, purchase intention, and where possible actual purchase or retention.

15. Recommendations for Future Research

- Future studies should use longitudinal designs that establish temporal order among CSR exposure, changes in brand equity, and later purchase behavior.
- Experimental studies should manipulate CSR authenticity, fit, communication intensity, and third-party verification to identify causal mechanisms.
- Researchers should compare actual purchase behavior with stated purchase intention to quantify the intention–behavior gap in responsible consumption.
- Cross-cultural studies should test whether the same CSR dimensions build brand equity in collectivist, individualist, high-trust, and low-trust institutional environments.
- Industry-specific models should distinguish CSR that is peripheral from CSR that directly addresses the industry’s most material externalities.
- Future mediation models should compare brand equity with alternative mechanisms such as trust, identification, reputation, satisfaction, and perceived value while avoiding redundant constructs.
- Research should examine negative mediation: perceived greenwashing may reduce trust and brand equity, which in turn can lower purchase intention below its pre-campaign level.

16. Conclusion

This study examined corporate social responsibility, brand equity, and consumer purchase intention through a mediation perspective. The analysis indicates that CSR is most likely to influence purchase intention when consumers translate responsible corporate behavior into stronger brand knowledge and evaluation. Brand equity performs this translating function by accumulating awareness, associations, trust, perceived quality, loyalty, and attachment.

The mediation relationship is not automatic. CSR must be noticed, understood, credible, and sufficiently relevant to the brand and its stakeholders. Authenticity, brand–cause fit, consumer values, prior reputation, industry context, and product competitiveness determine whether responsibility becomes an equity-building signal or a source of skepticism. For this reason, brand equity is best treated as a partial and contingent mediator.

The broader strategic conclusion is that CSR and branding should be managed as connected systems. Responsibility creates greater market value when it is embedded in operations, expressed through verifiable evidence, and reinforced by the customer experience. Under these conditions, CSR does more than generate favorable publicity: it contributes to durable brand equity, and durable brand equity increases the probability that favorable attitudes become purchase intentions and repeated choice.

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