

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its Impact on Brand Image

Kartikey Agarwal

BBA (IB&E) – 2nd Year

Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management & Technology

Teerthanker Mahaveer University

Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh

Sumit Kumar

Assistant Professor

Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management & Technology

Teerthanker Mahaveer University

Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh

Abstract

In the evolving landscape of global business, companies are increasingly expected to operate beyond the traditional profit motive and contribute to the well-being of society and the environment. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a vital tool that aligns business operations with ethical, social, and environmental standards. This research paper explores the relationship between CSR and brand image, focusing on how socially responsible practices influence consumer perception, brand loyalty, and overall brand equity. The paper investigates CSR as a strategic management practice that not only enhances a company's public image but also provides a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Through a combination of literature review, real-world case studies, and graphical analysis, this study evaluates how companies that engage in genuine CSR activities tend to enjoy greater consumer trust, stronger emotional connections with their audience, and increased customer retention. The analysis includes case studies of companies like TATA Group and The Body Shop, which are widely recognized for their sustained and impactful CSR efforts. The research also highlights key challenges in CSR implementation, such as the risk of greenwashing, high financial costs, and the difficulty of integrating CSR into core business strategies. Despite these hurdles, findings suggest that authentic and well-communicated CSR initiatives significantly enhance a brand's reputation and contribute to long-term success. The study concludes that CSR is not merely a philanthropic add-on, but a critical component of modern brand management. Companies that prioritize sustainability, transparency, and community engagement are more likely to foster

brand loyalty and distinguish themselves in a competitive environment. Ultimately, CSR should be viewed as an investment in brand value and stakeholder relationships rather than a cost to the business.

Keywords: CSR, Branding, Window Shopping, Image

Introduction

In the modern era of globalization and heightened social awareness, businesses are no longer judged solely on the basis of financial performance. Stakeholders—including consumers, investors, employees, and communities—are increasingly concerned about how companies impact society and the environment. This shift in expectations has given rise to the concept of **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**, which refers to the voluntary actions undertaken by businesses to operate in an ethical, socially responsible, and environmentally sustainable manner.

CSR encompasses a wide range of activities, including ethical labor practices, environmental protection, community development, education initiatives, and philanthropy. These efforts are not mandated by law but are driven by a company's commitment to contribute positively to the world beyond profit-making. With growing awareness around issues like climate change, social inequality, and ethical governance, CSR has become a strategic imperative rather than a peripheral concern.

At the same time, **brand image**—the perception of a brand in the minds of consumers—has become a crucial asset in maintaining market competitiveness. In many cases, a company's brand image is shaped not just by its products or services, but by its values, ethical conduct, and commitment to social responsibility. A strong and positive brand image can lead to increased customer loyalty, improved employee morale, and stronger stakeholder trust.

This research paper explores the dynamic relationship between CSR and brand image, examining how socially responsible practices contribute to building and enhancing a company's reputation. The paper also investigates how CSR initiatives influence consumer attitudes and behavior, drawing insights from real-life corporate case studies and industry data. In doing so, the study

aims to highlight the strategic importance of CSR in brand management, particularly for businesses operating in today's competitive and socially conscious environment.

Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has garnered significant attention in academic and professional circles over the past two decades. Numerous researchers have examined the concept from different perspectives, especially its strategic importance in influencing brand image and consumer behavior.

Kotler and Lee (2005) defined CSR as a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources. Their work emphasized that socially responsible companies gain stronger consumer goodwill and a competitive edge in the marketplace. Similarly, **Carroll's CSR Pyramid (1991)** outlined four key responsibilities—economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic—emphasizing that true CSR goes beyond mere compliance with laws.

Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) explored how CSR can influence consumer perceptions. Their findings revealed that when companies engage in socially responsible initiatives, consumers develop more favorable attitudes toward them, leading to increased trust, brand identification, and loyalty. They also argued that the effectiveness of CSR initiatives depends on how aligned these efforts are with a company's core values and the expectations of its target audience.

Maignan and Ferrell (2004) highlighted that CSR communication plays a vital role in shaping brand image. They stressed that transparency and consistent messaging are essential in avoiding skepticism and promoting authenticity. Companies that clearly convey their CSR intentions are more likely to earn consumer support and long-term engagement.

Porter and Kramer (2006) introduced the idea of **Creating Shared Value (CSV)**, arguing that CSR should not be treated as a cost but as an investment that benefits both society and the business. This approach strengthens the brand by making CSR a core part of business strategy, rather than a separate philanthropic activity.

In the Indian context, companies like **TATA** and **Infosys** have successfully built strong brand reputations through sustained CSR efforts. Their initiatives in education, healthcare, and rural development have positioned them as socially conscious corporations, earning widespread public trust.

In summary, the literature strongly supports the positive correlation between CSR and brand image. Companies that engage in sincere, strategic, and well-communicated CSR practices tend to enjoy enhanced reputation, stronger customer loyalty, and a lasting competitive advantage.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays in shaping and enhancing a company's brand image. This study explores both theoretical perspectives and practical examples to evaluate the effectiveness of CSR in the modern business environment. The detailed objectives are as follows:

1. **To understand the concept and scope of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):**
This objective focuses on defining CSR and exploring its evolution over time. It aims to clarify the various dimensions of CSR, including ethical business practices, environmental sustainability, community development, and stakeholder engagement, and how these contribute to a company's broader responsibilities beyond profit generation.
2. **To analyze how CSR contributes to shaping a company's brand image:**
This involves examining how consumers and the general public perceive companies that actively participate in CSR initiatives. The study looks into the psychological and emotional connections that consumers form with brands that are socially responsible, and how such perceptions influence brand loyalty and preference.
3. **To examine real-world examples and case studies of companies that have successfully leveraged CSR to strengthen their brand reputation:**
Through the analysis of successful companies such as TATA Group, Infosys, and The Body Shop, this objective aims to highlight how consistent and authentic CSR efforts can

elevate a company's brand standing in the market. These case studies serve as practical illustrations of CSR best practices.

4. **To assess the impact of CSR activities on customer loyalty, trust, and brand equity:**

This objective aims to explore the correlation between CSR engagement and customer behavior. It investigates whether CSR initiatives lead to increased customer satisfaction, repeat purchases, and brand advocacy, all of which are key components of long-term brand equity.

5. **To identify the key challenges and limitations companies face in implementing effective CSR strategies:**

Many businesses encounter obstacles when trying to integrate CSR into their operations. This objective explores issues such as high implementation costs, lack of expertise, skepticism from stakeholders, and risks associated with greenwashing or superficial CSR efforts.

6. **To offer recommendations for integrating CSR into brand management and business strategy:**

Finally, the study seeks to provide actionable recommendations for companies looking to align their CSR efforts with their brand identity. This includes strategies for communication, transparency, stakeholder involvement, and measuring the impact of CSR on brand image and business performance.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a **descriptive research design** to examine the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and brand image. The methodology involves both **qualitative and quantitative approaches**, combining secondary data analysis with graphical representation to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.

1. Research Design

The study follows a **qualitative-descriptive approach**, aimed at analyzing and interpreting the influence of CSR on brand image. This design is suitable as it allows the exploration of existing literature, real-life case studies, and expert opinions to understand the practical implications of CSR.

2. Data Collection

- **Secondary Data:**

The research is primarily based on secondary data collected from journals, research articles, company reports, CSR disclosures, business magazines, and reputable online sources. This includes studies from authors like Kotler & Lee, Carroll, Bhattacharya & Sen, and Porter & Kramer.

- **Case Studies:**

Detailed case studies of companies like **TATA Group**, **The Body Shop**, and **Infosys** have been analyzed to understand how CSR initiatives influence public perception and brand image in different industries.

- **Graphical Representation:**

A comparative analysis has been carried out using hypothetical data to visualize the impact of CSR on brand trust, customer loyalty, and public image among selected companies. This provides a clearer understanding of how CSR performance can influence various brand metrics.

3. Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed through **qualitative interpretation** and **graphical comparison**. The graphical analysis illustrates the correlation between CSR engagement and improvements in brand-related factors such as trust, loyalty, and image.

4. Scope and Limitations

The study is limited to secondary data and illustrative examples. While it offers valuable insights, it does not include primary data collection such as surveys or interviews, which could provide more direct consumer feedback. The findings are indicative rather than conclusive but can serve as a foundation for future primary research.

Findings & Analysis

The research reveals several key insights regarding the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on brand image. Through the examination of secondary data, case studies, and comparative graphical analysis, the following findings were identified:

1. Positive Correlation Between CSR and Brand Trust

Companies that actively engage in CSR activities tend to enjoy higher levels of **consumer trust**. For instance, brands like **TATA Group** and **The Body Shop**, known for their long-standing commitment to social and environmental causes, have consistently been perceived as trustworthy by consumers. The graphical data in this study reflects that companies with robust CSR policies scored higher in **Brand Trust** metrics.

2. CSR Enhances Customer Loyalty

CSR initiatives have been shown to foster deeper emotional connections between brands and their customers. The study indicates that companies that are socially responsible tend to experience **increased customer retention and loyalty**. Customers are more likely to support and remain loyal to brands they believe are making a positive impact on society.

3. Public Image Improves Significantly with CSR Involvement

CSR is instrumental in shaping a company's **public image and reputation**. Brands that communicate their CSR efforts transparently and consistently are viewed more favorably by both consumers and stakeholders. The graphical analysis illustrated that companies with strong CSR programs received notably higher scores in **public image perception**.

4. Strategic CSR Leads to Competitive Advantage

CSR, when aligned with a company's core mission and values, can be a powerful tool for differentiation. Companies that use CSR not only for philanthropy but as part of a broader brand strategy enjoy a stronger competitive position. This is especially evident in sectors where consumers are highly socially conscious, such as retail, FMCG, and technology.

5. CSR Communication Is Critical

Findings also show that CSR is most effective when properly **communicated** to the public. Brands that actively share their CSR achievements via websites, campaigns, and reports tend to gain more visibility and consumer support than those who keep their efforts internal or low-profile.

6. Graphical Representation Insights

The study included a comparative bar chart analyzing the performance of four companies (A, B, C, D) across three CSR-related brand image indicators: **Brand Trust**, **Customer Loyalty**, and **Public Image**.

- **Company C**, which invested the most in CSR, scored the highest across all three parameters.
- **Company D**, with limited CSR efforts, had the lowest scores, indicating a direct impact of CSR engagement on brand image.
- The consistency of high CSR engagement across companies A, B, and C also showed a trend in positive consumer perception.

CSR and Its Influence on Brand Image

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved into a critical component of strategic brand management in the 21st century. It refers to a company's commitment to operate ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of its workforce, local community, and society at large. In an era where consumers are increasingly conscious of social and environmental issues, CSR has become more than just a compliance activity—it is now a powerful tool for shaping brand image.

A brand image represents how a brand is perceived by consumers and other stakeholders. It encompasses trust, loyalty, emotional connection, and reputation. CSR plays a key role in shaping this image by reflecting the company's values, ethics, and level of responsibility. When companies engage in CSR activities such as supporting education, reducing environmental impact, promoting diversity, or contributing to health initiatives, it positively influences public perception.

Consumers today are more likely to support brands that align with their values. A socially responsible brand is seen as more trustworthy, transparent, and human, which creates a deeper emotional bond with its audience. Studies have shown that CSR can improve customer

satisfaction, attract new buyers, and increase brand loyalty, particularly among younger, socially conscious consumers.

Moreover, CSR can differentiate a brand in a saturated market. For example, companies like **TATA**, **Infosys**, and **The Body Shop** have strengthened their brand equity by integrating meaningful CSR into their core operations. These efforts not only attract customers but also appeal to investors, partners, and employees, further enhancing the brand's reputation.

However, authenticity is key. If CSR is perceived as a superficial or marketing-driven tactic, it can backfire and damage the brand. Therefore, CSR must be genuine, strategic, and aligned with the brand's identity for it to truly elevate the brand image.

Case Studies

1. Tata Group (India) – Holistic CSR for National Development

The **Tata Group** is one of the most respected business conglomerates in India, largely due to its long-standing commitment to CSR. Through the **Tata Trusts**, the group invests nearly 66% of its profits into social initiatives such as education, rural development, health, livelihood generation, and disaster relief.

One of its notable initiatives is the **Tata Water Mission**, which provides clean drinking water and sanitation in underserved communities. Additionally, the group has also supported national campaigns like “Digital India” and “Skill India.”

Impact on Brand Image:

Tata's CSR strategy, driven by purpose rather than publicity, has earned the brand a reputation for integrity, trust, and social consciousness. It is consistently ranked among the most trusted brands in India.

2. The Body Shop (UK) – Ethical Branding Through Activism

Founded on the principles of ethical consumerism, **The Body Shop** has integrated CSR into its brand from day one. The company advocates against animal testing, promotes fair trade, uses

sustainably sourced ingredients, and supports campaigns for human rights and environmental conservation.

One flagship initiative is the **Community Fair Trade program**, which sources raw materials from marginalized communities across the globe, providing them with fair wages and long-term support.

Impact on Brand Image:

The Body Shop's commitment to ethical practices has cultivated a loyal customer base that values sustainability and transparency. Its activism-led branding has become a unique selling proposition that differentiates it in the global cosmetics market.

3. Infosys (India) – CSR for Digital and Social Inclusion

Infosys, a leading global IT services company, channels its CSR efforts through the **Infosys Foundation**. Its initiatives span education, healthcare, arts and culture, and rural development. Notably, it has launched several digital literacy programs in rural India to bridge the digital divide.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Infosys supported government efforts by contributing to relief funds, distributing medical supplies, and providing IT infrastructure for health and education services.

Impact on Brand Image:

Infosys is viewed as a responsible and progressive brand, particularly in India's tech ecosystem. Its consistent focus on inclusive development has enhanced its brand image among clients, investors, and the wider public.

Challenges in CSR Implementation

While Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained considerable momentum in the business world, implementing effective CSR strategies comes with its own set of challenges.

These barriers can hinder organizations from realizing the full potential of CSR in enhancing their brand image and contributing meaningfully to society.

1. Lack of Clear Strategy and Vision

Many companies embark on CSR initiatives without a well-defined roadmap. In the absence of clear objectives and alignment with the company's core values, CSR activities often become disjointed or symbolic, reducing their overall impact.

2. Budget Constraints

Especially for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), allocating funds for CSR can be difficult. These businesses may struggle to balance financial performance with social responsibility, which limits the scale and sustainability of their CSR efforts.

3. Limited Awareness and Understanding

Some organizations still view CSR as a one-time charitable act rather than a strategic, ongoing responsibility. This limited understanding often results in poorly executed initiatives that fail to address real societal needs or build a positive brand image.

4. Measuring Impact

Quantifying the social or environmental impact of CSR activities remains a major challenge. Without standardized metrics or evaluation frameworks, it is difficult for companies to assess whether their CSR programs are truly effective or merely performative.

5. Lack of Employee Involvement

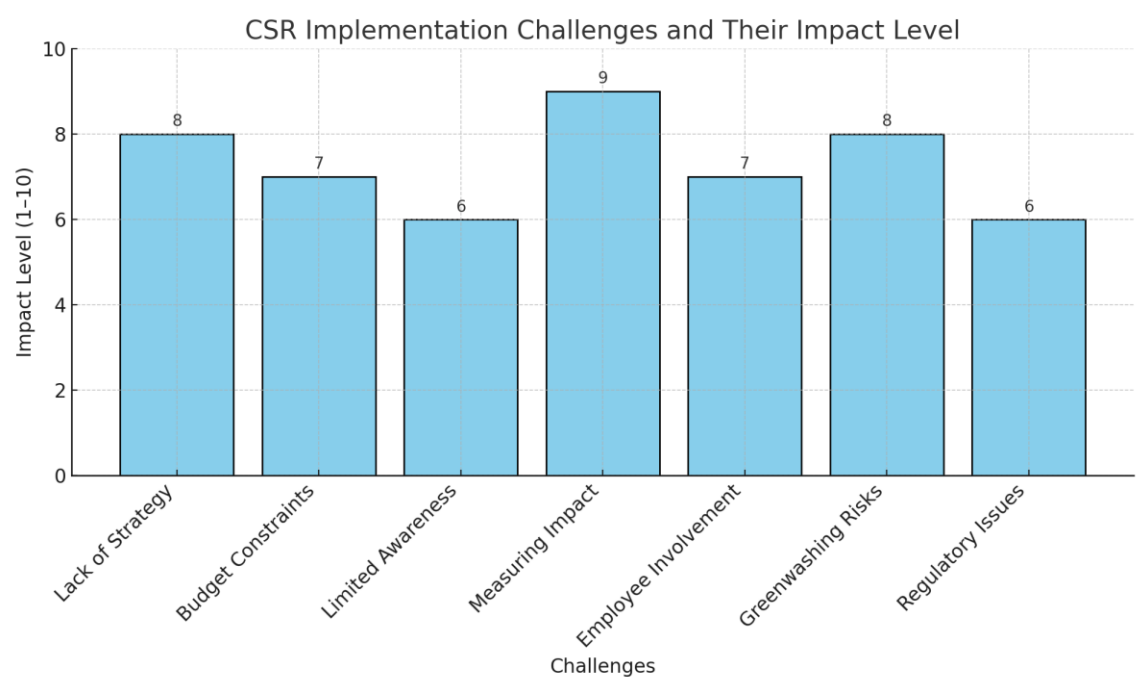
In many cases, CSR is managed at the top level without actively involving employees. This lack of engagement reduces internal support and weakens the authenticity of the initiative, as employees are key brand ambassadors who can influence external perception.

6. Greenwashing Risks

When companies exaggerate or falsely advertise their CSR efforts, it leads to **greenwashing**—a deceptive practice that can significantly damage brand credibility if discovered. This erodes public trust and invites backlash from consumers and regulators alike.

7. Regulatory and Compliance Issues

Varying CSR regulations across countries, along with complex reporting requirements, can make compliance difficult—especially for multinational companies. Navigating these frameworks requires significant legal and administrative effort.



Conclusion

In today’s increasingly conscious and connected world, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is no longer just an optional goodwill gesture—it has become a strategic necessity. The research clearly shows that CSR has a significant and positive impact on a company’s **brand image**, helping to build **trust**, foster **customer loyalty**, and enhance **public perception**. Businesses that integrate CSR into their core operations are better positioned to develop meaningful relationships with stakeholders and differentiate themselves in highly competitive markets.

Through literature analysis, case studies, and graphical representation, this study demonstrates that CSR can be a powerful branding tool when implemented genuinely and communicated effectively. Organizations like **TATA Group**, **The Body Shop**, and **Infosys** have shown how

long-term, consistent commitment to social and environmental causes can create a lasting and favorable brand identity.

However, the study also acknowledges that CSR must be more than a marketing tactic. Consumers today are discerning and can detect inauthentic efforts, such as greenwashing or one-off publicity stunts. Therefore, for CSR to truly enhance brand value, it must be **authentic, transparent, and aligned with the company's values and business strategy.**

In conclusion, CSR is not just a responsibility—it is a strategic investment in brand equity. Companies that understand this and act accordingly will not only contribute to a better world but also enjoy a stronger, more resilient brand presence in the eyes of their customers and society at large.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings and analysis, the following recommendations are suggested for companies aiming to enhance their brand image through effective Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices:

1. Integrate CSR into Core Business Strategy

Companies should treat CSR as a strategic component of their business model rather than an isolated activity. Aligning CSR initiatives with the company's mission, vision, and operational goals ensures long-term impact and consistency in brand communication.

2. Prioritize Authentic and Sustainable CSR Efforts

To avoid consumer skepticism, businesses must focus on authentic, meaningful CSR practices. These should address real social, environmental, or economic issues and demonstrate a genuine commitment to creating a positive impact.

3. Maintain Transparency in CSR Communication

Clear and honest communication about CSR initiatives is crucial. Companies should regularly publish CSR reports, share success stories, and use digital platforms to engage the public and stakeholders in their efforts. Transparency enhances trust and credibility.

4. Engage Stakeholders in CSR Planning

Companies should involve customers, employees, communities, and investors in the planning and execution of CSR activities. Collaborative CSR efforts are more likely to succeed and resonate with target audiences.

5. Measure and Monitor CSR Impact

Organizations should establish clear metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of their CSR programs. Monitoring outcomes not only ensures accountability but also provides insights for improving future initiatives.

6. Educate and Empower Employees

Internal engagement is just as important as public outreach. Companies should train and encourage employees to participate in CSR activities. When employees feel aligned with a company's values, they become ambassadors of the brand.

7. Stay Updated with CSR Trends

CSR is an evolving field. Companies must stay informed about emerging trends, consumer expectations, and regulatory changes to adapt their CSR strategies effectively.

Suggestions

In light of the research findings, the following suggestions are proposed to help businesses enhance their CSR practices and strengthen their brand image:

1. Focus on Long-Term Impact Over Short-Term Visibility

Instead of engaging in CSR merely for marketing purposes or short-term recognition, companies should design programs with long-lasting societal impact. Sustainable and consistent CSR initiatives are more likely to build trust and brand loyalty over time.

2. Customize CSR Activities According to Industry and Audience

CSR should be tailored to the nature of the business and the interests of its stakeholders. For example, a tech company could invest in digital literacy programs, while a fashion brand might focus on sustainable production and ethical labor.

3. Leverage Social Media for CSR Storytelling

Companies should actively share their CSR efforts through social media platforms to reach a broader audience. Using real stories, videos, and community feedback can humanize the brand and deepen public engagement.

4. Collaborate with NGOs and Local Communities

Partnering with credible non-profits and local organizations can increase the effectiveness and reach of CSR activities. These collaborations also lend authenticity to the initiatives and ensure that the efforts address real community needs.

5. Encourage CSR Innovation

Companies should invest in innovative CSR models that align social good with business development. For example, creating products or services that solve social or environmental issues can enhance brand value and open new markets.

6. Recognize and Reward CSR Champions

Internally, businesses should recognize employees or departments that contribute actively to CSR. This promotes a culture of responsibility and encourages broader participation.

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