



Unravelling the Effect of Consumer Perception of CSR Practices of Multinational Enterprises on Consumer Purchase Intention: Insights from the Sri Lankan FMCG Sector

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4038/sljmuok.v10i1.156>

ABSTRACT

Due to increased market potential, Multinational enterprises offering fast-moving consumer goods have grown rapidly in developing countries such as Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to investigate how CSR practices in the MNE FMCG sector of Sri Lanka affect consumer purchasing intentions through the mediation of brand image, brand attitude, and perceived quality. A positivist research paradigm has been adopted in this study. Accordingly, self-administered questionnaires were distributed among 200 consumers of MNE FMCGs and the structural equation modeling technique was adopted to generate the study's statistical conclusions. It was found that consumer purchase intention is influenced by the CSR practices of MNE FMCG companies, while brand attitude, brand image and perceived quality partially mediate the aforementioned relationship.

This study unravels the actual effect of CSR practices of MNEs on consumer purchase intention especially in the context of South Asia based on the theoretical foundations of Social Exchange theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. This would be in contrast to extant literature which seems to have inconsistent findings on this relationship.

Keywords: *Corporate social responsibility, Consumer purchase intention, Brand image, Brand attitude, Perceived quality, Multinational Enterprises*





1. INTRODUCTION

Multi-national enterprises (MNEs) are typically businesses that operate both in their home country and in other host countries (Dunning, 1977). The statistics state that there are more than 60,000 MNEs spread throughout the world that control more than 500,000 subsidiaries and account for more than half of international trade (World Atlas of Global Issues, 2018). Moreover, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) which are the largest category of the consumer goods market can be referred to as the goods that are not durable and quickly sold at a low cost with a low profit (Durmaz, 2014) and growth of FMCG sector in the Asian market was 4.3% in the fourth quarter of 2018 (Kou, 2019).

Companies are driven to devote resources to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices by the recognition they earn from a broad range of stakeholders (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001), however, MNEs find it challenging to do so because there are differences in the expectations of stakeholders in their home and host countries (Eweje, 2006; Gardberg and Fombrun, 2006; Jamali, 2007). Especially if the host country is a developing country, the CSR expectations of stakeholders differ to a greater extent than in developed countries (Jamali and Neville, 2011).

CSR has evolved as a strategic tool for enhancing organisational performance and profitability, but only in developed country contexts (Lee, 2016; Taneja *et al.*, 2011). Existing literature has suggested that CSR directly affects customer purchase intentions (Gatti *et al.*, 2012; Lee and Shin, 2010; Mohr and Webb, 2005), yet some inconsistent findings highlight the dependence of CSR on several factors such as culture, product preferences, price impacts, spending habits, and CSR knowledge level (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2015).

Interestingly, consumer intention to purchase a product may vary based on the amount and nature of CSR information available about the company (Mohr *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, it appears that consumers consider product attributes such as brand



image and brand attitude when choosing a product over others (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2000; Shamma and Hassan, 2011; Shim *et al.*, 2001), and if the consumers are aware that the company is involved in CSR initiatives, it may also influence their purchase intention (De Wolf *et al.*, 2012).

In the context of Sri Lanka being a lower-middle-income South Asian nation (Jayawardena and Dewasiri, 2023), consumers tend to spend a significant proportion of disposable income on lifestyle products and durable products for the home (Oxford Business Group, 2022) and have experienced a change in consumer culture (Dewasiri *et al.*, 2021). This demonstrates that the consumer base of the Sri Lankan FMCG sector is rapidly growing. On a similar note, the knowledge of the general public about CSR practices is in doubt because they only take into account philanthropic activities when defining CSR (Samarakoon and Arachchige, 2015). Therefore, this paves the path for this research to explore how the CSR practices of MNEs influence consumer purchase intention in the Sri Lankan context of the FMCG sector since it is hard to generalise the existing findings to the South Asian context. This study is based on the following questions.

- i. What is the impact of consumer perception of the CSR practices of MNEs on consumer purchase intention?
- ii. What is the mediating effect of brand attitude on consumer perception of the CSR practices of MNEs and consumer purchase intention?
- iii. What is the mediating effect of brand image on consumer perception of the CSR practices of MNEs and consumer purchase intention?
- iv. What is the mediating effect of perceived quality on consumer perception of the CSR practices of MNEs and consumer purchase intention?



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the contemporary context, CSR practices have emerged as a prominent research field, notably focusing on the CSR initiatives undertaken by MNEs (Liu et al., 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2006). Companies undertake numerous strategies and policies related to their CSR practices in order to attract host country communities, which ultimately lead to a strong business image and a competitive advantage over others (Azman & Mustapha, 2018; Boso et al., 2017). Furthermore, the aforementioned argument was supported by scholars by stating that companies that are larger in size invest a significant amount in CSR practices with the expectation of obtaining a competitive advantage (Du et al., 2007). In the current era companies engage in CSR practices continuously and it is vital to gain a good understanding of how these activities pave the path to improving company image (Kim & Lee, 2019). According to Kolk and Van Tulder (2006) it has been a challenging task for MNEs to evaluate the direct and indirect effects of CSR initiatives in the developing country context. Therefore, the current study is implemented to investigate how the CSR practices of MNEs effect on consumer purchase intention in the Sri Lankan FMCG sector.

2.1. Perception of CSR

CSR practices can be identified as one of the emerging research areas due to their value addition to consumer perception (Liou & Rao-Nicholson, 2022). When considering the evolution of CSR definitions, it is clear that all definitions described two aspects, namely societal concerns of companies and stakeholder groups, and societal expectations (Hildebrand *et al.*, 2011; Podnar and Golob, 2007). Furthermore, ‘Consumer driven corporate responsibility model’ which was a newly introduced CSR model reflects that companies need to be more socially responsible to be more profitable (Claydon, 2011). In Carroll’s (1979) view, CSR practices address four main responsibilities such as ethical, legal, philanthropic, and economic that a company should fulfill. It should be noted that in this study Carroll’s view of CSR practices will be used which covers all the legal, ethical, philanthropic and economic aspects of CSR practices.



According to Lomba (2017), CSR can influence buyers' perception and CSR is identified as a driving strategic marketing tool that can influence consumer behaviour in both marketing and business management contexts (Hwang and Kandampully, 2015; Sen *et al.*, 2006). The degree of information available to consumers regarding the CSR implementation information of a company could manipulate the consumer purchase intention (Mohr *et al.*, 2001). In addition, when customers are more conscious of social responsibility, CSR implementation may be far more successful in influencing the desire to make purchases (Prakash and Pathak, 2017). Lee and Shin (2010) claim that there is a positive relationship between consumer purchase intention and CSR. Additionally, Sen and Wadera (2021) state that CSR practices positively impact on consumer purchase intention in FMCG sectors. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be formulated with regard to CSR and consumer purchase intention.

H₁: CSR has a significant positive relationship with consumer purchase intention

It can be claimed that when a brand image is strong, it improves product recognition, creates favourable brand attraction, and prompts favourable customer perceptions (Shamma and Hassan, 2011). Ultimately, it is expected that companies to use their well-established brand image as a competitive edge over other competitors by strategically implementing CSR (Boonpattarakon, 2012; Wu and Wang, 2014). Malik *et al.* (2010) urged to study brand image with respect to CSR as it is central to determining branding in emerging markets. Based on the aforementioned facts, this study will focus on brand image, as it is evident that brand image is important in the context of CSR in influencing consumer purchase intention.

As CSR practices express the company's values, they generally tend to strengthen a company's brand image; nevertheless, the impact of the brand image depends on consumer evaluation processes (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2000). According to Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006), CSR assists in creating a positive consumer perception of the brand image of a company. Interestingly, studies have proposed that if a company successfully adopts CSR practices and it results in a positive relationship between brand image and consumer perception of CSR, consumers may be encouraged to

actively participate in the brand (Alexander *et al.*, 2014; Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006). As a result, the below hypothesis is formulated in order to reflect the relationship between CSR and brand image;

H₂: CSR has a significant positive relationship with the brand image

In the context of company engagement in CSR initiatives, it is noted that consumers may have favourable perceptions of specific brands or companies (Jilani *et al.*, 2021; Kim and Lee, 2019) while Rivera *et al.* (2019) argue that there is no relationship between CSR and brand attitude. This phenomenon has led certain scholars to posit that CSR is a crucial factor that contributes to the enhancement of brand attitudes in the minds of consumers (Pratihari and Uzma, 2018). Interestingly, scholars have argued based on their findings that brand attitude may have an impact on consumer willingness to buy in various contexts (Arachchi and Mendis, 2021; Arachchi and Samarasinghe, 2023). Since it is possible to assume that brand attitude plays a significant role in forming an influential impact on consumer purchase intention concerning CSR this study aims to identify how it works in the Sri Lankan MNE FMCG context.

Brand attitude plays a crucial role in the contemporary competitive market by activating consumer attitudes through consumer perception of CSR initiatives taken up by companies (Schnittka *et al.*, 2022). CSR engagement of a company can be described as a tool that assists in improving the brand attitude of a company (Pratihari and Uzma, 2018) and it may establish a positive viewpoint towards the brand (Kim and Lee, 2019). Additionally, studies have asserted that CSR initiatives have a direct impact on developing a favourable brand attitude, and it is through this attitude that it is possible to determine if a customer likes or dislikes a brand (Aydın, 2019; Ramesh *et al.*, 2018). Based on the above arguments it is hypothesised that;

H₃: CSR has a significant positive relationship with brand attitude

Existing empirical studies have revealed that if a company takes an active role in CSR initiatives, consumers are more likely to have positive perceptions of the quality of the products (Poolthong and Mandhachitara, 2009; Liu *et al.*, 2014). It is interesting to point out that Martínez and Nishiyama (2017) have proposed that engaging an active role in CSR activities could improve a company's intangible assets, including perceived quality and corporate reputation. Accordingly, it can be hypothesised as follows;

H₄: CSR has a significant positive relationship with perceived quality

2.2. Brand Attitude

The attitude a consumer holds regarding a particular brand after evaluating the functions and features of numerous brands can be defined as brand attitude (Hildebrand *et al.*, 2011). Brand attitude plays an important role since it can determine consumer behaviour including consumer willingness to purchase and it reflects the consumer likes and dislikes concerning a particular brand which ultimately decides and helps to predict consumer purchase intention (Chaudhuri, 1999). However, Appel *et al.* (2019) argue that brand attitudes towards any brand depend on the information obtained by the consumer through their family background, friends, culture, networking and global aspects. Over time, consumers tend to be loyal, trust, or like a particular brand based on the attitudes formed in their minds (Liu *et al.*, 2010).

Some scholars have stated that consumer perception regarding a company is driven by the extent to which that company engages in CSR practices that result in building a brand attitude in the consumer's mind, thereby influencing the consumer's intention to purchase products or services from that particular company (Wongpitch *et al.*, 2016). It can be demonstrated that the consumer's experiences with the CSR practices of a company influence not only the brand attitude but also the consumer purchase intention (Youn and Kim, 2008). Moreover, Lii and Lee (2011) proved that there is a strong relationship between brand attitude and consumer purchase intention for CSR. The above-mentioned literature arguments pave the path to develop the following hypotheses;



H₅: Brand attitude has a significant positive relationship with consumer purchase intention

H₆: Brand attitude mediates the relationship between consumer perception of CSR practices and consumer purchase intention

2.3. Brand Image

The brand image can be defined as the observations regarding a brand as reflected by the brand association held in the consumer's memory (Keller, 1993; Low and Lamb, 2000). Accordingly, it can be suggested that brand image is formed in the minds of consumers based on their interpretations.

Since CSR practices can have a significant impact on consumer minds to create a positive perception of the brand image of a particular company, it is able for companies to positively impact sales revenue by influencing consumer purchase intention (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001). Shamma and Hassan (2011) and Aaker and Keller (1990) both claim that a product can easily attract more consumers if its brand image has a strong position in the consumer's mind. Furthermore, Abdullah and Budiman (2019); and Ramesh *et al.* (2018) also argue that brand image mediates the relationship between CSR and consumer purchase intention. Based on the above argument the following hypotheses are proposed;

H₇: Brand image has a significant positive relationship with consumer purchase intention

H₈: Brand image mediates the relationship between consumer perception of CSR practices and consumer purchase intention

2.4. Perceived Quality

The perceived quality of a product is often regarded as a key element influencing consumer preferences across various industries (Boisvert and Ashill, 2011; Chomvilailuk and Butcher, 2010). The perceived quality can be formed by the influence of product price, marketing campaigns, brand, etc. (Kwak and Kang, 2009).

In particular, consumer intention to purchase is higher when consumers perceive a higher product quality (Lee and Lee, 2018).

To measure the CSR impact on brand preference, perceived quality could be identified as a primary factor in brand evaluation by consumers (Chomvilailuk and Butcher, 2010). Correspondingly, the efficacy of CSR will also be diminished if customers perceive that the product quality is below par (Folkes and Kamins, 1999). Moreover, it can be suggested that there is a high possibility that consumers will assume the quality of the products based on the company's involvement in CSR activities (Servaes and Tamayo, 2013).

According to Carman (1990), Jones *et al.* (2002), and Hendra and Lusiah (2017) there is a positive relationship between the perceived quality and the purchase intention of consumers. Gatti *et al.* (2012) and Ramesh *et al.* (2018) proved in their studies that perceived quality can mediate the relationship between consumer perception of CSR and consumer purchase intention. This is because consumers typically regard quality as one of the most important purchasing criteria. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated;

H₉: Perceived quality has a significant positive relationship with consumer purchase intention

H₁₀: Perceived quality mediates the relationship between consumer perception of CSR practices and consumer purchase intention.

2.5. Consumer Purchase Intention

The purchase intention of consumers can be described as the willingness of consumers to buy products (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000). Following Keller (1993) unforeseen situational factors serve as influential factors in determining consumer purchase intention. Furthermore, when a company implements successful CSR practices, it gains a good reputation and gives customers a reason to choose its products over those of competitors (Chung, 2015).



The existing literature demonstrates that consumer perception of CSR practices influences consumer intention to purchase (Arachchi and Mendis, 2021; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Lee and Shin, 2010) while the study implemented by Ramesh et al. (2018) mentions that CSR practices do not influence on consumer purchase intention. As there are contradictory findings within the existing body of literature regarding consumer purchase intention concerning CSR, the current study focuses on investigating the impact on purchase intention concerning CSR practices of MNE FMCG firms in the Sri Lankan context.

The two theoretical foundations of the current study are the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Social Exchange theory. The theory of Planned Behaviour posits that purchase intention is primarily influenced by three factors namely attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. These three factors are key predictors of intention, which in turn predicts actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In particular, Armitage and Conner (2001) state that TPB is a commonly used theory in social psychology to determine behavioural intentions of people. Similarly, a study conducted by Cruz et al. (2018) proves that TPB is a well-established theory to interpret and predict the intentions and behaviours of people, while Pearson and Grandon (2005) also support the aforementioned argument by stating TPB is a well-suited theoretical foundation to interpret purchase intention with particular beliefs, attitudes, and controls.

In the existing body of literature, TPB has been used by many studies to elaborate on the impact on purchase intention, and consumer behaviour both with and without CSR impact (Arachchi and Mendis, 2021; Rathore et al., 2022). Taken together, it seems reasonable that purchase intention with other factors such as consumer attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural controls has a greater impact than others, and it seems worthy to study in a CSR context as well.

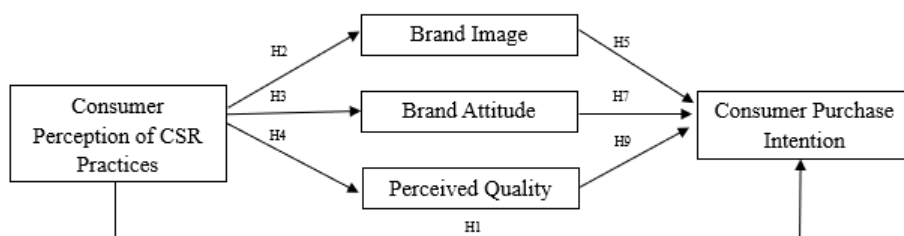
Another theory that has been adopted in the current study would be the social exchange theory (SET). According to the SET, rewards are the motivation for people to engage in social activities (Emerson, 1976) and they can be categorised as

socioemotional benefits that are mainly focused on social needs and economic benefits that focus on financial needs (Shore et al., 2006). The study conducted by Ramesh et al. (2018) states that CSR could be incorporated into SET since consumers perceive a brand to be more valuable when they realise the company engages in CSR initiatives. It encourages consumers to develop a favourable brand attitude and brand image in their minds, which leads them to choose that specific brand over competing options; in other words, it boosts consumers' intentions for purchasing products from that specific brand. Therefore, the mediating effect of brand image and brand attitude of the current study is aligned with SET based on the aforementioned theoretical foundation.

According to Becker-Olsen et al. (2006), Foster et al. (2008), Lee and Shin (2010) consumer minds and purchase intentions are driven by the companies that engage in CSR practices. Lee and Shin (2010) conducted their study in the Korean context to understand the relationship between consumer awareness of CSR practices and their purchase intentions by distributing questionnaires among a sample of 250 Korean consumers. In addition, the study conducted by Arachchi and Mendis (2021) in the Sri Lankan context to examine the relationship between perceived CSR and purchase intention with mediation of brand attitude and moderation of generation X and Y by using structured questionnaires for a sample of 392 individual consumers also indicates that the perceived corporate social responsibility significantly related to consumer purchase intention.

Refer to Figure 1 for the conceptual framework of the study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Note. This figure represents the conceptual framework that was built to identify the relationship between the variables in concern. Researcher's construction.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study has adopted a positivistic epistemology and objective ontology, which can be elaborated as a way of claiming the nature of reality's existence (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). According to Al-Ababneh (2020), the deductive approach is more appropriate if the study aims to develop existing theories and hypotheses while formulating a research strategy to test those hypotheses. The survey strategy was adopted and data was collected from 200 MNE FMCG consumers by sharing online self-administered questionnaires. The structural equation modeling technique (SEM) was employed as the statistical analysis method to analyse the relationships and mediation effects between the independent and dependent variables of the study.

The questionnaire consisted of six sections. In the first section, several demographic factors were collected. The second section comprised four questions adapted from future buying willingness by Wu and Wang (2014) which measure consumer purchase intention (PI). The consumer perception of CSR practices (CSR) was measured under Section 3, which adapted nine questions from perceived CSR by Bianchi *et al.* (2019). In the fourth section, the brand image (BI) was measured under six questions adapted from Ramos (2002). Section 5 measured brand attitude (BA) using five questions developed under brand attitude by Wu and Wang (2014). The sixth or final section consisted of five questions that were used to measure the perceived quality (PQ) developed by Aaker (1991,1996).

4. ANALYSIS OF DATA

According to the data gathered from the respondents, a majority of participants, comprising 59% of the total sample, identified as female. Moreover, a significant proportion of the respondents, amounting to 64%, fell within the age range of 21 to 30 years. Conversely, the age group above 51 years exhibited the lowest level of participation, constituting merely 3% of the overall respondents. Based on the results

of the respondents it can be identified that 57% of respondents are employed. Moreover, food and beverages (41.5%) and personal care products (40%) are the most preferred MNE FMCG products by the respondents.

4.1. Multivariate Assumptions

The results indicate normality since the purchase intention (PI), consumer perception of CSR practices (CSR), brand image (BI), brand attitude (BA), and perceived quality (PQ) have acceptable measures of skewness and kurtosis (refer to Table 1) which prove that all of the variables are normally distributed (Khatun, 2021; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). In terms of the assumption of linearity, in the current study, it can be observed that the residuals are scattered around the zero line and it is evident that the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable is linear in nature (Casson and Farmer, 2014).

In terms of reliability, the current study demonstrates a satisfactory degree of reliability (refer to Table 2) as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha values surpassing the threshold of 0.7.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Note. The constructs will be measured on a seven-point Likert scale where (1) Strongly disagree; (2)

		PI	CSR	BI	BA	PQ
N	Valid	197	197	197	197	197
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		4.9962	4.8314	5.3283	5.2142	5.1807
Std. Deviation		1.27687	1.14685	1.15039	1.17812	1.13598
Skewness		-.804	-.580	-1.221	-.914	-.954
Std. Error of Skewness		.173	.173	.173	.173	.173
Kurtosis		.025	-.202	1.590	.340	.639
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.345	.345	.345	.345	.345

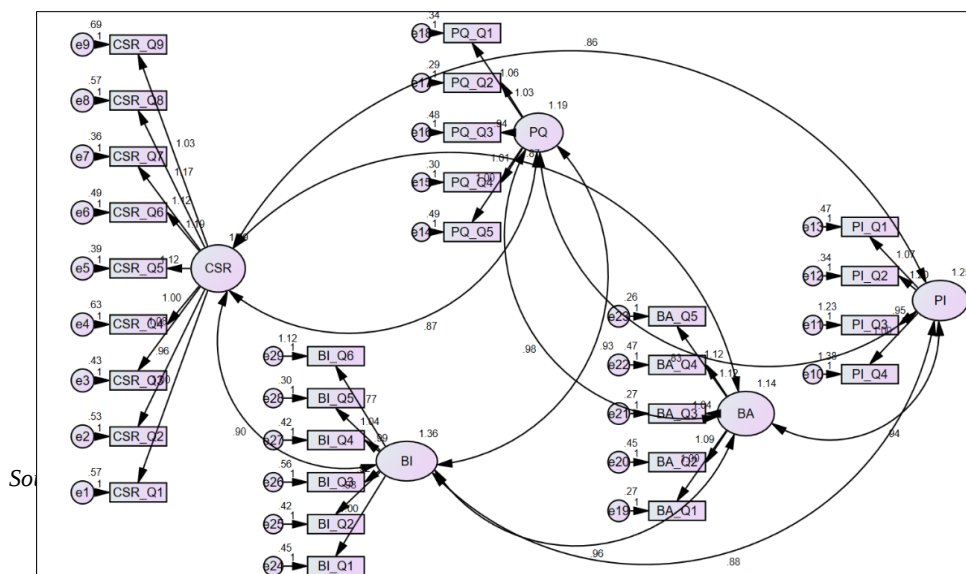
Disagree; (3) Somewhat Disagree; (4) Neither agree or disagree; (5) Somewhat agree; (6) Agree; (7) Strongly agree.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of the Variables

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.880	4
Consumer Perception of CSR Practices (CSR)	0.959	9
Brand Image (BI)	0.941	6
Brand Attitude (BA)	0.958	5
Perceived Quality (PQ)	0.946	5

4.2. Model Specification and Identification

Figure 2: First order measurement Model



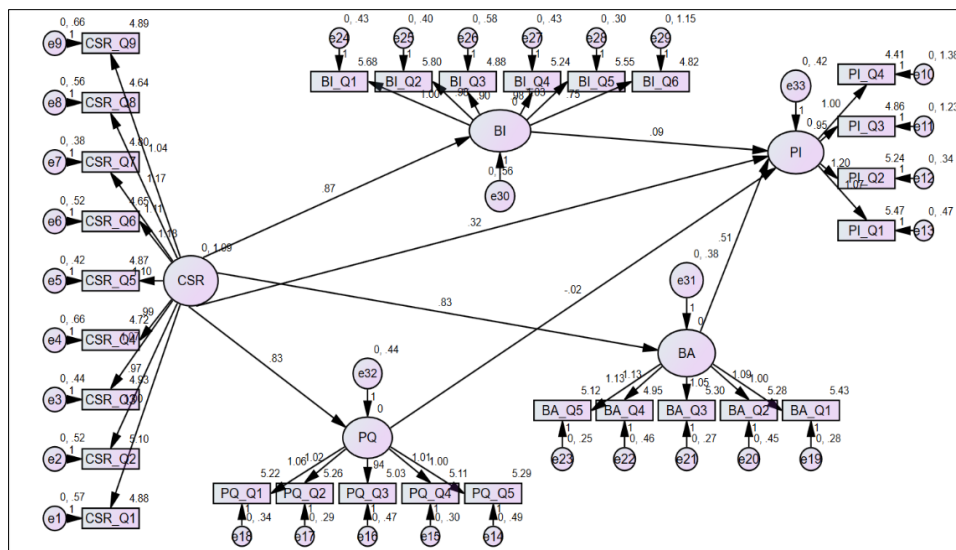
The data model fit assessment (refer to Figure 2) is used to determine if the formulated model should be accepted or rejected by the researcher (Marsh *et al.*, 1988). The most often used measures to determine model fit are absolute fit, parsimonious fit, and incremental fit (Smelser, 2001). Furthermore, fit indexes have been constructed to ensure that the overall fit assessment is fair by avoiding sample size issues and distribution misspecification (Bentler and Bonett, 1980). The present investigation assesses the adequacy and marginal fit of CMIN/df, GFI, AGFI, and RMSEA within the context of absolute fit. Additionally, it demonstrates a moderate level of NFI, TLI,

and CFI scores concerning incremental fit, while achieving an acceptable fit for PGFI and PNFI within the framework of parsimony fit (refer to Figure 2). Therefore, it can be concluded that the model of the current study is moderately fit and acceptable.

4.4. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

SEM facilitates the most efficient measurement technique that can be used for assessing relationships among a set of variables, especially between observed and latent variables (Hair et al., 2010). Refer to Figure 3.

Figure 3: Structural Model



Note: Chi-square = 1092.689, Degree of freedom = 367, Probability level = 0.000

The study examined multiple hypotheses to explore the relationships within the Sri Lankan MNE FMCG sector. Hypothesis 1 revealed a significant positive correlation between consumer perception of CSR practices and consumer purchase intention, supporting its acceptance with a positive β value of 0.777 and acceptable p value ($p \leq 0.01$). Similarly, H_2 confirmed a positive relationship between consumer perception of CSR practices and brand image, with a significant p -value ($p \leq 0.01$) and a positive β value of 0.729. Hypotheses 3 and 4 also demonstrated high significance ($p \leq 0.01$), accepting the positive relationships between consumer perception of CSR practices

and brand attitude ($\beta = 0.776$) and perceived quality ($\beta = 0.728$), respectively. Hypotheses 5, 7 and 9 also demonstrate high significance with an acceptable p -value ($p \leq 0.01$) and positive β values of 0.519 for brand attitude, 0.243 for brand image, and 0.266 for perceived quality.

The subsequent hypotheses (H_6 , H_8 , and H_{10}) investigated mediating factors, revealing that brand image, brand attitude, and perceived quality each exhibit a statistically significant partial mediation effect on the relationship between consumer perception of CSR practices and consumer purchase intention in the Sri Lankan MNE FMCG sector.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

According to the statistically tested empirical evidence of the current study, it can be demonstrated that all hypotheses were accepted. Hypothesis 1, holds a significant positive relationship between CSR practices of MNEs and consumer purchase intention, suggesting that consumer perceptions of CSR practices impact purchase intentions in the Sri Lankan context. Existing literature, including studies by Becker-Olsen *et al.* (2006), and Lee and Shin (2010), aligns with these findings, emphasising the influence of CSR on consumer minds and purchase intentions.

Similarly, Hypothesis 2, indicating a significant positive relationship between CSR and brand image, found support in the empirical results. Research by Aftab *et al.* (2014), He and Lai (2012), and Ramesh *et al.* (2018) in different contexts further substantiates this relationship. Hypotheses 3 and Hypothesis 4, both postulating significant positive relationships between consumer perception of CSR and brand attitude and perceived quality, respectively, were statistically accepted. Corresponding studies conducted by Arachchi and Samarasinghe (2023), Hsu and Bui (2022), and Ramesh *et al.* (2018) reinforce these connections, affirming the positive impact of consumer perception of CSR on brand attitudes and perceived quality.



Additionally, Hypothesis 5 validates a significant positive relationship between brand image and consumer purchase intention, supported by empirical evidence from Aaker and Keller's study in 1990. Furthermore, the statistical findings of Hypothesis 7 align with those of Lii and Lee (2011), indicating a positive relationship between brand attitudes and consumer purchase intention. Similarly, Hypothesis 9 is statistically confirmed, drawing support from research conducted by Carman (1990), Jones et al. (2002) and Hendra and Lusiah (2017), demonstrating a positive association between perceived quality and consumer purchase intention.

Moving to the mediating hypotheses, H_6 , H_8 and H_{10} explored the mediation effect of brand image, brand attitude, and perceived quality, respectively, on the relationship between consumer perception of CSR practices and consumer purchase intention. Each hypothesis was statistically accepted, indicating that these factors act as partial mediators. The validity of these findings is strengthened by studies such as Abdullah and Budiman (2019), Suhartini and Pertiwi (2021), Arachchi and Samarasinghe (2023), and Ramesh *et al.* (2018) in various contexts, supporting the mediating roles of brand image, brand attitude, and perceived quality between CSR perception and consumer purchase intention.

5.1. Implications for Theory and Practice

From a theoretical perspective, existing literature regarding the CSR practices of companies tends to be rare in the context of developing countries such as Sri Lanka (Luken & Stares, 2005; Viser, 2008). Furthermore, Jamali and Karam (2016) emphasise the absence of moderation and mediation studies related to CSR in developing country contexts. Therefore, the findings of the current study tend to extend the existing literature's knowledge of CSR in the Sri Lankan and the South Asian context (Arachchi & Mendis, 2021; Arachchi & Samarasinghe, 2023). Apart from that, it is expected that the current study will extend the existing literature regarding brand image, brand attitude, perceived quality and purchase intention concerning CSR in the context of developing economies (Gatti et al., 2012; Hsu & Bui, 2022; Ramesh et al., 2018; Severt et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Wu & Wang,

2014) The current study paves the way to extend the literature on social exchange theory developed by Homans (1958) and theory of planned behaviour developed by Ajzen (1991), similar to studies such as Ramesh *et al.* (2018). Most importantly, it appears that practically all of the studies that have been done so far have disregarded the role that perceived quality plays in mediating the connection between consumer perception of CSR and their intent to buy.

From the managerial perspective, having a comprehensive understanding of how CSR practices are viewed by consumers and how they act accordingly would create a competitive advantage for companies. Thereby, marketers could design CSR practices and their communication in a way that enhances brand image, brand attitude, perceived quality of the company and purchase intention of consumers.

5.2. Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

It is important to note some limitations of the current study. For instance, the current study has restricted the scope of CSR to Carroll's (1979) framework, future studies can focus on the variety of definitions available for CSR. Additionally, the study has adopted a cross-sectional research design which limits the data collection process to a shorter period and future researchers can adopt a more longitudinal research design to obtain more comprehensive results that can consider various other circumstances that might affect consumer purchase intention. Moreover, the generalisability of the results tends to be limited due to the sample size of 200 respondents and limiting data collection from MNE FMCG consumers. Hence, future researchers can consider a larger sample which do not restrict to one industry or consider a more unique industry such as the luxury goods industry where consumers are more likely to be conscious and selective in their purchase intention.

6. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of conducting this study was to explore how the CSR practices of MNEs influence consumer purchase intention in the Sri Lankan context of the FMCG sector, and it was able to identify that there is a significant positive



relationship between the CSR practices of MNE FMCG companies and consumer purchase intention. Furthermore, the study managed to elaborate on the mediation effects of brand image, brand attitude and perceived quality on the relationship between CSR and consumer purchase intention. The data for the study was collected through an online self-administered questionnaire from 200 MNE FMCG product consumers in Sri Lanka. The statistically derived findings validated each of the ten hypotheses. The topic has a wide range of theoretical and real-world applications. Theoretically, the current study manages to contribute to the CSR literature in developing countries by addressing the requirement of providing mediation effect literature to the existing body. Furthermore, the study provides insightful decision-making factors for MNE FMCG managers and other policymakers regarding manipulating consumer intention to purchase by influencing consumer perception. Apart from all of the above, the current study area can be extended by future research studies that will be conducted by addressing identified limitations.

7. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article. No funding has been received for this research work.





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