

Empirical Evidence on The Relation Between the Perception of Consumers on Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives and its Impact on Brand Loyalty in The Automobile Sector in The National Capital Region, India

Prabhakara Rao Jammandlamudi¹, Dr. Atul Kumar Agarwal²

¹Research Scholar, Sushant University, Gurugram, Haryana.

²Professor, Sushant University.

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ABSTRACT

The present-day markets are highly competitive. Every company attempts to provide advanced and unique features in their Motor Cars to attract and retain customers. Apart from providing advanced technological features in motor vehicles, building goodwill and brand loyalty for the organization is also being seen as a strategy to increase the market share.

In this direction, companies are adopting the corporate social responsibility route to build up their goodwill and create brand loyalty. So, it becomes pertinent to study whether Automobile consumers are aware of the concept of CSR and the initiatives of the automobile companies in this direction and whether the CSR initiatives influence brand loyalty, brand image and perceived quality in the Automobile Industry in the National Capital Region. The objective of this study through structural equation modelling is to evaluate the CSR initiative's role in Brand Loyalty in the Automotive Sector. To examine the relationship between CSR perception and brand loyalty, the research study was undertaken with a structured questionnaire with special reference to India's automobile sector in NCR. The results show a nuanced understanding of the relationships among Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand Image, Brand Loyalty, and CSR perception. The model reveals that while Brand Awareness has a direct impact on quality perceptions and brand image, its effect on loyalty is primarily mediated through these constructs. Furthermore, CSR perception plays a critical role in shaping consumers' Brand Loyalty. This study helps the managers of Automobile industries to aim at CSR to enhance Brand Loyalty and increase awareness of CSR through publicizing.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, Perceived Quality, CSR Perception.

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives aim to give shape to an organization's efforts to give back to the community, participate in social causes, and create positive social value. Businesses use CSR initiatives to make a difference in a competitive world and build goodwill and brand loyalty to their customers. Jason Fernando (2024) states that "CSR can help improve various aspects of society as well as promote a positive brand image for companies".

"Large businesses driven by profit motives are now turning to initiate CSR endeavors." (Tim Stobierski (2021) customers are aware of the initiatives the companies are taking for their community, and many now base their purchasing decisions on the CSR aspect of a business. As a company engages more in CSR, it is more likely to receive favourable brand recognition. Apart from the positive impacts, the article mentions many reasons for businesses to continue corporate social responsibility. Because social responsibility is becoming more popular on a global scale, CSR is seen as crucial in creating an attractive corporate image (CI), providing competitive advantage and differentiation, and leading to business success.

The questions discussed are whether CSR activities contribute to brand loyalty in the automobile sector. Is there an interrelationship among brand awareness, brand image, consumer perceived quality, and brand loyalty in the automobile sector? This study helps to understand whether automobile companies must increase expenditure on CSR initiatives to increase brand loyalty. This study aims to understand how CSR can be a tool to influence a consumer's preference for a particular automobile brand. In academia, CSR and brand loyalty enhance reputation, attract students and faculty, foster alumni connections, increase funding opportunities, and build resilience. Integrating CSR strengthens student engagement and satisfaction, while also embedding social responsibility into institutional culture and academic programs.



CSR and brand loyalty enhance a business's reputation, attract and retain customers and talent, and drive long-term profitability. Through positive social impact, CSR fosters customer trust and loyalty, reduces marketing costs, and ensures resilience against market shifts and regulations. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) enhances brand loyalty by aligning companies with social values, which influences consumer trust and support. Policymakers benefit as CSR-aligned brands can drive ethical economic growth, promoting policies that encourage businesses to act responsibly and sustainably.

The Objectives of this study are to evaluate consumer awareness of CSR in the Automobile Sector, understand the role of CSR in Brand Loyalty in the Automobile Sector. Also to understand the interrelationships among Brand Awareness, Brand image, Perceived Quality, and Brand Loyalty.

This study examines whether there is any relationship between CSR and Brand Loyalty while making car purchases in NCR region.

1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

As per the Companies Act (2013), "Every company with a net worth of Rs 500 crore, a minimum turnover of Rs 1,000 crore, or a minimum net profit of Rs 5 crore, is obligated to constitute a CSR committee dedicated to undertaking a mix of initiatives, such as promoting education, gender equality, women's empowerment, improving mental health, or ensuring environmental sustainability."

The Companies Act of 2013 in India defines corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a business's duties and responsibilities to society. It includes Projects or programs related to activities in Schedule VII of the Act. Projects or programs related to activities undertaken by the company's board of directors (BOD). Activities such as eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality, and ensuring environmental sustainability

"The law includes foreign companies doing business in India, whether by themselves, through an agent, or even electronically" (Carroll, A. B., 1991).

1.1.1 Definition of CSR

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defines CSR as "CSR is the continuing commitment by businesses to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large."

Maignan (2001) proposed four dimensions of perceived CSR, namely economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic (2001). Salmons et al. proposed three dimensions of perceived CSR: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic (Salmones, Crespo, and Bosque, 2005). Mohr and Webb proposed two dimensions of perceived CSR, namely environmental and philanthropic (Mohr and Webb, 2005). Several studies proposed two to fourteen dimensions of perceived CSR (Singh, de los Salmones Sanchez and del Bosque, 2008; Wagner, Bicen and Hall, 2008; Turker, 2009; Brunk, 2010; Becker-Olsen et al., 2011; Mandhachitara and Poolthong, 2011; Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Öberseder et al., 2014)

1.1.2 Current Situation of Corporate Social Responsibility in India

Corporate Social Responsibility is not a novel concept in India. Through donations and charity events, many organizations have been doing their part for society. However, the 2013 Companies Act made it mandatory.

CSR programs in India range from community development to advancement in education, environment, healthcare, etc. Many companies help people by providing them with a good standard of living. For instance, CSR expenditure in Haryana is 551 crores, and 971 crores in U.P. in the financial year 2020-21 on CSR activities. (Source: National CSR Portal, Ministry of Corporate Affairs)

1.2 Automobile Industry in India

India is the second fastest-growing automobile market in the world (Gopalan, 2010) and has emerged as Asia's fourth largest exporter of passenger cars, behind Japan and South Korea (Ohnsman, 2011). According to the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, passenger vehicle sales were 42,18,746 in the year 2023-24'. With the growth in the automobile industry, consumer choices are wide, and the market is highly competitive. The automobile sector in India is growing at a fast pace. Several domestic and foreign companies are launching new products.

Passenger Vehicles in numbers

Year	2021-22	2022-2023	2023-2024
Production	36,50,698	45,87,116	49,01,844
Domestic Sales	30,69,523	38,90,14	42 18,746
Exports	5,77,875	6,62,891	6,72,105

Source: Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers



1.2.1 Corporate Social Responsibilities by the Automotive Industry

The automobile sector in India is growing at a fast pace. Several domestic and foreign companies are launching new products.

Organizations need to maintain quality products to survive in such an aggressive market. At the same time, they also need to concentrate on building their reputation, a good corporate image, and goodwill, as these are crucial to the success of the company. To maintain a good corporate image, 'Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility Performance of Organisations: A Key to Winning Stakeholders' Goodwill' 2014, ES Asemah, RA Okpanachi, EO, Olumujievery, Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a business concept whereby a company seeks to behave in socially and environmentally responsible ways so that its business contributes to society in meaningful and lasting ways (Hopkins, 2007). company attempts to boost its goodwill with the help of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR is therefore recognized as an important tool that enhances the company's reputation and leads to its success. Ailawadi et al. (2011), Green, Peloza (2011), Lindgreen (Corporate Social Responsibility in framing corporate image)

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Khan Imran and Fatma Mohin (2019), in their article said, 'The indirect effect of CSR on brand loyalty through experience is stronger than the indirect effect through brand trust. "The firm's CSR initiatives have a significant and positive impact on brand loyalty and brand image. "Jintao Lu, Licheng Ren, Chong Zhang, Chunyan Wang, Zahra Shahid, Justas Streimikis (2020) "Consumers' perceived legal and ethical responsibilities of brands may improve brand loyalty by enhancing positive functional and symbolic images." Said Yuanquong and Inkeung (2014) in their article The Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Loyalty: the mediating role of Brand Image. "Corporations that have understood this mantra of corporate success have internalized the benefits flowing from responsible corporate citizenship and can hope to reap rich dividends in terms of improved corporate reputation, gaining consumers' trust, employee motivation and retention, and favourable market positioning' stated by M Dey, S Sircar-(2012) 'Integrating corporate social responsibility initiatives with business strategy: A study of some Indian companies'

CSR practices are not only ethically important but also serve as a strategic tool to enhance brand equity and foster consumer loyalty. Companies that align their business activities with societal expectations can gain competitive advantages by strengthening their brand and increasing customer loyalty. Joana Araújo, Inês Veiga Pereira, and José Duarte Santos (2024) 'The Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image and Brand Equity and Its Impact on Consumer Satisfaction'

Several research studies on CSR have been published in various journals.

Goel (2015) found that many business organizations were practicing CSR activities before the introduction of the Companies Act 2013. Cheng, Lin, and Wong (2016) affirmed that it was about 40% of the companies in India have collaborated with local and state governing bodies to promote and impart CSR activities. Shyam R. (2016) did a study titled "An Analysis of Corporate Social Responsibility in India" which Offers trends to know the growth of CSR in India, shifting trends, and activities done by SMEs which make it mandatory for every company. Kaur S. and Tandon N. (2017), in their article titled "The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility in India," conclude that some businesses have already begun to use CSR as a strategy to develop the company and the community. (Miras-Rodríguez et al., Citation2020) the effective implementation of CSR responsibility towards employees, customers, community, and environment, and the description of CSR application in annual reports improve the stakeholders' perception of the company.

Consumer loyalty towards a brand is a basic marketing construct, and it has been an area of investigation for academia and practitioners. The focus on loyalty has been increasing, particularly due to consumers' inability to differentiate brands in certain product categories (Schultz DE, Block MP, Visvanathan V. Brand preference being challenged. J Brand Manage. 2014; 21(5):408–428.).

A commitment to buy/purchase a good or service continuously from a particular firm in the future is known as brand loyalty (Ha et al, 2011. Customer loyalty is their interest in the brand (Aker 1996). Corporate Social Responsibility is a tool for organizations that may be utilized to build loyalty. (Dapi and Phiri, 2015; Akbari et al,2021)

Hypothesis 1: Consumer perception of CSR has a positive effect on Brand Awareness

Hypothesis 2: Consumer perception of CSR has a positive effect on Brand Image

Hypothesis 3: Consumer perception of CSR has a positive impact on Perceived Quality

Hypothesis 4: Consumer Perception has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty

2.1 Brand Awareness

According to Aaker (1996), brand awareness is the degree to which a product or service is present in a consumer's mind. According to Keller, Brand awareness serves three crucial functions in marketing: 1) creating a feeling of familiarity, 2) consideration during purchase, and 3) high brand awareness tends to high trust (Keller, 1993).

According to Aaker, brand awareness is recognized as a prerequisite for brand loyalty. (Aaker, 1996). Consumers recall, remember, buy, and rebuy a well-known brand, creating a process that develops brand loyalty. (Tepeci, 1999, Increasing



brand loyalty in the hospitality industry). Additionally, consumers who are familiar with a particular brand or logo (i.e., brand awareness) tend to highly value the perceived quality of the brand and are willing to pay a higher price for it (Rao and Monroe, 1988.). Due to this, it is acknowledged that brand awareness influences consumers' perception of a brand's quality in a positive way. (Hoyer and Brown, 1990).

Hypothesis 5: Brand Awareness has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty

2.2 Brand Image

According to Keller, brand image is "Perceptions of a brand as represented by the brand associations preserved in consumer memory." (Keller, 1993). According to the last three decades' studies on brand image, consumers who have a positive perception of a brand are more likely to favor the product or service offered by that brand and, as a result, value its high go (Andreassen and Lindestad, 1998; Bloemer, De Ruyter and Peeters, 1998). One of the first steps in creating brand loyalty is enhancing brand image. (Tepeci, 1999). Consumer brand choice and loyalty are frequently exclusively correlated with brand image. (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1991).

Brand awareness and brand image are linked with each other. Many studies have backed the claim by Keller that when consumers remember a brand, then, they are better able to create an image for the brand (Schuiling and Kapferer, 2004; Esch et al., 2006). Hyum and Kim confirmed that brand awareness affects brand image favorably and that brand image influences brand loyalty and perceived quality (Sean Hyun and Kim, 2011).

Hypothesis 6: Brand Image has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty

2.3 Perceived Quality

Zeithaml defines perceived quality as "the consumer's evaluation of a product's overall excellence or superiority in their mind." (Zeithaml, 1988). It should be noted that as this is a consumer's subjective evaluation of a product or service's quality, consumers may have different opinions on the quality of the same goods or services. Olshavsky has proposed that perceived quality reflects consumers' sentiments. Consumers who buy goods or services assess them for quality while forming opinions. Buying and opinion formation have happened simultaneously (Olshavsky, 1985) Malai, Yu Jang, and Namkung have backed the idea that brand loyalty is significantly influenced by the perceived quality, which is a brand's subjective evaluation (Malai and Speece, 2005; Yu et al., 2005; Jang and Namkung, 2009)

Hypothesis 7: Perceived Quality has a positive effect on Brand Loyalty

2.4 Brand Loyalty

Oliver defined brand loyalty by incorporating repeat purchase as "a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior."

Brand-loyal customers purchase a brand frequently. They also show a strong resistance towards shifting to the competitor's brand. Strong brand loyalty is a firm's asset that leads to an improved market share, better returns on investment, creating scope for brand extensions, and higher brand equity.

As businesses started to see customers as one of their assets, brand loyalty has grown in importance as a marketing term. (Shugan, 2005). Empirical research has demonstrated the strong positive impact brand loyalty has on a company's profitability. Both researchers and brand marketers believe that brand loyalty formation is essential to a company's success and have looked into the primary drivers of brand loyalty. (Sean Hyun and Kim, 2011)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data obtainment

As per the objectives of the study, primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire from car owners (respondents) from the NCR region in India. Convenient sampling was adopted. A Questionnaire was floated to 600 car owners, and 442 responded. The period of study is from October 2023 to August 2024. Statistical tools used are Correlation, Multiple Regression Analysis, and Structural Equation Modelling. The software used are SPSS 26 and AMOS.

3.2 The Model

The below model is constructed to find out the interrelationship between CSR perception and Brand Loyalty. And also to understand the relationship between CSR perception and Brand awareness, brand image, customer-perceived quality, and Brand Loyalty.

CSR Perception and Brand Loyalty

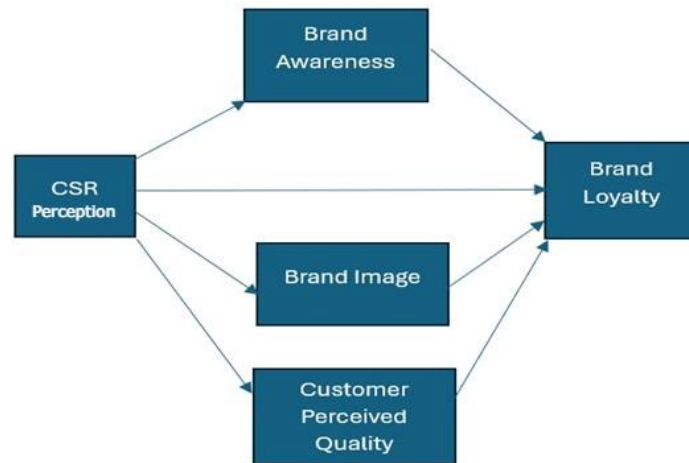


Fig. 1 CSR Perception and Brand Loyalty (Developed for this study)

3.3 Analysis of results

Measurement scales used in the research are evaluated, and then regression analysis is used to proceed with the estimation of the structural model (supplied by the AMOS). Fig.2 shows the estimation model standardized regression weights.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted, as shown in Fig.2, to empirically test the measurement model. Multiple tests on construct validity and reliability were performed. Model fit was evaluated using the maximum likelihood (ML) method.

Construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach's α , and composite reliability (CR) through CFA. As the values (Table 2) for all the constructs are greater than the guideline of 0.60, it can be concluded that the scales can be applied for the analysis with acceptable reliability. CR and AVE were calculated from model estimates using the CR formula and AVE formula given by Fornell and Larker.

In the measurement model, all constructs had a CR over the cut-off of 0.70. Based on these assessments, measures used within this study were within acceptable levels, supporting the reliability of the constructs (Table 1).

Construct Validity-Construct validation includes content, convergent, and discriminate validities. Content validity was verified by expert judgment and by a careful literature review. Convergent validity can be evaluated by examining the factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). All estimated standard loadings (Table 1) were higher than 0.70, and the AVE for all exceeded the recommended level of 0.50, suggesting good convergent validity. To assess the discriminant validity, Fornell and Larker's criterion, that the square root of the AVE for each construct should be greater than the correlation between constructs, was used. Table 1 shows the values of the square root of the AVE are all greater than the inner construct correlations.

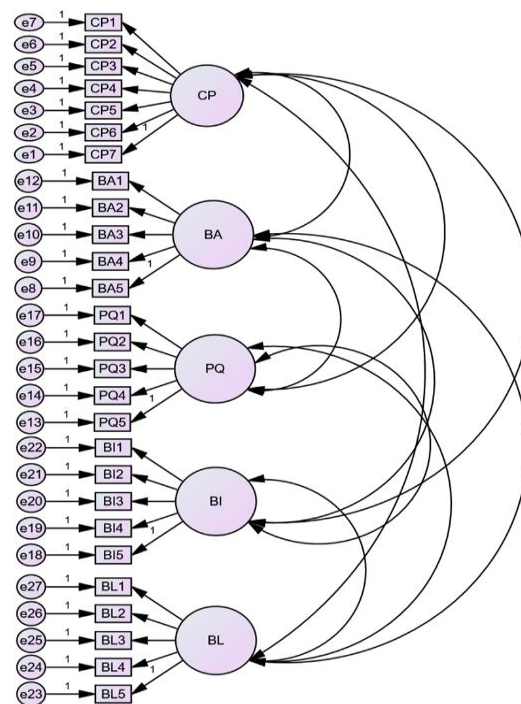
Table 1. Results of the Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Factor loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach's α
CSR Perception	CP1	0.769	0.575	0.903	0.905
	CP2	0.789			
	CP3	0.800			
	CP4	0.777			
	CP5	0.749			
	CP6	0.761			
	CP7	0.673			
Brand awareness	BA1	0.782	0.688	0.918	0.917
	BA2	0.820			
	BA3	0.822			
	BA4	0.853			
	BA5	0.825			
Perceived Quality	PQ1	0.832	0.714	0.926	0.926
	PQ2	0.865			
	PQ3	0.852			



	PQ4	0.847			
	PQ5	0.832			
Brand image	BI1	0.762	0.637	0.897	0.897
	BI2	0.819			
	BI3	0.793			
	BI4	0.740			
	BI5	0.744			
Brand Loyalty	BL1	0.782	0.530	0.843	0.849
	BL2	0.788			
	BL3	0.811			
	BL4	0.690			
	BL5	0.788			

Fig. 2. CFA



Fit indices calculated for the measurement model indicated a good fit between the structural model and data. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value below 0.08 indicates a reasonable error of approximation. As suggested, an acceptable model goodness of fit index (GFI) value is above 0.90. The other fit measures, like the Normed Fit Index (NFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI), are more than 0.95, which shows a well-fitting model. Also, the Relative Fit Index (RFI), Incremental Index of Fit (IFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) are above 0.95, which showed a good fit. Table 2 provides the value of the fit indices of the model.

Table 2. Measurement Model Fit Indices

Fit indices	Recommended value	value Indices
CMIN/DF	≤ 3.00	1.83
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.897
NFI	≥ 0.95	0.914
CFI	≥ 0.95	0.953
IFI	≥ 0.95	0.953
RFI	≥ 0.95	0.905
TLI	≥ 0.95	0.948
RMSEA	0.05 to 0.08	0.050



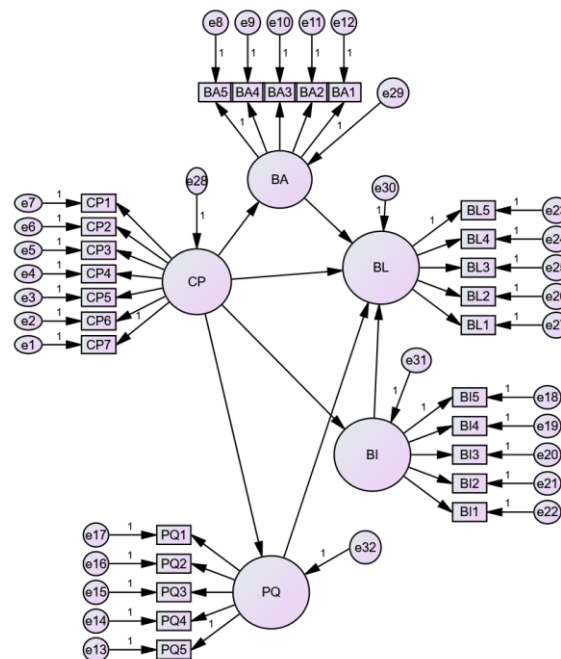
Table 3. Hypothesized Relations;

Structural equations	Coefficients (β)	t-values	P	Result
Consumer perception \longrightarrow Brand awareness	0.58	7.115	***	Supported
Consumer perception \longrightarrow Brand image	0.74	10.488	***	Supported
Consumer perception \longrightarrow Perceived Quality	0.50	6.043	***	Supported
Consumer Perception \longrightarrow Brand loyalty	0.25	2.57	0.004	Supported
Brand Awareness \longrightarrow Brand Loyalty	0.12	1.818	0.069	Not Supported
Brand Image \longrightarrow Brand Loyalty	0.17	1.626	0.104	Not Supported
Perceived Quality \longrightarrow Brand Loyalty	0.19	3.039	0.002	Supported

Regarding the hypothesis tests (supplied by the AMOS), as shown in Table 3, hypothesized relations 1,2,3,4 and 7 are supported in the estimated structural model. As shown in Fig. 3, Consumer perception of CSR has significant positive effects on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.58$, t-value = 7.115, $p < 0.05$) and brand image ($\beta = 0.74$, t-value=10.488, $p < 0.05$) and Perceived Quality ($\beta = 0.50$, t-value = 6.043, $p < 0.05$) and Brand Loyalty ($\beta = 0.25$, t-values=2.57, $p < 0.05$), Perceived Quality has positive effects on Brand Loyalty ($\beta = 0.19$, t-values=3.039, $p < 0.05$). Hence, H1, H2, H3, H4 and H7 are supported.

Brand awareness does not have positive effects on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.12$, t-value = 1.818, $p > 0.05$) as well as brand image ($\beta = 0.17$, t-value = 1.626, $p > 0.05$), indicating that H5 and H6 are not supported.

Structural models Fig.3



4. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of the study is to understand the application of CSR perception and Brand Loyalty in the National Capital Region, India. Also, to examine interrelationships among Brand Awareness, Brand Image, Perceived Quality, and Brand Loyalty. Primarily to study the relationship between CSR perception and Brand Loyalty.

It's been observed that CSR Perception Influences Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty. Marketing and brand managers may increase Perceived Quality, Brand Image and Brand Loyalty through CSR spending.



This may be done through multimedia and other means. People recall and recognize the brand through the CSR initiatives made known to the general public.

This study helps the managers of Automobile industries in NCR to aim at CSR initiatives to enhance Brand Image and Loyalty. CSR initiatives thus taken by Automobile companies in NCR should be publicized to bring awareness among consumers. By utilizing both CFA and SEM, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between brand-related constructs, enabling managers and researchers to make data-driven decisions about how to enhance brand image and customer perception through targeted marketing strategies in the Automobile Sector in NCR.

The research indicates that Consumer perception of CSR has significant positive effects on brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality and Brand Loyalty. Also, perceived quality has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty.

Summing up the results, Consumer perception of CSR has an impact on Brand Image and Brand Loyalty in the Automobile Sector in the NCR region of India.

5. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study aims only at consumer perceptions of Brand Awareness, Brand image, Perceived Quality, and Brand Loyalty. Financial Brand-Based equity is not studied. CSR perception as a tool to increase passenger car sales has not been studied. The study is limited to the NCR region in India only.

This study can be extended to study CSR keeping other variables such as organizational factors, information systems, environmental concerns, stakeholders' welfare, ethical practices, and philanthropic activities. It can also be extended to other parts of India.

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