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Consumer Awareness, Attitudes and Perceptions Towards CSR: A Study of Delhi NCR

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Abstract - Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a mandated requirement for companies in several countries worldwide. Organizations engage in CSR for various reasons, such as enhancing brand image, attracting investors and customers, fostering customer loyalty, engaging with communities, and gaining a competitive advantage. While existing studies on CSR often focus on the factors influencing consumers' purchasing decisions, there is limited research on consumer awareness regarding CSR initiatives. This paper examines consumer awareness and attitudes towards CSR in Gurgaon, India, across different demographic segments. The study employed a quantitative survey methodology to gather data on consumers' awareness of the CSR initiatives of three prominent companies, Tata, Reliance, and Unilever, in India. Data were collected from 100 respondents in selected areas of Gurgaon to assess the importance attributed to CSR in purchasing decisions. The findings reveal no significant difference in CSR awareness among consumers based on age, employment status, or household income. However, gender and education emerged as impactful variables, with individuals holding a university education or higher and females demonstrating significantly greater awareness of CSR initiatives of well-known companies operating in India. Furthermore, the study found that CSR remains a low priority, ranked fourth out of five factors respondents consider when making purchase decisions. These findings suggest that while educational background and gender can influence CSR awareness, overall consumer awareness and prioritization of CSR in purchase decisions remain low. This highlights the need for companies to adopt more targeted and effective CSR communication strategies to educate and engage a broader demographic spectrum. Companies could leverage this insight to better align their CSR activities with consumer values and drive meaningful engagement, thereby enhancing the impact of their CSR efforts on consumer behavior and brand loyalty.

Keywords - Corporate Social Responsibility, Consumer perception, Purchase decision, Consumer awareness.

1. Introduction

According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a management approach that encourages companies to incorporate social and environmental considerations into their business practices and stakeholder interactions. CSR seeks to enable companies to achieve a balance between profitability and responsible social goals. While several countries mandate CSR reporting, participation in CSR initiatives is not universally required. India, however, is unique as it legally mandates CSR for companies with a net worth of ₹500 crores or more or a turnover of ₹1,000 crores or more, requiring them to allocate 2% of their profits to CSR activities. Companies often engage in CSR initiatives beyond legal requirements because they attract investors to invest in ethical and socially responsible businesses. CSR also enhances brand image, which can expand a company's customer base and, in turn, boost profits. A recent survey found that 46% of consumers consider a company's social responsibility closely before purchasing. Studies further

suggest that negative corporate activities have a more substantial impact on consumer purchasing decisions than positive ones, underscoring the importance of companies focusing on positive actions, including CSR.² Several studies have examined the impact of CSR on consumer behavior. For instance, a study conducted in China³ found that online retailers' CSR efforts positively correlate with consumer purchase intentions, with brand identification serving as a mediating factor in this relationship. Additionally, Word-of-Mouth (WOM) communication was shown to mediate the link between perceived CSR and consumer purchase intentions and between brand identification and purchase intentions. Similarly, a study conducted in Ghana⁴ among customers of MTN explored awareness and attitudes toward MTN's CSR initiatives. The findings revealed that while 73% of respondents were aware of MTN's CSR activities, only 55 out of 150 respondents reported purchasing from MTN due to these initiatives. However, the reliability of these findings remains uncertain, as there is no way to verify the respondents' honesty regarding their awareness.



Contradictory findings also exist in the literature. For example, one recent survey⁵ suggests that CSR is among the least important factors consumers consider when purchasing a product. In contrast, another study finds that CSR significantly influences consumer purchasing behavior, though consumer attitudes show an insignificant impact on the relationship between perceived CSR and purchasing behavior. Additionally, this study highlights that consumer demographics do not significantly affect attitudes or perceptions toward CSR. Most existing research focuses on the various factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions, with CSR being one of them. However, there is a limited exploration of consumer awareness of CSR itself.

Moreover, studies that do address awareness often face challenges in confirming the accuracy and honesty of respondents' self-reported awareness. Although there is existing literature on consumer awareness and attitudes toward CSR in the Indian market, the diversity of Indian consumers, particularly in terms of demographics, suggests a need for more granular, region-specific studies. This gap is significant because in-depth research into specific regions of India could provide valuable insights for businesses to improve their strategies. Aligning CSR activities and other factors, such as product quality and pricing, with customer preferences can enhance business outcomes. Increased consumer awareness and positive attitudes towards CSR could encourage companies to continue these initiatives, ultimately benefiting both society and the environment.

This study examines consumer awareness and attitudes toward CSR initiatives taken by companies in India. Through a survey collecting primary quantitative data from diverse demographic groups, the study will assess the extent of consumer awareness about CSR and its influence on their purchasing decisions. The survey will include questions related to respondents' demographics, their awareness of CSR activities by specific companies, and the extent to which CSR affects their purchase choices.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Aim and Hypotheses

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate consumer awareness and attitudes towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives by companies in India. The specific objectives are to:

- Assess the level of CSR awareness among consumers in Delhi NCR.
- Determine the importance of CSR efforts in consumers' purchase decisions.
- Evaluate CSR awareness based on gender, age, education, employment status and socioeconomic status.

The following are the null hypotheses of the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in CSR awareness based on gender.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in CSR awareness based on age.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in CSR awareness based on employment status.

H₀₄: There is no significant difference in CSR awareness based on educational qualifications.

H₀₅: There is no significant difference in CSR awareness based on annual household income.

2.2. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design, utilizing a structured survey to gather data on consumer awareness and attitudes towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The survey is divided into three sections to address the research objectives comprehensively. The first section collects demographic information, including age, gender, annual household income, educational level, and employment status. The second section evaluates CSR awareness by presenting respondents with various companies and their CSR strategies, asking them to match the strategies to the respective companies. The third section examines the role of CSR in purchase decisions, using an ordinal scale to measure its impact relative to other factors such as product price, quality, and company reputation. This design allows for a detailed analysis of how different demographic factors influence CSR awareness and the role of CSR in consumer decision-making.

2.3. Data Collection Procedure

Data for this study was collected using a structured online survey administered through Google Forms. The survey was conducted in English to ensure clarity and uniformity in responses. To maintain the integrity of the data and prevent respondents from researching answers, the survey was administered as a scheduled activity, with responses recorded in the presence of the researcher. This approach was chosen to ensure the accuracy of responses, particularly in Section 2, which tests consumer awareness of CSR initiatives.

2.4. Sampling and Sample Characteristics

This study employed a convenience sampling technique, a non-probability sampling method that involves selecting participants who are readily available and willing to participate.⁶ Convenience sampling was chosen due to its practicality and efficiency in reaching the target population within the Delhi NCR region. The sample consisted of 100 respondents, carefully selected to provide a diverse representation of the consumer base. To ensure a comprehensive analysis of consumer awareness and attitudes towards CSR, the sample was stratified based on several demographic factors: age, gender, employment status, annual household income, and educational qualifications. This stratification allowed for a more detailed examination of how CSR awareness varies across different population segments. Approximately 50% of the respondents were female, and the other 50% were males. 48% were Gen Z, 2% were Gen Alpha, 21% were millennials, etc. Moreover, around 38% of the total

respondents were employed/self-employed. Additionally, the level of education was almost equally divided among the respondents, but only 3% had no formal education. Lastly, most of the respondents earn above 25 lakhs per annum.

2.5. Ethics and Informed Consent

This study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure participant rights and data integrity. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by anonymizing responses and securing data access. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained through a consent form in the Google Forms survey. Participants were clearly informed about the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. All data handling and analysis were conducted with respect to participants' privacy and rights.

2.6. Data Analysis Technique

This study employed statistical tests and data visualizations to analyze the data collected through the survey. Specifically, t-tests and graphs were used to identify meaningful differences and represent different situations. This helped identify the significant differences in different demographics and situations. Additionally, t-tests are useful for small sample sizes such as the one in this study. Graphs were used to present the findings of this study in a more visually engaging way. Both these methods allowed the findings of this study to be clear and detailed.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, consumer awareness based on different demographics is discussed. The results showcase varying

degrees of knowledge. Analyzing the results, the discussion section presents and talks about the reasons as to why these results are the way they are and case studies to support these reasons.

3.1. Consumer Awareness with regards to CSR

The independent t-test analysis reveals that females ($M = 1.23$, $SD = 1.12$) have a higher mean score for CSR awareness than males ($M = 0.83$, $SD = 1.04$), with a $t(98) = 1.86$ and a p-value of 0.066 ($p < 0.10$). This indicates a marginally significant difference in CSR awareness between genders at the 0.1 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) stating no significant difference in CSR awareness based on gender is rejected. The finding that females have marginally higher CSR awareness than males can be attributed to several social and cultural factors. Research indicates that women are more likely to be involved in community and social activities and may be more inclined towards socially responsible behaviours and initiatives.⁷ Studies indicate that women often participate more actively in community and social activities and show a higher propensity for ethical consumption⁸, aligning with their elevated CSR awareness levels. Moreover, according to the United Nations⁹, women are generally more sustainable in their lifestyle choices, such as recycling, minimizing waste, and purchasing organic products, which reflects their broader awareness and concern for societal and environmental issues. This heightened sensitivity may stem from traditional roles, where women often act as primary caretakers and decision-makers within households, influencing their awareness and attitudes toward CSR. This trend could be seen as an opportunity for companies to target CSR marketing efforts more effectively towards female consumers.

Table 1. Independent t-test analysis of CSR awareness based on demographic variables

		n	Mean	SD	t	p
Gender	Female	48	1.23	1.12	1.86	0.066*
	Male	52	0.83	1.04		
Age	Non-Gen Z	52	1.12	1.08	0.91	0.366
	Gen Z	48	0.92	1.11		
Employment status	Employed	38	0.92	1.02	-0.58	0.561
	Unemployed	58	1.05	1.15		
Education	University	49	1.22	1.1	1.86	0.066*
	Non-University	51	0.82	1.05		
Household Income	Below 25L	42	1.02	1.14	-0.03	0.977
	Above 25L	58	1.02	1.07		

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

On the contrary, the mean score for CSR awareness among Non-Gen Z ($M = 1.12$, $SD = 1.08$) and Gen Z ($M = 0.92$, $SD = 1.11$) shows a $t(98) = 0.91$ and a p-value > 0.05 . This indicates no significant difference in CSR awareness between Gen Z and Non-Gen Z groups. Hence, H_{02} is accepted. The lack of a significant difference in CSR awareness between age groups might suggest that awareness of CSR initiatives is uniformly distributed across different age demographics in this sample. Younger consumers, like Gen Z, are often seen as more socially conscious; however, the data does not reflect a

higher awareness among them compared to older groups. This could be due to the fact that awareness campaigns and corporate communication strategies are reaching a broader audience effectively, or it could indicate that older generations have also become more attuned to CSR due to its increasing prevalence in corporate strategies and media coverage. Similarly, the t-test results show a mean score of CSR awareness for employed individuals ($M = 0.92$, $SD = 1.02$) and unemployed individuals ($M = 1.05$, $SD = 1.15$), with a $t(94) = -0.58$ and $p > 0.05$. In simpler terms, there is no

statistically significant difference in CSR awareness based on employment status; hence, H_{03} is retained. The non-significant difference in CSR awareness between employed and unemployed individuals may suggest that employment status does not heavily influence an individual's exposure or engagement with CSR information. Both employed and unemployed groups might have similar access to information sources like social media, news, and public discussions that promote CSR awareness. Additionally, companies may target CSR campaigns broadly to reach all segments of the population, regardless of employment status, which could account for the lack of difference in awareness. By the same logic, no significant difference in CSR awareness based on household income has been found. Hence, H_{05} is accepted. This might imply that CSR messaging by companies is reaching all income segments equally or that people across different income levels prioritize other factors over CSR when becoming aware of company practices.

Previous research also indicates that while higher-income groups may have more purchasing power, they do not necessarily exhibit greater CSR awareness than lower-income groups. This is likely due to the fact that CSR awareness is more dependent on exposure to relevant information than income level (Maignan, 2001)¹⁰. Finally, the mean score for CSR awareness among those with university education ($M=1.22$, $SD=1.1$) and non-university education ($M = 0.82$, $SD = 1.05$) shows $t(98)=1.86$ and $p<0.10$. Thus, people with a university education show a marginally higher awareness of CSR compared to those without. Hence, H_{04} stands rejected. This can be explained by the fact that higher education often exposes students to a broader array of social and ethical issues, including corporate social responsibility. Educated individuals may be more likely to critically analyze and engage with corporate strategies, including CSR initiatives.¹¹ Studies have shown that education level significantly predicts awareness and understanding of CSR, as educated consumers are more likely to value ethical considerations when making purchasing decisions.¹²

3.2. Consumer Preferences: Analyzing the Role of Attitudes and Perceptions

This study sought to understand consumer preferences by asking respondents to rank five factors—Product Quality, Product Price, Company Reputation, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and “Made In” Tags—based on their importance when making a purchase decision. The results, illustrated in Figures 1 to 5, reveal a clear hierarchy of consumer priorities. Product Quality (Figure 1) emerged as the most critical factor influencing purchase decisions. Most respondents (47) ranked Product Quality as the top priority (Rank 1), highlighting its overwhelming importance. This result indicates that consumers place significant emphasis on the intrinsic attributes of a product, such as durability, reliability, and satisfaction. This aligns with the core marketing principle that consumers seek the highest perceived

value, and quality often correlates directly with perceived value and satisfaction¹³. Product Price (Figure 2) was identified as the second most influential factor, with 35 respondents ranking it as their second priority (Rank 2). While affordability is an essential consideration, it does not surpass the importance of product quality for most consumers. Price is a significant factor in consumer decision-making, as evidenced by research from Kotler and Keller¹⁴, which states that consumers often weigh the cost against the perceived benefits. The focus on price suggests that consumers are cost-conscious but only after ensuring that a product meets their quality expectations. This aligns with the economic theory of utility maximization, where consumers seek the best value for their money.

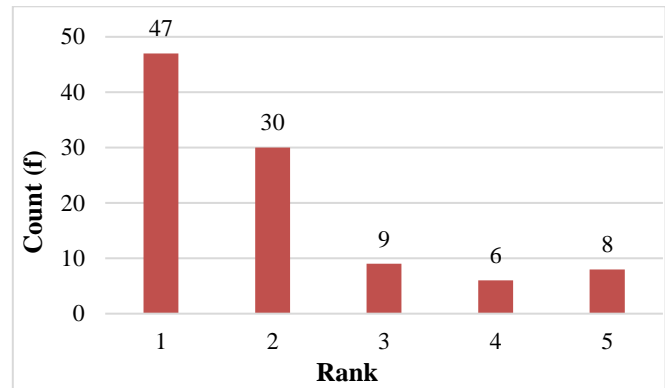


Fig. 1 Count of Rank for Product Quality

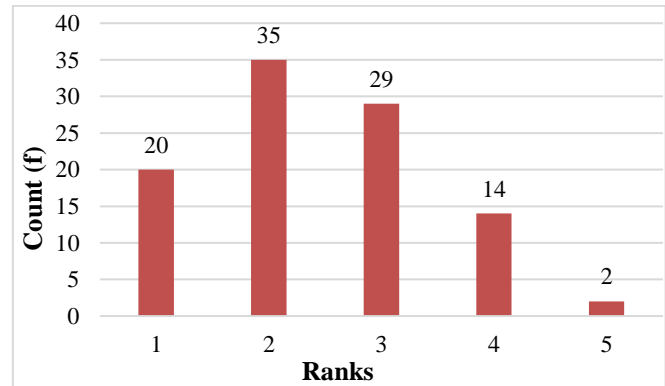


Fig. 2 Count of Rank for Product Price

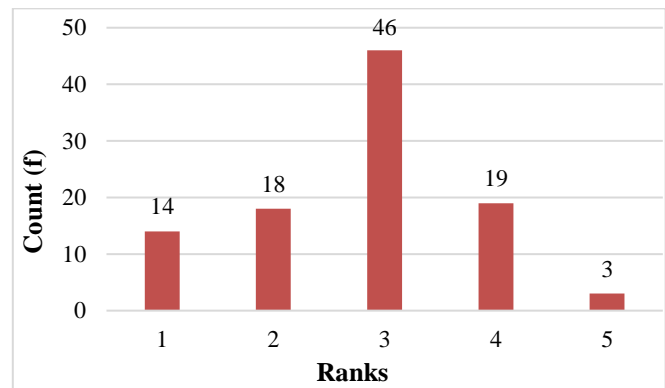


Fig. 3 Count of Rank for Company Reputation

Company Reputation (Figure 3) was most frequently ranked third (45 respondents), suggesting that while consumers value a company's trustworthiness and credibility, these attributes are secondary to the direct benefits offered by product quality and price. A good company reputation may provide a sense of security and reliability; however, it acts more as a reinforcing factor rather than a primary driver of purchasing decisions. According to Fombrun and Van Riel¹⁵, a company's reputation can help build trust and loyalty with customers, but it doesn't have as strong of an immediate effect as things like product quality and price. However, company reputation becomes important when the quality and price of products of different companies become similar. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Figure 4) ranks lower in the hierarchy, with 41 respondents placing it fourth and 35 respondents ranking it fifth. This finding implies that consumers recognize and appreciate a company's ethical practices and contributions to social causes, but these considerations are not crucial in their immediate purchasing choices. The relatively lower priority of CSR suggests that consumers may view it as an added advantage rather than a necessity, reflecting a gap between ethical awareness and actual purchasing behavior. Studies have shown that CSR can positively influence consumer perceptions and brand loyalty but is often secondary to more immediate factors like price and quality, where more tangible benefits are considered in purchasing decisions.¹⁶

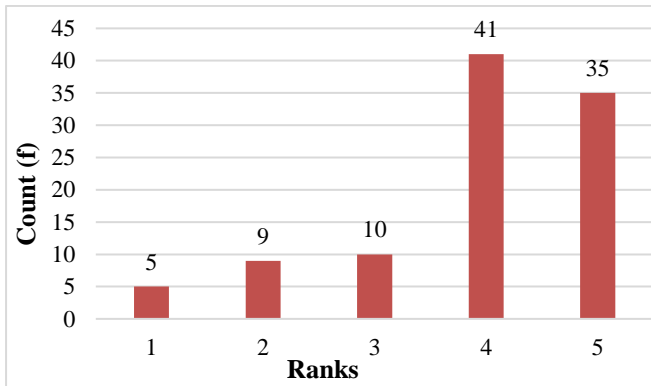


Fig. 4 Count of Rank for CSR

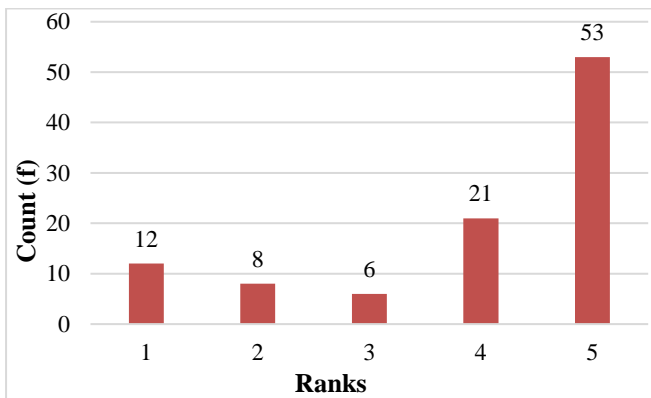


Fig. 5 Count of Rank for Made-In Tags

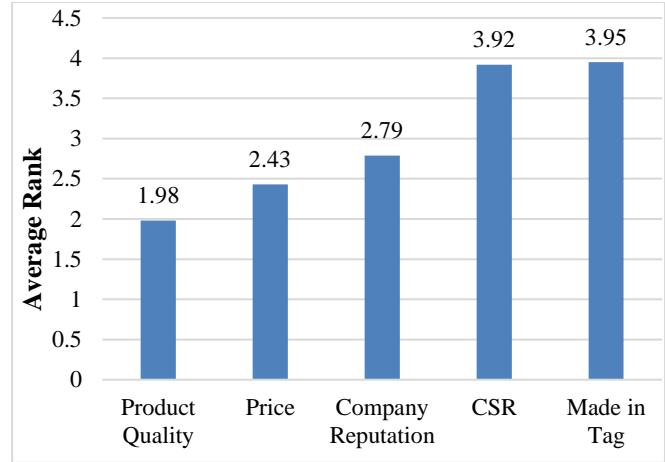


Fig. 6 Average of Rank for Study Variables

"Made In" Tags (Figure 5) were ranked as the least important factor by a significant majority (53 respondents). This result indicates that the origin of a product holds minimal influence over consumer decisions compared to other factors. It suggests that in a globalized marketplace, the geographical origin of a product does not significantly affect consumers' purchasing decisions unless associated with specific quality perceptions or socio-political sentiments. A study suggests that the country-of-origin effect can influence consumer perceptions, but its impact varies widely depending on the product category and consumer preferences¹⁷. In many cases, it is a less critical factor unless it's related to specific quality or ethical considerations.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the study on consumer awareness and attitudes towards CSR in India has found that gender and education affect CSR awareness, with people of university and females showing high CSR awareness. However, CSR has been ranked low in consumer decision-making priorities, suggesting that CSR significantly impacts consumer purchase decisions. The awareness is low for the rest of the demographics, and it needs to be enhanced for specific people, including men and people who do not possess higher educational qualifications. Companies are suggested to enhance their CSR communication strategies to be ranked higher in the priority of purchase for customers. Methods and avenues to increase awareness about companies' CSR initiatives can be targeted towards these demographics to have a greater impact. This could enhance the company's reputation, which, after the traditional base requirements of quality and price, is the most important driver of purchase decisions. Leveraging CSR campaigning fruitfully to build a company's reputation is important. This research paper can be used by business managers, marketers, and CSR professionals/consultants who want to understand consumer patterns and trends to improve their CSR goals and implementations in the city of Gurgaon, India. Analyzing consumer attitudes and perceptions can help these

professionals identify crucial demographic factors such as gender and education level. By doing this, they can adjust and modify their CSR strategies and promotion methods to target these specific demographics to align with their interests. This will further increase brand reputation and customer loyalty. For example, CSR consultants can use the findings of this study to guide different companies to improve their CSR strategies, helping them implement initiatives that have a greater impact and would affect these certain demographics. One limitation of this study would be that the trends and findings can't be used for regions other than Gurgaon. Future research can be conducted on consumer attitudes and

perceptions towards CSR in different regions as well as different industries.

This will give a broader understanding of the topic. Additionally, specific CSR initiatives can be asked about customers so companies can identify areas to work on. Furthermore, this study was limited in terms of sample size, region, and the variables it is studying. Hence, this study can't be generalized for the entire population. Variables such as promotion, sales channels, and packaging could be included in future studies to decrease the study's limitations.

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