

# The Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on consumer purchasing behaviour. The method of systematic sampling was used, and a total of 150 students participated as respondents. A five-point Likert scale were utilised to measure the independent variables (economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility) and dependent variable (consumer purchasing behaviour) respectively. The data were collected by using online self-administered questionnaires. The Pearson correlation coefficient results indicated that economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility were significantly and positively correlated to the consumer purchasing behaviour. In addition, the results of Multiple Linear Regression showed that the four the independent variables could explain 42.0% of consumer purchasing behaviour, with ethical responsibility having the greatest influence on consumer purchasing behaviour. The findings of this study could aid consumers and businesses in comprehending the impact of corporate social responsibility on consumer purchasing behaviour.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Economic Responsibility, Legal Responsibility, Ethical Responsibility, Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

## Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is deemed important for the operation and sustainability of the businesses in a variety of industries. This is due to the increasingly complex business environment in which businesses must satisfy the diverse demands and expectations of the numerous stakeholders in the market (Zukauskas et al., 2018). It cannot be denied that CSR and engagements of stakeholders are playing increasingly important roles in the current business environment (Hasan et al., 2018). CSR has been used by businesses to maintain or even improve their reputations (Hasan et al., 2018), as well as to influence financial capabilities (Weinzimmer and Esken, 2016) and provide competitive advantages (Diddi and Neihm, 2016).

CSR is an umbrella term that includes corporate philanthropy, business ethics, community service and environmental sustainability (APEC, 2005; Auld et al., 2008). However, one of the

most influential researchers in the history of CSR, Archie Carroll, offered his perspective and defined corporate social responsibility as the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society places on businesses (Carroll, 1979). This set of four responsibilities establishes a foundation or framework for defining the nature of businesses' responsibilities to the society of which they are a part. Several empirical studies have demonstrated the usefulness and distinctiveness of the four responsibilities. In 1991, Carroll revised the definition of CSR into the form of a pyramid, stating it as CSR pyramid (Carroll, 2016).

Companies have realised that operating their businesses ethically is crucial in order to attract stakeholders, particularly the consumers (Chan and Saad, 2019). Consumers are more likely to patronize businesses with a "good social reputation" (Islam et al., 2021). As time passes, CSR becomes more important to practice as consumers' awareness of CSR practices increases, and it is not impossible that all companies will be required to fulfill all CSR dimensions in the coming years (Zapata-Ramos & Kim, 2017). This is consistent with the findings of Gosselt et. al (2019) who discovered that the external CSR label of a company influences consumer acceptance. The relevant research findings in this field, as well as information on consumers' conceptions of CSR, may influence their purchasing behaviour (Teh et al., 2019). Accordingly, it can be concluded that the elements of CSR defined by Carroll, namely economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities, may have an impact on consumer purchasing behaviour.

CSR studies have received a great deal of attention, and consumers are becoming increasingly interested in CSR research (Teh et al., 2019; Sharma and Shravani, 2013, Tian et al., 2011). Companies have traditionally been viewed as economic engines (Anupama and Jayanthi, 2019) and this perception persists today. Prior to engaging in other obligations or CSR activities, such as donations and charity programs, businesses must first be able to fulfil their economic responsibilities, i.e. *maintaining a strong competitive position and maximising profitability* (Carroll, 1991). However, research has shown that consumers ranked economic responsibilities provided by companies as the least important concerns (Teh et al., 2019) and this finding was supported by research conducted in Zimbabwe by (Manuere et al., 2021). Nevertheless, contrary findings were discovered in another study. Thomas & Tahir (2019) found that, compared to other perspectives of CSR, the economic element in CSR had the strongest and most significant relationship with consumer purchasing behaviour. The findings are consistent with the findings of Safi and Ramay (2013), who discovered that economic responsibilities are the most important for organisations. This is due to the fact that consumers anticipate organisations to generate profits and use those profits to produce high quality goods and services that will boost their confidence level, enhance their quality of life, and provide them with more options; these expectations align with the economic concerns of corporations (Teh et al., 2019). Therefore, it is essential to consider financial capacity when implementing CSR. Carroll (2016), who stated that economic responsibility is one of the most essential requirements for the existence of a company in given society, also supports this position. The relationship between economic responsibilities and consumer purchasing behaviour is therefore uncertain and must be clarified through this study.

CSR is very situational and unpredictable topic, and it may need to be studied and investigated in the context where it is being practiced (Doh et al., 2006). However, the majority of CSR research and literature focuses on the impacts of CSR in developed countries. Most CSR research is conducted in developed countries such as the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom, and its applicability in developing nations is unclear (Sameer, 2021). Thus, there is a knowledge gap regarding the impacts of CSR on developing nations. According to Pisani et al (2017), it is ascertained that less than 10 percent of CSR literature focuses on developing countries. This is likely due to a lack of public pressure on companies to record and report CSR activities in developing countries (Ali et al., 2017). This condition has inevitably impacted or diminished the accessibility of CSR data for further research. In addition, developing countries may face different CSR-related challenges than developed nations (Chatterjee & Mitra, 2017; Ghosh, 2014). Therefore, it is important to conduct this research to better understand how CSR responsibilities and consumer purchasing behaviour are related.

### Literature Review

Carroll's CSR pyramid has had a significant impact on CSR research (Carroll, 1979; Carroll, 1991; Carroll, 1999; Carroll, 2016; Visser, 2006; Visser, 2008; Baden, 2016; Marek, 2018; Masoud, 2018; Thomas & Tahir, 2019; Lu et al., 2020; Talonen et al., 2021). Visser (2008), claims that Carroll's pyramid is one of the most widely used models for understanding CSR in its entirety. Nevertheless, the responsibilities in CSR can be displayed as a whole or even separately (Talonen et al., 2021). This statement is supported by the assertion made by Aupperle et al (1985), that these four components form an interrelated structure. However, they also can be viewed as distinct conceptual components of corporate responsibility. Based on Figure 1, economic responsibility is the base of the pyramid because the infrastructure of CSR is formed by economically sustainable business (Carroll, 2016). In addition, attaining a



profit is necessary for a company's growth and market survival. It can also aid in establishing trust and credibility among investors (Marek, 2019).

Figure 1: Carroll's Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility (Source: Carroll, 1979; 1991; 1999; 2016)

The second component of CSR, according to Carroll (2016), is legal responsibility. Society is sending a message to companies that they should comply with laws and regulations if they want to operate in a civil society. In Carroll's pyramid, the other two dimensions of corporate social responsibility are ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. Both are unrestricted by and are the result of voluntary actions and decisions (Marek, 2018). According to Kuzbik (2016), financial or economic and legal responsibilities are the minimum for any organization, but for those who wish to develop and pursue competitive advantage, moral responsibility must be added to the minimum because the first two dimensions are no longer sufficient. From the perspective of ethical responsibility, according to Carroll (2016), society expects businesses to operate ethically as well. This implies that the company has an obligation to do what is right, fair and just in addition to avoiding or minimising harm to stakeholders with whom it interacts. Lastly, in terms of philanthropy, a company is expected to be a good corporate citizen by contributing or returning physical, financial, and human resources to society or communities (Baden, 2016; Carroll, 2016; Masoud, 2017).

### **Economic Responsibility**

Economic responsibility is concerned with a company's ability to generate profits, which can help ensure its long-term viability in the market (Carroll, 1991). Such a responsibility is essential as well as the fundamental substance of a business, which a company must adhere to in order to maintain stable financial conditions and a sustainable economy in order to continue to achieve corporate success (Teh et al., 2019). Carroll (1991) stated that economic responsibility entails that a corporation must demonstrate its primary responsibilities, such as providing products and services that society requires at reasonable prices and the ability to generate financial returns. This assertion is supported by Abdeen et al (2016) who assert that a company's responsibility is to produce services and goods valued by society. The profitability argument claims that good CSR practises lead to prosperity, which can be demonstrated by increased financial margin returns (Hermawan and Mulyawan, 2014). Teh et al (2019), discovered a positive correlation between economic responsibility and consumer purchasing behaviour. Price is the most influential factor on consumer satisfaction and purchasing behaviour, according to (Onlaor and Rotchanakitumnuai, 2010). When the prices of products or services are excessively high, consumers tend to feel dissatisfied, which can affect the consumers purchasing behaviour and their loyalty to the company. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between economic responsibility and consumer purchasing behaviour.

### **Legal Responsibility**

A prosperous business must fulfil its legal obligations (Carroll, 2016). The society expects businesses to operate in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. The purpose of carrying out legal responsibility is to ensure that the company's performances and activities

of the companies are acceptable to stakeholder groups (Eshra & Beshir, 2017). Society has not only supported companies as economic entities, but it has also established the laws and regulations under which companies must function and operate. Consumers anticipate that businesses will meet the legal requirement for quality, product safety, and accurate information. Failure to meet these objectives may negatively impact the company's performance (Carroll, 2016). Previous research found a positive correlation between CSR legal initiatives and consumer behaviour (Abdeen et al., 2016). Consequently, the following hypothesis was developed:

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between legal responsibility and consumer purchasing behaviour.

### **Ethical Responsibility**

Ethical responsibility can relate to a company making the right decisions and abiding by company or national regulations (Carroll, 1991). According to Carroll and Shabana (2010), ethical responsibility refers to a company's voluntary actions that extend beyond the legal dimension to achieve social goals. In addition to the goal of maximising profits, a company should consider the social repercussions of its actions and strive to maximise their positive impact on society. According to Abdeen et al (2016) a company's ethical responsibility is not a legal requirement, but rather a social expectation that it will not cause harm. For example, the existence of false and misleading advertisements can be described as unethical actions in which a company attempts to do excessive advertising, making claims for its products or services that confuse consumers about the quality of goods or services. Abdeen et al. (2016) discovered a direct relationship between ethical beliefs and consumer buying behaviour. The following hypothesis was therefore formulated:

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between ethical responsibility and consumer purchasing behaviour.

### **Philanthropic Responsibility**

Philanthropic responsibility is associated with a voluntary social role of business to contribute to the improvement of society, which is neither required nor expected by laws or ethical norms (Carroll, 1991; Zapata-Ramos and Kim, 2017). It is also referred to as the discretionary responsibility since a good corporate citizen will carry out his responsibility as a return to society from the profits earned during the business (Thomas and Tahir, 2019). According to Bolton and Mattila (2015), CSR can take many forms, including recycling programs, diversity initiatives, the use of environmentally friendly materials, charitable donations, and support for community events. Businesses that actively promote and support CSR are perceived to be more dependable; consequently, their products are believed to be of higher quality, and they may even achieve greater consumer support (Bolton and Mattila, 2015). Engaging in philanthropic activities will therefore benefit both the surrounding societies and business sectors (Manuere et al., 2021). Hence, the following hypothesis was formed:

Ho4: There is no significant relationship between philanthropic responsibility and consumer purchasing behaviour.



**Consumer Purchasing Behaviour**

Consumer behaviour encompasses the physical, mental and emotional characteristics of individuals during the selection and acquisition of desired goods or services (Vahdati et al., 2015). It is suggested that CSR initiatives have a positive impact on consumers' intentions to support the organisation as well as their purchasing behaviour (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Oberseder et al., 2011). There is also evidence to show that some consumers used CSR as a purchase criterion, suggesting that CSR has an effect on purchase behaviour (Mohr et al., 2001). Furthermore, the findings by (Abdeen et al., 2016) demonstrates a direct relationship between consumer perceptions of an organisation's CSR and purchase behaviour. By understanding and recognising consumer behaviour and purchasing progressions, a business can become more familiar with its customers and, as a result, may identify the factors that will influence their purchase decision (Yeo et al., 2018). Nevertheless, Eshra and Beshir (2017) discovered that Egyptian consumers do not consider CSR practices when making purchasing decisions, resulting in CSR having an insignificant relationship with purchase behaviour. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Ho5: Economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility do not significantly influence the consumer purchasing behaviour.

**Methodology**

A cross-sectional quantitative designed was employed to examine the influencing factors of CSR towards consumer purchase behaviour. The study took place in a public university in Selangor, *Malaysia's largest economy with a conducive business environment that is home to numerous business organisations. The university students were chosen as the respondents to represent consumers* (Thomas and Tahir, 2019; Tan and Komaran, 2006). Systematic sampling method was used in this study. The management office of the selected residential colleges were contacted in order to obtain the total number of students. Starting with the list of students at each of the selected *residential colleges*, a random starting point was chosen, and every third person was selected as the respondents. According to Roscoe (1975), a sample size with of between 30 and less than 500 respondents is appropriate for most research. Therefore, 150 respondents would be adequate for this exploratory study sample size.

The questionnaires were sent to the students' email addresses via an online Google form. The implementation of an online Google form was intended to prevent the participation of unqualified individuals during the sampling process (Yeo et al., 2018). Closed-ended questions were used in the questionnaire that had been divided into demographic background and influence of CSR dimensions towards consumer purchasing behaviour. Respondents were required to answer the questionnaire based on the five-point Likert scale ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree.

The five items for each economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities were derived from Manuere et al (2021); Thomas and Tahir (2019), while the six items on consumer purchasing behaviour were drawn from (Thomas and Tahir, 2019). The reliability test for economic responsibility 0.651, legal responsibility 0.790, ethical responsibility 0.733, philanthropic responsibility 0.826 and consumer purchase behaviour 0.776. The items can be

used for further analysis because they had a reliability coefficient of more than 0.6 (Hair et al., 2011).

The descriptive analysis provided a background on the respondents. The inferential data analysis involving Pearson correlation was used to determine the correlation between the independent variables and consumer purchase behaviour, whereas the multiple linear regressions analysis was employed to ascertain the influence of predictor variables on consumer purchase behaviour.

## Findings and Discussion

### Background of respondents

Table 1

*Demographic Background of Respondents (n=150)*

Variables	Frequency(n)	Percentage(%)
Gender		
Male	39	26
Female	111	74
Ethnicity		
Malay	87	58
Chinese	46	30.7
Indian	16	10.7
Others	1	0.7
Year of Study		
1	5	3.3
2	31	20.7
3	44	29.3
4	70	46.7

The demographic background of the 150 respondents was displayed in Table 1. All of the 150 respondents were between the ages of 20 and 24 years. There were 39 male respondents (26%), in addition to 111 female respondents (74%). More than half of the respondents were Malay (58%), followed by Chinese at 30.7%, Indian at 10.7% and others (0.7%). Based on the year of study, the highest number of respondents, 46.7% were in fourth year of study, followed by 29.3% in the third year. Next, 20.7% respondents were in the second year, while the lowest number of respondents, 3.3% were found in the first year.

### Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 2 demonstrates the results of the Pearson correlation analysis. All four independent variables have a significant and positive relationship with consumer purchase behavior; economic responsibility ( $r=0.479$ ), legal responsibility ( $r=0.302$ ), ethical responsibility ( $r=0.513$ ) and philanthropic responsibility ( $r=0.466$ ).

Table 2

*Pearson Correlation Coefficient Analysis*

Variables	r-value	p-value
Economic responsibility	0.479***	0.000
Legal responsibility	0.302***	0.000
Ethical responsibility	0.513***	0.000
Philanthropic responsibility	0.466***	0.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The significant correlation between economic responsibility and consumer purchasing behaviour is consistent with the findings of Thomas and Tahir (2019); Safi and Ramay (2013); Onlaor and Rotchanakitumnuai (2010); Dusuki and Yusof (2008), all of whom discovered a positive and significant relationship between economic responsibility and consumer purchasing behaviour. It could be explained by focusing on the demographic background of respondents, where all of them were university students, and they would most likely choose to purchase products and services at affordable prices because they did not yet have stable incomes. Therefore, Ho1 was rejected.

The result also indicated that the relationship between legal responsibility and consumer purchasing behaviour was moderately significant and positive. Similar findings were obtained from previous investigations into legal responsibility and demonstrated consistency with the findings reported by (Fadun, 2014; Safi and Ramay, 2013; Min et. al., 2012). Consumers always hope that they will be able to obtain all products and services through a fair and just channel in which this goal can be attained under the surveillance of rules and regulations, and that their rights as consumers will be protected from time to time. Businesses adherence to legal responsibility may aid in the reduction of deceptive issues in the business world, such as scamming and misleading advertisements that endanger consumers' interest. Thus, Ho2 was rejected.

It can be seen that there was a significant and strong relationship between ethical responsibility and consumer purchasing behaviour. This result was consistent with the findings of (Sharma and Sharavani, 2013). Consumers would form moral judgments about the companies with which they wanted to connect, and they would form their own perceptions about the image of the companies based on the ethical responsibility performed. Therefore, Ho3 was rejected.

For the fourth hypothesis, philanthropic responsibility was associated with consumer purchasing behaviour, with a moderate strength of this relationship. This finding was supported by (Thomas and Tahir, 2019; Safi and Ramay, 2013). It was understandable because there had been having various types of volunteer and sponsorship events to help victims of natural disasters, rescue abandoned animals, give donations for the poor, provide scholarships for students and so on. Companies would always be regarded as warm-hearted and helpful because there were active participations found among the companies



corresponding to the philanthropic responsibility activities. It was inevitable that consumers would pay attention to this responsibility as well. As a result, Ho4 was rejected.

### The Influence of Predictor Factors on Consumer Purchase Behaviour

Ho5 was tested by using multiple linear regression analysis in Table 3. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to identify the four predictor factors that influence consumer purchase behaviour and ascertain the most influential factor influencing consumer purchase behaviour.

Table 3

#### *Result of Multiple Regression*

Variable	B	Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	0.993		0.379	0.705
Economic responsibility	0.394	0.064	1.223	0.011
Legal responsibility	0.486	0.197	3.839	0.048
Ethical responsibility	0.474	0.222	3.972	0.000
Philanthropic responsibility	0.721	0.230	4.231	0.050

$R^2=.436$ ; Adjusted  $R^2=.420$ ;  $F= 27.988$ ;  $\text{Sig.F}=.000^*p<0.05$

The findings revealed that the four variables in the Carroll's CSR pyramid are significant predictors of consumer purchase behaviour. Economic responsibility ( $\beta= 0.202$ ,  $p\text{-value}= 0.011$ ), legal responsibility ( $\beta= 0.147$ ,  $p\text{-value}= 0.048$ ), ethical responsibility ( $\beta= 0.390$ ,  $p\text{-value}= 0.000$ ), and philanthropic responsibility ( $\beta= 0.149$ ,  $p\text{-value}= 0.050$ ) were all significant predictors of consumer purchasing behaviour, as the p-values were all equal to or below the significance level of 0.05. Thus, Ho5 was rejected.

As the beta for ethical responsibility was the highest, it exerted the greatest influence on consumer purchasing behaviour. This results were consistent with the findings of Manueri et al. (2021), which indicated that the majority of consumers believed there was an association between ethical responsibility and the concept of CSR, and that ethical responsibility was the most important aspect of CSR that influence their purchasing behaviour.

The adjusted  $R^2$  was at 0.420, indicating that the four independents variables (economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities) in the study could account for 42.0% of the variance in consumer purchasing behaviour. The results of this study were supported by Thomas and Tahir (2019) who found significant and positive relationships between all the elements of CSR and consumer purchasing behaviour. CSR efforts made by businesses in the market would always have an impact on consumer purchasing behaviour, not just by looking into the economic dimension but also the non-economic dimensions, which were the legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. According to Lu et al (2020), the organisational performances will continue to get better in the future. Consumer support would help business grow sustainably, and CSR was seen as a competitive advantage because consumers were more likely to do business with companies that practice CSR (Jin et al., 2017).

### **Implication and Conclusion**

This research was done to identify the CSR dimensions that influenced consumer purchasing behaviour. The relationship between economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, philanthropic responsibility and the consumer purchasing behaviour was explored. There was a significant relationship between economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, philanthropic responsibility and the consumer purchasing behaviour.

The findings also revealed that ethical responsibility had the greatest influence on the respondents' purchasing behaviour. The businesses should be aware of their responsibilities and engage in activities that do not harm society or the environment. Companies should always pay attention to the contents of their advertisements in order to avoid any misleading descriptions or information about specific products or services offered. They would also need to ensure that their daily production process did not pollute the water sources, soil or air. Companies' ethical responsibilities would eventually help them gain a good reputation and consumer trust. Hence, the consumers will be more willing to purchase the products and services offered by ethical businesses.

The economic, legal and philanthropic responsibilities of the businesses would also influence consumer purchasing behaviour. Companies should demonstrate economic responsibility by providing affordable goods and services. So that consumers do not feel burdened when purchasing goods and services, they would need to monitor and control both actual costs and selling prices. Consumers will always prefer to purchase items with high quality and reasonable prices. Furthermore, companies' legal responsibilities would include adhering to the rules and regulations and providing goods and services in accordance with safety recommendations. It would aid in protecting consumers from any harm that was caused by unsafe materials in the production of goods, and it could also assist consumers in avoiding becoming the victims of deceptive business practices. In addition, for the philanthropic responsibility, businesses may provide donations or sponsorship, such as fundraising for calamity victims and sponsoring school events. It may assist them in gaining consumer support for their good deeds and surviving on the market for the foreseeable future.

Based on the findings of this study, all the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities of CSR would serve as guidelines for both the businesses and consumers. Companies could implement CSR programs by understanding the connections between CSR elements and consumer purchasing behaviour, whereas consumers use the CSR elements as reference when purchasing the products and services or even selecting companies to protect their rights.

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