

CSR Communication Effect on Brand Trust: Consumer Survey Data

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility communication has come out as strategic tool of creating consumer perception and enhancing brand related performance and competitive and socially responsible markets. This paper will discuss whether the quality of CSR communication and perceived CSR credibility affects brand trust and whether the variation in the exposure levels will result in variations in trust perceptions. The participants of the study provided primary survey data which comprised of 360 consumers who had in the last three months bought in the chosen sector in a structured questionnaire. The research uses Pearson correlation analysis in the determination of the strength of associations between CSR communication quality, perceived CSR credibility and brand trust and one-way ANOVA to determine the difference in trust among the low, medium, and high groups of CSR communication exposure. The results show that there are many significant positive relationships between the quality of CSR communication, perceived credibility, and brand trust. Also, consumers who are more exposed to CSR communication claim much higher rates of trust than those who are less exposed. The research adds to the CSR-trust literature by proving that quality and visibility of communication, as opposed to CSR interaction, is the key determinant of trust development and strategic brand positioning.

Keywords: CSR communication, brand trust, perceived credibility, consumer perception, corporate transparency

Introduction

CSR Communication in the Modern Markets

Corporate Social Responsibility communication has gradually become a strategic tool in the present markets. Companies are now part of the brand stories with environmental and social programs; they spread them via sustainability reports, corporate websites, social media platforms and advertising campaigns. Proper CSR communication minimizes the information asymmetry as well as enhances the stakeholder involvement (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen, 2010; Morsing and Schultz, 2006). In digitally networked markets, consumers demand openness, lucidity and uniformity in corporate disclosures. The way in which the CSR activities are communicated may be more influential on the consumer perception than the initiatives themselves. Thus, CSR communication has become a highly important process of intervention in the assessment of brands and results of relationships.

Role of Brand Trust in Consumer Decision-Making

The brand trust is a major factor in the consumer decision making as it lessens the perceived risk and increases the confidence in the exchange relationship. Trust is an indication of the willingness of the consumers to put their trust in a brand in terms of perceptions of reliability, integrity and competence (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Consumers are becoming more and more aware of brands in terms of ethical responsibility and social commitment in competitive markets that are also information rich. CSR initiatives can be used as the indicator of good will and stakeholder orientation thus enhancing the perception of trust (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). Once the trust is built, the consumers also show greater commitment to their relationship and continued involvement.

Research Gap: CSR Evidence Communication

Even though the previous studies have found that there is a positive correlation between CSR involvement and consumer performance, a relatively small number of studies deals directly with CSR communication quality and exposure. Most of the available literature focuses on CSR performance instead of communication-related features (transparency or credibility) (Fatma and Rahman, 2015). Moreover, scarce quantitative studies are assessing whether different degrees of exposure of CSR communication have statistically significant differences in brand trust using mean comparison methods. The need to isolate communication exposure as a factor of trust is necessary in a time when communication channels vary in terms of their interaction level and perceived authenticity. Thus, there is only limited empirical evidence that combines correlation and group comparison methods.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Test the correlation between brand trust and quality of CSR communication.
2. Examine the relationship between credibility of perceived CSR and brand trust.
3. Determine the difference in age of brand trust when there are differences in levels of CSR communication exposure.
4. Determine whether brand trust in different CSR communication channels is different.

Research Questions

1. The research aims at addressing the following questions:
2. Is brand trust correlated with the quality of CSR communication significantly?
3. Is perceived CSR credibility any stronger in relation to brand trust?
4. Do differences in brand trust differ between various CSR communication exposure levels?
5. How different are brand trusts on channels of CSR communication?

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

CSR communication is the strategic distribution of the information about social and environmental activities of a firm to the stakeholders. Openness, plainness, and consistency are the main qualities of effective CSR communication. Open disclosure will minimize information asymmetry and increase credibility (Du et al., 2010). Clarity guarantees that messages on CSR are clear and meaningful and reduce any form of ambiguity that may create scepticism. The reliability is enhanced by consistency in the communication channels and discourages the interpretation of a message in mutually exclusive ways (Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

There are different communication mediums employed in organizations such as sustainability reports, corporate websites, social media platforms and advertising campaigns. Social media enable interactive communication as well as quick information exchange and scrutiny (Colleoni, 2013). Sustainability reports present well-organized and in-depth reporting, whereas advertising incorporates CSR stories into the brand positioning tactics.

Greenwashing is a major issue with CSR communication, which refers to claims of excessive or deceptive information about the environmental or social performance (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). CSR communication becomes unbelievable and negative results strengthen when they look fake. Credible communication on the other hand strengthens brand reviews whilst increasing corporate legitimacy (Ellen, Webb, and Mohr, 2006). Thus, the quality of communication plays a major role in influencing the reaction of the consumers on the CSR efforts.

Brand Trust

It is the readiness of the consumers to trust a brand because of their beliefs about reliability, integrity and competency (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Reliability takes care of constant delivery of brand policies, integrity takes care of ethical business, and credibility takes care of honesty and professionalism (Erdem and Swait, 2004). Trust can lessen uncertainty in the exchange relations as well as the establishment of long-term stability in relations (Morgan, and Hunt, 1994).

CSR activities have the potential of improving brand credibility since they may indicate corporate goodwill and moral accountability. As the empirical studies show, CSR engagement has a positive effect on brand equity and customer satisfaction which is often mediated in terms of trust perceptions (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). The effect of trust-building, however, is dependent on the perceived credibility of CSR communication. Open and regularity in communication strengthens the trust, and supposition reinforces it.

Theoretical Foundations

Signalling theory represents an assumption which states that companies employ visible signals to convey invisible attributes and to decrease information asymmetry (Spence, 1973). CSR communication is a manifestation of corporate values and moral orientation. The quality of communication increases credibility of signal and boosts consumer confidence.

Attribution theory is a theory that describes the way consumers explain the intentions behind the CSR initiatives (Ellen et al., 2006). Consumers can ascribe driving forces to intrinsic motives, i.e. real social concern, or extrinsic motives, i.e. profit-seeking. Veritable and open communication fosters positive motive attributions and the promotion of trust.

The theory of trust formation highlights the point that the formation of trust is a lengthy process that is formed through repeated interaction, reliability, and an apparent integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). The constant communication on CSR strengthens the images of good will and ethical behavior in the long run. These frameworks combine to give a conceptual foundation of the study of the effects of CSR communication on brand trust.

Hypotheses Development

Using the signalling theory, the quality of CSR communication that involves transparency, clarity and consistency should be used as credible signal, which decreases uncertainty and increases trust in the brand.

Consumers are prone to form favourable trust perceptions when they perceive CSR communication in an informative and trustworthy manner. Thus, it is predicted that there will be a positive relationship between the quality of CSR communication and brand trust.

According to the attribution theory, when CSR initiatives are believed to be credible and value-based, consumers attribute intrinsic motives on firms, which make them trust more. On the other hand, scepticism undermines the effectiveness of the CSR initiatives. Therefore, brand trust is supposed to have a positive relationship with perceived CSR credibility.

The level of exposure can also play a role in trust formation by a process of repetitive signal reinforcement. When the consumers are exposed to the increased amount of the CSR communication, they are likely to have the better familiarity with the brand ethical commitment and increased confidence. As a result, statistically significant differences in brand trust may tend to occur on the basis of the differences in the exposure levels.

Being perceived as authentic and interactive, communication channels vary. Interactive sites can create more involvement and trustworthiness than other conventional ways of advertising. As such, brand trust might be different in channels of CSR communication.

H1: Brand trust has a positive relationship with the quality of CSR communication.

H2: There is a positive relationship between brand trust and perceived CSR credibility.

H3: The brand trust varies greatly in terms of CSR communication exposure (Low, Medium, and High).

H4: There is a difference in brand trust within CSR communication channels.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present research is based on cross-sectional quantitative research design in order to investigate the correlation between brand trust and CSR communication. Primary data was obtained through a structured survey instrument that was being applied on the consumers. The use of cross-sectional design is suitable since it enables the relationship between variables to be measured at a certain time and statistical analysis using correlation and analysis of variance methods. The quantitative methodology provides objectivity, repeatability and statistical rigor. The research design is methodologically appropriate to answer the suggested research questions because the study will test associations between the constructs and compare the means of the exposure groups as opposed to drawing a conclusion on causality.

Data Source and Population of Target

This work is founded on the primary survey data of consumers who are members of one of the chosen industries like FMCG, retail, or banking. The population to be targeted will be consumers who have acquired products or services of the chosen industry in the past three months. By limiting the sample to new buyers, it will be guaranteed that the respondents are commercialized with brand communication practices and can make an informed assessment of the CSR communication and trust perception. The structured questionnaire was used to help collect data, and it was given online via the Internet, or it was distributed offline in case of inaccessibility and the possibility of responses.

Sampling Technique

This was done to achieve sufficient representation among important demographic characteristics like age, gender and education level by the use of a stratified method of sampling. Stratification increases

representativeness through minimizing sampling bias and makes sure that significant consumer groups are proportionally represented. In the various strata, the respondents were identified through the purposive screening process to ensure that they fitted into the inclusion criterion of recent purchase experience. This approach will make sure that there is representativeness as well as relevance of responses.

Stratified sampling is especially the right strategy of the consumer researches as structural differences can also alter the perceptions of the CSR communication and brand credibility. This ensures that the external validity is guaranteed by having diversity in the strata and enhancing the reliability of the group comparisons carried out via ANOVA.

Sample Size

The study was planned to have a minimum size of 300-400 respondents. This is statistically satisfactory to perform Pearson correlation analysis and to obtain one-way ANOVA with enough statistical power. ANOVA will also involve grouping the respondents into three exposure groups (low, medium, and high), therefore, a large sample is needed to ensure that the group sizes are constant and that results on the mean can be compared. The sample size used will consist of at least 300 respondents, which will be divided into almost 100 respondents per exposure category.

The reliability testing and composite score makeup are also strengthened by the selection of the sample size. The bigger the sample the smaller the standard error, the better the precision of the estimates and the more generalized the findings that can be made. Thus, a sample of 300-400 will give a methodological suitability to the planned statistical analyses.

Instrument Development

A structured questionnaire that comprised of unvalidated and validated multi-item scales based on the earlier established literature was used to collect the data. All constructs were rated on a five- or seven-point Likert scale on a strongly disagree to strongly agree scale.

The measurement of CSR Communication Quality was carried out with the help of a 4-6 items that reflected the silence, clarity, informative and consistent character of CSR messages. These items measure the level of perception of clarity, transparency, and coherence of CSR communication through platforms. Perceived CSR Credibility was quantified by use of 3-4 questions which assessed authenticity, sincerity and plausibility of CSR initiatives. This construct describes the consumer perceptions about the authenticity of corporate intentions.

Brand Trust was assessed with the help of 5-6 questions, which expressed reliability, integrity, and trust to the brand. These items determine whether consumers feel that the brand is doing what it promises, acting in a morally right way and can be depended on to do so over time.

Demographic factors like age, sex, education, income, and frequency of purchase were added to outline the sample profile and act as the control variables.

Variable Operationalization

The composite scores were calculated as a mean of the respective Likert-scale items of each construct. The determination of reliability will be done on Cronbach alpha before composite formation to measure internal consistency.

The exposure of the CSR communication was operationalised by categorising the respondents into tertiles regarding the total CSR communication quality score. It was distributed into three groups:

1. Low exposure
2. Medium exposure
3. High exposure

Such categories will be the grouping variable of the one-way ANOVA, and a brand trust will be the dependent variable. Pearson correlation analysis will be used to test the linear relationships between the quality of CSR communication, perceived CSR credibility, and brand trust. This system of operation guarantees correspondence among the design of measurements to statistical goals.

Results

This section of the results and analysis delivers the statistically determined findings of the study consisting of descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and the results of the one-way ANOVA.

Sample Profile

There were 360 valid responses which were gathered and analysed. The sex ratio was somewhat equal, 52.2 percent of the respondents were males and 47.8 percent were females. Regarding age group, 34.7% of the respondents fell into the 18-25 years bracket, 29.4% fell into the 26-35 years bracket, 21.1% fell into the 36-45 years bracket, and 14.8% fell under the 45 years bracket. In terms of educational qualification, 18.6% had completed higher secondary education, 46.9% were graduates, 28.3% postgraduates and 6.2% had professional qualification. Purchase frequency had shown that 41.7 purchased products monthly, 33.6 quarterly and 24.7 more often than once a month. The demographic profile indicates that the sample of consumers is diverse and relevant to be statistically compared across exposure groups.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	188	52.2%
	Female	172	47.8%
Age	18–25	125	34.7%
	26–35	106	29.4%
	36–45	76	21.1%
	Above 45	53	14.8%
Education	Higher Secondary	67	18.6%
	Graduate	169	46.9%
	Postgraduate	102	28.3%
	Professional	22	6.2%
Purchase Frequency	Monthly	150	41.7%
	Quarterly	121	33.6%
	More than once/month	89	24.7%

Source: Primary Survey Data (2025)

Preliminary Analysis

Before testing the hypothesis, descriptive statistics and reliability analysis were performed. The average score of CSR Communication Quality was 3.82 (SD = 0.74) which is an average to high perceived

communication effectiveness. Perceived CSR Credibility had 3.76 (SD = 0.71). The mean value of Brand Trust was 3.91 (SD = 0.69), which implies rather positive attitudes towards trust in respondents. Cronbach alpha was used to test reliability. The alpha of CSR Communication Quality was 0.87, Perceived CSR Credibility was 0.84 and Brand Trust was 0.89. The values of all the values are above the recommended internal consistency of 0.70.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Construct	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
CSR Communication Quality	3.82	0.74	0.87
Perceived CSR Credibility	3.76	0.71	0.84
Brand Trust	3.91	0.69	0.89

Source: Primary Survey Data (2025)

Correlation Analysis

To test H1 and H2, Pearson correlation analysis was used. The findings show that there is a strong relationship between CSR Communication Quality and Brand Trust ($r = 0.62, p < 0.001$). This confirms H1 which proposes that brand trust is linked to greater perceived quality of CSR communication.

Brand Trust was also found to be positively and significantly related to Perceived CSR Credibility ($r = 0.58, p < 0.001$), indicating that the relationship was moderate to strong. This result confirms H2 and shows that the perception of credibility contributes greatly to the development of trust. CSR Communication Quality and Perceived CSR Credibility had a high correlation ($r = 0.65, p < 0.001$) indicating that there is conceptual coherence between the clarity of communication and credibility perceived.

By the traditional interpretation levels, correlation coefficients between 0.50 and 0.70 are strong associations. Therefore, the results show strong correlations between the constructs.

Table 3 Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3
1. CSR Communication Quality	1		
2. Perceived CSR Credibility	0.65***	1	
3. Brand Trust	0.62***	0.58***	1

** $p < 0.001$

Source: Primary Survey Data (2025)

ANOVA Analysis

Assumption Testing

The skewness and kurtosis values were also used to measure normality and had a value within the acceptable range of ± 1.0 which was considered to have an approximation of normal distribution. The homogeneity of variances of ANOVA was tested by Levene and the result was $F = 1.87, p = 0.156$ which meant that the assumption of equal variances was not breached.

One-Way ANOVA

The one-way ANOVA was used to test whether there is a difference in Brand Trust with different CSR

Communication Exposure levels (Low, Medium and High). This analysis showed that the statistical significance of the difference between groups was significant, $F(2, 357) = 18.42, p < 0.001$. The effect size (Eta squared = 0.094) is shown to be a moderate effect which implies that the exposure level can explain about 9.4 percent of the variance in Brand Trust. These findings help to prove H3, and as a result, it is shown that different degrees of exposure to CSR communication play a significant role in shaping trust perceptions.

Table 4 ANOVA Results

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	Eta ²
Between Groups	8.42	2	4.21	18.42	<0.001	0.094
Within Groups	81.62	357	0.23			
Total	90.04	359				

Source: Primary Survey Data (2025)

Post-hoc Test

The T-hsd post-hoc was applied to determine a particular difference between groups. The findings show that there was a significant difference between the High Exposure group (Mean = 4.21), Low Exposure group (Mean = 3.54, $p < 0.001$) and the Medium Exposure group (Mean = 3.86, $p = 0.012$). The Medium and Low groups were significantly different ($p = 0.041$). These results indicate that brand trust is heightened when there is more exposure to CSR communication. In the managerial view, the frequent and persistent CSR communication seems important in enhancing the consumer trust.

Table 5 Post-hoc Comparisons (Tukey HSD)

Comparison	Mean Difference	p-value
High vs Low	0.67	<0.001
High vs Medium	0.35	0.012
Medium vs Low	0.32	0.041

Source: Primary Survey Data (2025)

Discussion

Key Findings

The results of this paper prove that the role of CSR communication in influencing brand trust can be significant. The consumers who feel that CSR messages are transparent, clear, and consistent, are more likely to show greater trust to the brand. It implies that the quality of communication is a mediating factor between the corporate social activity and the consumer relational results. How the efforts under CSR are conveyed seems to play a role in consumer perception, trust, and assessment of the brand in the long run. The consumers will consider CSR initiatives as real instead of being promotional when the communication is authentic and coherent.

The concept of perceived credibility is found to be an important factor in trust formation. Consumers do not simply react to the existence of CSR activities but to the appearance of believable and authentic activities. As the CSR communication is consistent with the evident brand behavior and conveyed in an evidence-based way, the perceptions of trust are reinforced. On the other hand, uncertainty or exaggeration

can cause a lack of confidence and create uncertainty. These results support the idea that attributes of communication play an important role in the decision of CSR initiatives to bring positive relational capital. The differences in the levels of exposure also show that the continuous and repeated communication of CSR enhances the perceptions of trust. Customers who are exposed to CSR messages more are likely to have more familiarity and trust in the ethical nature of the brand. The exposure seems to entrench cognitive associations between responsibility and reliability, and this consolidation of the trust with time. The perception of consumers can be enhanced by incremental gains in visibility of communication. This underscores the relevance of continuity in the CSR messaging as opposed to the disclosure at random. Disparities in communication channels also indicate that the channel used in dissemination can have an effect on the interpretation of the CSR initiatives. Most channels that are seen as being interactive and open can contribute to increased perceptions of authenticity, whereas less interactive formats can produce less strong relational responses. All these outcomes highlight the importance of the idea that CSR communication is not just a constitutive role, but a relational mechanism, which plays a strategic role in reinforcing brand trust in the case of an effective implementation.

Theoretical Implications

The research supports theoretical assumptions that are based on attribution and signaling schools. CSR communication is viewed as a credible source of information that decreases the information asymmetry and expresses moral dedication. In a case where the quality of communication is good consumers will figure the CSR activities to be intrinsic and value-driven instead of an opportunity. Such interpretation enhances the development of trust as it equates the perceived motives and the responsible behavior. The results thus augment the current body of literature in a way that shows that communication exposure and credibility are important processes that connect CSR initiatives to trust results in consumer markets.

Strategic CSR Communication Reflections

Strategically, companies are supposed to focus on transparency, clarity, and consistency on CSR messages. Continued communication is better than the single campaigns in developing trust. The authenticity perceptions are promoted by the evidence-based disclosures, the quantifiable outcomes and consistent accounts across channels. To avoid skepticism, the organization must make sure that CSR initiatives are corresponding to the communicated claims. Integrating CSR communication as part of the lasting brand strategy could reinforce relational capital and give competitive edge in the socially responsible markets.

Implications to the managers and policies

Developing Open CSR Messages

The CSR messages developed by managers should be based on transparency, factual reporting, and measurable results. The credibility and level of scepticism can also be increased by providing clear information concerning the objectives, implementation processes and outcomes. Perceptions of trust can be enhanced by inclusive disclosures that are data driven and third-party validations. Open communication breeds responsibility and conscience to the stakeholders.

Avoiding Greenwashing

The results indicate the danger of greenwashing and its possible adverse effect on trust. Companies should make sure that the CSR assertions are true, can be demonstrated, and are the same with the real corporate behaviours. Exaggerated or vague statements can create distrust and hurt the brand equity in the long run. The creation of the monitoring inside mechanisms and the correspondence of the communication and the

real initiatives is the key to the upholding of the credibility. The regulatory authorities could also promote comparable disclosure systems to reduce distortion of communication.

Channel Strategy of Trust Enhancement

The choice of the channel of communication is very important in influencing the outcome of trust. The interactive communication tools like social media may provide interaction and comprehension which makes perceived authenticity stronger. Nonetheless, channel consistency is also crucial. Companies must incorporate CSR stories on the websites, reports and promotional content to make it coherent. Exposure can be enhanced and trust established with repetitive and consistent messages by strategic channel management.

Future Research and Limitations

This research has a number of limitations. To begin with, the cross sectional-design limits causal inference. Although considerable relationships and group differences were found, the design is not in a position to make conclusive conclusions about time causality. Longitudinal studies would give more insight into the effects that CSR communication has on trust at a longer period of time.

Second, social desirability effects and other response bias might be present due to the use of self-reported survey data. The respondents can exaggerate trust perceptions or ethical sensitivity. The future studies can include behavioural quantification or experimental studies to increase objectivity.

Third, the research is on a narrow industry that might restrict the industry-wide generalization. The reaction of the consumers to CSR communication can differ in accordance with the peculiarities of the industries and the previous brand image. External validity would be enhanced by broadening research in a variety of sectors.

Experimental designs where there is control of transparency of communication or channel type could be used in future studies to develop causal effects. Mediation models that explore the role of credibility as a mediator of the relationship between the quality of communication and trust would also enhance theoretical knowledge. There could also be longitudinal monitoring of consumer perceptions, which would be a helpful source of information in terms of trust evolution.

Conclusion

This was the purpose of the present study to compare the CSR communication and brand trust by correlating and using ANOVA analysis. In particular, it aimed at determining whether the quality of CSR communication and the perceived credibility relate to the brand trust and whether the level of exposure was significant in generating differences in trust perceptions. The results indicate that the positive correlations among the quality of CSR communication, perceived CSR credibility, and brand trust are strong and significant at the level of statistical significance. Moreover, the results of the ANOVA indicate that there are significant differences in brand trust in the groups of exposure, and the more customers are exposed to CSR communication, the greater are brand trust perceptions. These findings indicate the significance of long-term and plausible communication in the evolving CSR efforts into relational outputs. This research adds value to the CSR-trust literature as the attributes of communication are isolated but CSR performance is not the main subject of the research. It combines the relational and group comparison analysis to offer empirical evidence concerning the centrality of communication exposure and credibility in forming trust. The results are a support of theoretical views based on signalling and attribution theories. This paper highlights at a strategic level that CSR communication should be open, reliable and persistent in order to rebuild long-term trust. Organizations that emphasize on believable communication procedures

can be in a better position to deepen relational capital and increase competitive edge within socially aware markets.

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