

The Effect of CSR on Consumers Trusts and Purchase Intention: The Moderating Role of Digital CSR Communication and Perceived Risk

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Abstract

Purpose: This article examines the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and their impact on consumers' trust and purchase intention. The study focuses on the moderating effects of digital CSR communication and perceived risk in shaping consumer perceptions.

Design/methodology/approach: The non-probabilistic sampling method, specifically both the convenient sampling and snowball sampling methods were applied. Target respondents were individuals aged 18 and above who had purchased from Malaysian fashion retailers. A total of 254 valid responses were collected and analyzed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM).

Findings: The study shows that CSR has a positive influence on both consumer trust and purchase intention. However, the moderating effects of digital CSR communication and perceived risk on the relationship between CSR and consumer trust were not significant.

Research limitations/implications: The generalizability of the results may be constrained as the current study focused only on consumers who purchase from fashion online retailers and data were solely collected in Malaysia.

Practical implications: This study offers important insights for online retailers and policymakers on utilizing CSR to strengthen consumer relationships and boost sales in the digital age.

Originality/value: The influence of digital CSR communication on Malaysian fashion retailers remains underexplored, particularly in the context of consumer perceptions. This study examines how consumer trust, viewed through the lens of SOR theory, affects purchase intentions.

Keywords: Stimulus Organism Response Theory (SOR), Consumer purchase intention, Consumer trust, Digital CSR communication, Perceived risk, Corporate social responsibility

Classification: Research paper

Introduction

In this era of digital age where consumers are not merely purchasers but conscientious participants in the marketplace, the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on consumer actions has become an instrumental aspect of corporate strategy and scholarly exploration (Al-Haddad et al., 2022). Investors, local communities, customers, consumers, media, vendors, business partners to employees, are all showing greater concern on the impact of CSR practices on organizations (Deloitte, 2023). Corporations worldwide are increasingly integrating socially responsible initiatives into their business models, aiming to not only fulfill ethical obligations but also to collect beneficial responses from their clients. According to Kucukusta et al. (2019), building a trustworthy relationship with stakeholder are essentials as it assists in obtaining feedback about their existing CSR practices and it was evident when CSR engagement post had the highest level of reach in the market among consumers.

The landscape of consumer decision-making has undergone significant transformation, largely driven by the twin forces of digitalization and an increased awareness of social issues (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001). In today's interconnected world, consumers are more discerning than ever, closely examining corporate behavior to ensure it aligns with their personal values before committing to any purchase decision. This shift is not just a trend but a reflection of a deeper, more conscious engagement with the marketplace. As reported in the 2015 Cone Communications/Ebiquity Global CSR Study, there is a growing recognition among consumers of their own role in addressing social and environmental challenges. They are increasingly aware that their purchasing choices can influence broader societal outcomes. This sense of responsibility is reshaping the way consumers interact with brands. Trust has become the cornerstone of the consumer-brand relationship, with ethical conduct and corporate responsibility playing pivotal roles in fostering loyalty and influencing buying decisions (Cone, 2015). In the digital age, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays a critical role in shaping consumer behavior. The vast reach of digital platforms amplifies the visibility of CSR initiatives, making them a key element in consumer decision-making. Consumers now consider a range of perceived risks, from environmental impacts to ethical concerns, when evaluating brands. This nuanced perception drives them to favor companies that not only meet their functional needs but also resonate with their moral and ethical values. Thus, in a world where information is readily accessible, CSR is no longer merely a corporate obligation but a strategic priority that directly influences purchasing behavior and brand loyalty.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, one of the most popular, fast-growing, and sustainable industries which run via online shopping is fashion products (Haslina Md Harizan & Hafizuddin Abdul Shukor, 2021). And the competition in this field has become increasingly fierce (New Straits Times, 2024). To increase the competitiveness of online stores, it is needed to study consumers' purchase intention.

Given the context, there has been little evidence on past studies attempting to model CSR studies with consumers trust and purchase intention with the moderating roles of digital CSR and perceived risk in a single integrated model based on the SOR premise (Peng & Kim, 2014; Godefroit-Winkel, Schill, and Diop-Sall, 2022). This paradigm is significant so as to explore how people react to any kind of stimuli in terms of their purchasing power and intention (Rivas et al., 2022). This study seeks to thoroughly go through this complexity by examining the direct impact of CSR on consumers' trust and their purchase intention, while also exploring the moderating roles of digital CSR communication and perceived risk. This study seeks to investigate how organism (consumer trust) stimulated by stimuli (corporate social responsibility) influences the response (consumer purchase intention), with SOR Theory as the theoretical lens, and digital CSR communication and perceived risk as the moderator. Majority of research using the S-O-R framework assume that positive stimuli, like CSR actions, prompt favourable emotions, which results in positive responses (Godefroit-Winkel et al., 2022; Schill and Godefroit-Winkel, 2022). Thus, this study provides a detailed examination on the relationship between CSR and consumers' trust and purchase intention, as moderated by digital CSR communication and perceived risks (Godefroit-Winkel et al., 2022). Conversely, previous studies on digital CSR communication are very limited and especially on the digital CSR communication (Capriotti, 2011; Adi and Grigore, 2015). Although businesses are fast evolving, they are still lacking in CSR engagement digitally (Kavoura et al., 2024). More research is required to comprehend the phenomena and the concepts of digital CSR communication to align with the values of corporate strategy. CSR studies focusing on online customers from the Asian perspective are also limited (Chu, et al., 2020; Chu and Chen, 2019). In the post-COVID era, as more consumers shop online, they are encountering CSR through social media channels, where they can easily learn about and discuss these initiatives (Chu et al., 2020).

This study theoretically investigates the crucial role of digital CSR communications by delving into how Malaysian online consumers perceive CSR (as a form of stimuli) in eliciting their trust (i.e. organism) and its ultimate impact on their purchase intention (i.e. response) by using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory as a framework. This research will enrich the existing literature by highlighting how digital CSR communication acts as a moderating factor in influencing consumer behavior, particularly within the Malaysian context. This paper may provide insights to Malaysian online retailers and organizations on the benefits of utilizing digital platforms to effectively promote their CSR initiatives and achievements. Leveraging these channels may offer organizations unique opportunity to enhance brand visibility, deepen consumer engagement, and strengthen reputational trust through transparent and impactful CSR communications.

Literature Review

Underpinning Theory: The SOR Theory

Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory was initially used in explaining the general environment psychology but in the later years this theory was often adopted in explaining the social influences of digital technologies on people’s daily activities, for example, online shopping behavior (Peng and Kim, 2014), e-learning (Yang et al., 2021), overuse of smartphone (Fu et al., 2021), mobile phone attachment (Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013) and so on. However, regarding the organism component in the SOR Theory literature, Loureiro et al. (2020) have indicated an observation that the inclusion of emotional reactions is considered an open question. Furthermore, prior researchers Eroglu et al. (2001) have pointed out that internal cognitive states are vital for a comprehensive understanding of consumers’ judgements in addition to emotional or affective reactions (O). In this sense, only a partial explanation for the activity of organism which concentrates on consumers’ emotional or affective reactions has been provided in the literature. The stimuli is CSR and affects the emotional responses of the consumer (Changa et al., 2011). When the stimuli are moderated by both the positive and negative factors, it has a different effect on the outcome (O). Positive emotional responses, as described by Bagozzi (1986), in this study indicates the consumer's trust in the CSR attributes and constitute the affective part of the organism factor. Approach behaviors, the focal point of the study, represent favorable behavior that could be aimed toward a particular setting (Changa et al., 2011). For instance, intention to continue browsing, and making purchases are examples of constructive final actions taken by customers. This research focuses on positive consumer purchase intention as a response because CSR generally strive to create trust among consumers to promote purchasing behavior. These components of the SOR model describe the reaction of the consumer that is generated by stimuli, which eventually influence the response of the consumer i.e. consumers’ purchase intention within the setting of online fashion retail.

Impact of CSR on online consumer purchase intention

When a business practices CSR, it can cultivate positive relationships with its customers and earn their support by having them volunteer to purchase and achieve satisfaction by implementing CSR practices while achieving competitive edge of the business (Carroll and Shabana, 2010; Zhang and Ahmad, 2021). CSR activities are encouraged by law and as well as a corporate strategic to increase the willingness of the consumer to purchase. Consumer will tend to purchase and believe the products of the company which practices CSR. Therefore, CSR activities assist consumers to make purchasing decision and influence them (Gong et al., 2023; Zhang and Ahmad, 2021). Numerous studies have demonstrated that when consumers are aware of and participate in CSR initiatives, their purchase intentions are impacted (Zhang and Ahmad, 2021; Abdeen et al., 2016; Mulaessa and Wang, 2017). A corporate’s CSR efforts will create a favorable relation with its consumers and induce better purchase intention. When a company engages in CSR, it facilitates online shopping, allowing customers to think more highly of the products. Hence the study postulates the hypothesis:

H1. CSR has a direct positive relationship with purchase intention.

Impact of CSR on online consumer trust

Integrity and credibility will be improved if organizations operate with a CSR-conscious orientation which will undoubtedly satisfy the conflicting needs of their stakeholders (Zhang and Ahmad, 2021). Initiatives that are responsible in nature towards social and environment, will

engender a sense of trust in consumers and hence improve their evaluations and willingness to try the organizations products or services. Improving consumer trust by engaging in CSR activities, also means that it offers a strategic edge to the company (Zhang and Ahmad, 2021). Building on the insights provided by Carroll and Shabana (2010), a robust relationship between CSR and customer trust is evident. Borges et al., (2018) further elaborate that organizations engaged in socially responsible activities can significantly enhance their brand credibility and identity. This perspective is supported by Kim (2019), who asserts that consumers tend to place greater trust in businesses that demonstrate strong social responsibility. Given this, it is apparent that CSR initiatives can positively influence consumer perceptions, leading to a better organizational image and enhanced reputation. This trust cultivated through CSR practices is especially critical in the digital marketplace, where consumer trust translates into loyalty and long-term engagement. Hence the study postulates the hypothesis:

H2. CSR has a direct positive relationship with consumer trust.

Impact of consumer trust on the purchase intention

Trust is a vital factor in determining consumer purchase intention. It is widely recognized in business interactions as a significant factor influencing purchasing decisions (Ventre and Kolbe, 2020). Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated a strong causal connection between trust and purchase intention (Hong and Cha, 2013). In the context of web-based shopping, Jarvenpaa et al. (2000) highlighted that consumers' purchase intentions are largely influenced by their attitudes toward online shopping, which fundamentally shape their trust in the online marketplace. Similarly, studies by Gefen et al. (2003), Salam et al. (2005), and Hong and Cha (2013) confirmed a direct link between trust and the intention to shop. Shankar et al. (2002) further argue that trust directly impacts consumers' purchase intentions. In emerging markets like Kuwait, research by Ventre and Kolbe (2020) and Gibreel et al. (2018) has shown that a positive trust relationship significantly enhances online purchase intentions. Conversely, Wagner Mainardes et al. (2019) observed that a lack of trust in e-commerce leads to decreased willingness to purchase online. Trust is also regarded as a significant predictor in predicting consumers' ethical behavior (Kang and Hustvedt, 2014). Peng and Kim (2014) demonstrated that a positive attitude towards online shopping is consistently influenced by trust, which in turn, affects online purchase intentions. In light of this, consumer trust is posited to be a critical factor influencing purchase intentions in online shopping contexts. Based on these insights, the H3 is proposed:

H3. Trust has a direct positive effect on purchase intention.

The moderating effect of Digital CSR Communication

Digital CSR tools are critical in conveying an organization's CSR initiatives and promoting a socially responsible image to stakeholders (Ali et al., 2015; Jahdi and Acikdilli, 2009). Social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are instrumental in strengthening the connection between consumers and brands, fostering trust, and influencing purchasing behaviors (Okazaki et al., 2015; Parent et al., 2011). Digital CSR communications facilitate two-way interactions, allowing consumers to engage with and respond to CSR activities. Research shows that effective CSR communication significantly enhances product perceptions, purchase intentions, and consumer trust (Krisch and Grabner-Kräuter, 2017). CSR initiatives impact consumer behaviour, increasing trust and purchase willingness, especially when communicated

through digital platforms (Khattak and Yousaf, 2022). Okazaki et al. (2020) highlight that digital CSR communication not only engages consumers but also strengthens brand-consumer bonds, creating substantial value. Thus, leveraging social media for CSR communication is essential for enhancing consumer trust and purchase intentions (Capriotti, 2011). Hence, the study posits that:
H4. Digital CSR communication positively moderates the relationship between CSR and consumer trust.

The moderating effect of Perceived Risks

Perceived risk is considered an important factor in customer behavior (Li, 2023). According to Kim et al (2008), perceived risk is defined by consumers' belief about uncertain negative outcome from online. For online consumers purchases, this is an important barrier, as most consumers will weigh the perceived risk as a common precautionary action. When consumers perceive high risk, they may become skeptical of a company's CSR efforts, questioning the authenticity or effectiveness of the initiatives.

Perceived risk and trust are closely intertwined in consumer perceptions (Stanaland et al., 2011). This relationship is particularly pronounced in contexts such as e-commerce (Ventre and Kolbe, 2020) and social commerce, where the presence of risk can heighten the relevance of trust (Ventre and Kolbe, 2020). Consequently, perceived risk significantly influences consumer trust, which is pivotal in shaping consumer purchase intentions (Hajli, 2014). Globally and specifically in Malaysia, numerous risks are associated with online purchases, with CSR-related issues often being a focal point where miscommunication can heighten perceived risks. Such miscommunications can detrimentally impact consumer trust and purchase intentions. From an online shopping perspective, perceived risks typically involve concerns about financial security, product quality, and data privacy (Kim et al., 2008). These factors collectively underscore the importance of managing perceived risks effectively in online environments, particularly in relation to CSR practices and communication strategies. Research indicates that consumers' perceptions of risk directly impact their trust levels and subsequent intentions to purchase online (Kim et al., 2008). Therefore, as perceived risks escalate, consumer trust is likely to diminish, thereby affecting purchase intentions. Accordingly, H5 is formulated:

H5. Perceived risk negatively moderates the relationship between CSR and consumer trust.

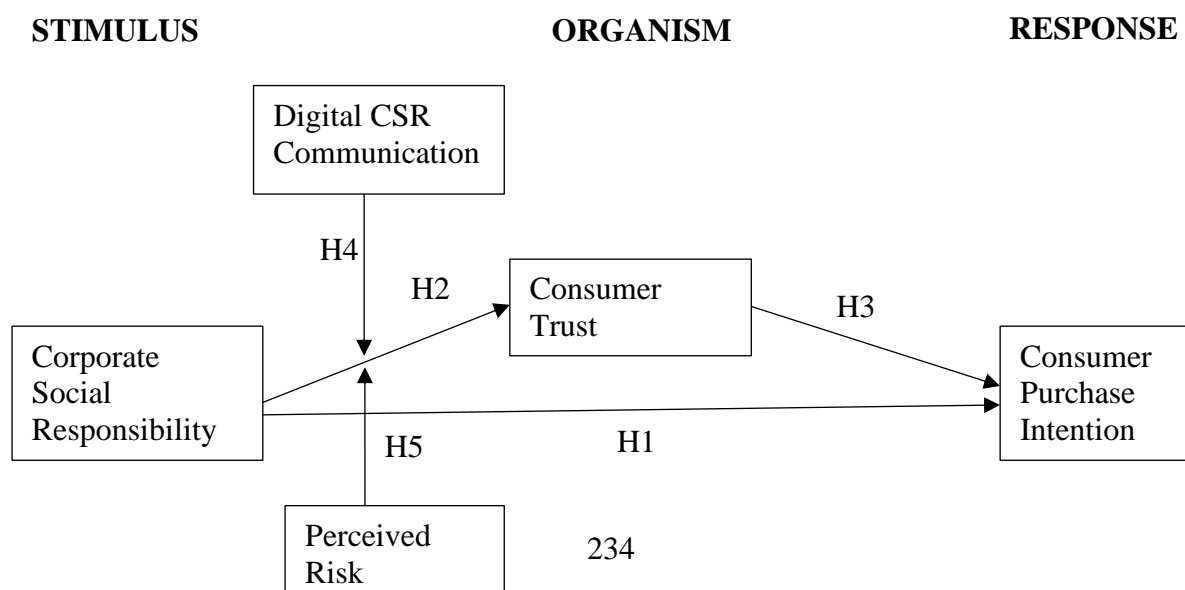


Figure 1: Proposed theoretical framework with SOR theory.

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

In line with the objectives of the study, the study targeted Malaysian adults aged 18 and above, who purchases fashion products online. The sample size proposed by G*Power was 92. However, the study sought to collect triple that amount, and 254 responses were obtained and valid for analysis. The research adopted convenience sampling and snowball sampling strategies to collect extensive information from members of the target population. The responses were collected from respondents who voluntarily completed the online questionnaires and from eligible participants reached with the assistance of the former respondents.

Instrument and Measurements

The study utilized questionnaires as the primary tool for data collection. Measurement scales for all study variables were sourced from previous research. Each questionnaire item was based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree. Respondents first provided demographic information, followed by eight items addressing corporate social responsibility (CSR), adapted from Zhang and Ahmad (2021). Digital CSR communication (DCSRC) was measured using a six-item scale from Al-Omoush et al. (2023). Perceived risk (PR) was assessed with a three-item scale from Kim et al. (2008) and Stanaland et al. (2011), while consumer trust (CT) was evaluated through a five-item scale also adapted from Zhang and Ahmad (2021). Consumer purchase intention (CPI) was measured using a four-item scale from Mulaessa and Wang (2017). All the items are included in appendix A. The questionnaire was formulated in English and created using Google Forms. Then, it was shared in various groups on different social media platforms via posts or private messages, containing a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) leading to the website hosting the questionnaire. The demographic profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1: Summary of Demographic Profile of Respondents

No	Items	Category	Frequency (n=254)	Valid (%)	Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	159	62.6	
		Female	95	37.4	
2.	Age	18 – 24 years	14	5.5	
		25 – 34 years	179	70.5	
		35 – 44 years	49	19.3	
		45 – 54 years	6	2.4	
		55 – 64 years	5	2.0	
		65-74 and above	1	0.4	
3.	Ethnicity	Chinese	67	26.4	
		Indian	136	53.5	
		Malay	39	15.4	

	Others	12	4.7
4. Educational Level	Secondary School	9	3.5
	Certificate/Diploma	51	20.1
	Bachelor's Degree	162	63.8
	Master's Degree	32	12.6
	PHD or higher	0	0.0
5. Residing Location	Central Malaysia (Selangor)	49	19.3
	East Coast (Kelantan, Pahang, Terengganu)	25	9.8
	East Malaysia (Sabah, Sarawak)	6	2.4
	Northern Malaysia (Kedah, Penang, Perak, Perlis)	159	62.6
	Southern Malaysia (Johor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan)	15	5.9
6. Annual Income	Less than RM25,000	33	13.0
	More than RM100,000	6	2.4
	RM25,000-RM50,000	84	33.1
	RM50,001-RM75,000	119	46.9
	RM75,001-RM100,000	12	4.7

Results and Findings

To analyse the data collected, we utilized the SmartPLS version 3.2.7. to carry out the structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). We first validated the measurement model, followed by the evaluation of the structural model. For measurement validation, we assessed factor loadings, reliability, and validity of the items used in the proposed model. The assessment included composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). Factor loadings greater than 0.708 and AVE values above 0.5 were considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2022), while CR value should be ≥ 0.70 to achieve satisfactory reliability (Hair et al., 2014). Table2 illustrates that all the studied constructs complied to accepted thresholds.

Table2: Measurement Model Evaluation

Constructs		Items	Outer Loadings	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR)	Social	CSR1	0.821	0.940	0.662
		CSR2	0.818		
		CSR3	0.836		
		CSR4	0.764		

		CSR5	0.831		
		CSR6	0.816		
		CSR7	0.827		
		CSR8	0.821		
Digital	CSR	DCSRC1	0.845	0.900	0.600
Communication (DCSRC)		DCSRC2	0.819		
		DCSRC3	0.787		
		DCSRC4	0.719		
		DCSRC5	0.728		
		DCSRC6	0.739		
Perceived Risk (PR)		PR1	0.683	0.820	0.606
		PR2	0.755		
		PR3	0.883		
Consumer Trust (CT)		CT1	0.829	0.902	0.647
		CT2	0.816		
		CT3	0.759		
		CT4	0.805		
		CT5	0.812		
Consumer	Purchase	CPI1	0.903	0.917	0.735
Intention (CPI)		CPI2	0.813		
		CPI3	0.849		
		CPI4	0.863		

Conversely, calculation of the HTMT involved reducing the mean correlation between items assessing distinct constructs by the geometric mean of the correlation between items assessing the same construct, as outlined by Henseler et al. (2015). The HTMT values observed in this study (Table 3) were found to be lower than the established cutoff value of 0.85, indicating a reasonable level of discriminant validity (Kline, 2011).

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Main Constructs	CPI	CSR	CT	DCSRC	PR
CPI					
CSR	0.63				
CT	0.809	0.604			
DCSRC	0.302	0.447	0.497		
PR	0.188	0.14	0.316	0.215	

Note: CPI = Consumer Purchase Intention, CSR= Corporate Social Responsibilities, CT= Consumer Trust, DCSRC = Digital CSR Communication, PR= Perceived Risk

The model's predictive capability in this research was assessed through the internal model's explanatory efficacy, measured by the R^2 (multiple determination coefficient). A higher R^2 value suggests that the measured variables strongly explained the latent variables. The values of

the coefficient of determination (R²) in the current study are 0.546 and 0.410, respectively. This revealed that consumer purchase Intention explained 54.6% of the variance in consumer trust and other variables, while the other variables explained 41% of the variance in consumer trust.

Additionally, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to assess collinearity. The VIF assesses whether a predictor demonstrates a strong linear link with other predictors, with concerns arising if the VIF exceeds 10 (Myers, 1990). In the current study, the VIF values for each construct ranged from 1.035 to 1.426, suggesting that multicollinearity is unlikely to be a problem in the dataset.

To evaluate the structural model, the researchers utilized bootstrapping with 5000 replications to investigate the assumptions put out in the study by Hair et al. (2022). This study confirmed positive relationships between CSR and consumer purchase intention (H1); consumer trust and consumer purchase intention (H3); and CSR and consumer trust (H2) as shown in Table 4. Hence, H1, H3, and H2 were well supported. As for the moderating effect of digital CSR communication, the results of the current study clearly demonstrated that digital CSR communication did not moderate the relationship between attitude and behavioral intention (H4). Similarly, the study found that perceived risk did not significantly influence the relationship between corporate social responsibility and consumer trust. Thus, both H4 and H5 were rejected.

Table 4: Summary of The Structural Model with Hypotheses Results

Hypotheses	Path	VIF	Beta	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	95% Confidence Interval	P Value	Decision
H1	CSR → CPI	1.426	0.262	0.261	0.08	3.283	[0.129, 0.392]	0.001	Accept
H2	CSR → CT	1.213	0.41	0.405	0.055	7.494	[0.322, 0.501]	0	Accept
H3	CT → CPI	1.426	0.565	0.565	0.075	7.537	[0.437, 0.684]	0	Accept
H4	DCSRC × CSR → CT	1.107	-0.07	-0.062	0.037	1.894	[-0.122, 0.01]	0.029	Reject
H5	PR × CSR → CT	1.035	-0.043	-0.034	0.055	0.786	[-0.121, 0.059]	0.216	Reject

Discussion

Anchored on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory, the study sought to explore the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on consumer trust and purchase intention. Since research on digital CSR communication and perceived risk are gaining traction, the study also incorporated digital CSR communication and perceived risk in the SOR model by testing their moderating impacts in the hypothesized relationships. Regarding the direct relationships examined, this research demonstrated that both CSR and consumer trust positively influence online purchase intention in Malaysia. Additionally, CSR has a positive impact on consumer trust.

The study found that corporate social responsibility (CSR) has a positive effect on consumer purchase intention, thereby supporting hypotheses (H1). This finding aligns with previous research (Zhang and Ahmad, 2021; Abdeen et al., 2016; Mulaessa and Wang, 2017) and indicates that consumers are most likely to purchase products from organizations which participate in CSR responsibly. The previous studies demonstrated that organization gain a high level of trust from consumers when they engage in CSR activities, which in turn enhances consumers' decision-making regarding purchasing and brand loyalty (Tian et al., 2011; Zhang and Ahmad, 2021; Carroll and Shabana, 2010; Borges et al., 2018). Furthermore, the results confirm that CSR positively influences consumer trust, supporting H2. Our findings indicate that businesses which are ethically and socially responsible are more reliable and tend to obtain more trusts from consumers. Additionally, the research also reveals that consumer trust significantly impacts purchase intention, supporting H3, which is consistent with prior findings (Ventre and Kolbe, 2020; Gibreel et al., 2018; Gefen et al., 2003, (Gefen et al., 2003; Salam et al., 2005; Hong and Cha, 2013). This result explains that a strong trust in a brand enables consumers to have an intention to purchase (Shankar et al., 2002).

In terms of the moderating role of digital CSR communication, the study found its moderating impact was not evident on the relationship between CSR and consumer trust, rejecting hypotheses (H4). This finding is inconsistent with the past studies (Ali et al., 2015; Khattak and Yousaf, 2022). The lack of effect may be because the quality of fashion retailers' digital CSR communication is low, which appears insincere or is perceived as a marketing trick. There have been some studies showing that CSR communication may diminish the organizations sincerity (Sen et al., 2006; Van De Ven, 2008; Wagner et al., 2009; Crane and Glozer, 2016). A significant advancement in this field is the increasing focus of marketing researchers on conducting more advanced analysis of potential outcomes to understand the varied impacts of CSR communication (Crane and Glozer, 2016). In a similar vein, the moderating impact of perceived risk on the relationship between corporate social responsibility and consumer trust (H5) also shown to be rejected in this research, which contradicted the results of previous research perceived risk negatively impacts the relationship between trust and CSR (Kim et al., 2008; Ventre and Kolbe, 2020). This might be due to increased consumers' positive experiences with CSR initiatives, which have reduced perceived risk significantly. Consequently, the moderating role of it on the relationship between CSR and consumer trust was weakened.

Implications

The study has made significant theoretical contributions in several ways. Firstly, this research is one of the few studies that attempt to explore the consumers' purchase intention via SOR theory, with consumer trust as an organism component. Consequently, the findings of the current study notably contribute to the emerging literature on corporate social responsibility by exploring digital CSR communication and perceived risk on consumer trust and their subsequent effects on the purchase intention. Secondly, our study also confirms that there have been inconsistencies between the findings of the present studies and past studies pertaining to the moderating roles of digital CSR communication (Ali et al., 2015; Khattak and Yousaf, 2022) and perceived risk (Kim et al., 2008; Ventre and Kolbe, 2020) on the relationship between corporate social responsibility and consumer trust. Our findings highlight that digital CSR communication and perceived risk may not always impact the relationship between corporate social responsibility and consumer trust.

Thirdly, this study has studied consumers' purchase intention in Malaysia, a developing country which going through a digitalization transition and where corporate social responsibility is becoming a focal point recently. Hence, the findings of the current research deepen the knowledge of consumer purchase intention with CSR context from a developing country viewpoint.

The practical implications of this study on consumer trust and purchase intention are significant for various stakeholders. Firstly, the study aims to assist online retailers and organizations in Malaysia and other Asian countries in leveraging digital platforms to promote their CSR initiatives and achievements. This study allows online retailers and organizations to understand the importance of CSR engagement and how it influences consumers to purchase their product or services. Understanding this, online retailers and organizations can better influence consumers' decisions to purchase their services or products. Furthermore, this study offers valuable insights to the operators regarding the digital CSR communication and perceived risk that may influence consumer trust and purchase intention. Knowing this, business operators are able to recognize the crucial roles of digital CSR communication and perceived risk in building consumer trust. Additionally, the findings of this research provide a deeper understanding of why CSR is important and how it can be effectively used in advertising and marketing. This knowledge is valuable for government authorities and policymakers who may consider introducing or enhancing regulations to encourage businesses to participate in CSR initiatives and communicate them digitally to consumers. Lastly, the research offers competitive guidance to foreign companies, especially those looking to expand their e-commerce businesses in developing countries such as Malaysia.

The results of this research demonstrate that corporate social responsibility helps retailers and organizations build consumer trust, which in turn would influence consumers to consider purchasing their products. This provides suggestions to fashion retailers and organizations intensifying their CSR initiatives via innovative and genuine approaches, which could resonate with consumers' values. Those initiatives may involve establishing local production hubs to reduce carbon footprints and support local economies, and adopting eco-friendly innovations such as biodegradable clothing and waterless dyeing technologies. Improving supply chain transparency through blockchain technology, and involving consumers in CSR decision-making processes further build trust. These comprehensive and transparent CSR efforts demonstrate a long-term commitment to sustainability and ethical practices, thereby fostering a credible and trustworthy relationship with consumers. As a result, these initiatives not only build consumer trust but also positively influence purchase intentions by aligning with consumers' growing preference for socially responsible and environmentally conscious brands.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite offering valuable insights, this research has certain limitations that need to be recognized. Firstly, the generalizability of the results may be constrained and limited as this research focuses only on consumers of online fashion retailers, and the data were solely collected in Malaysia. Therefore, it would be advantageous for future research to consider other retailers that heavily depend on online retailing or e-commerce (e.g., grocery retailers) and to probe into diverse cultures and countries, specifically Asian markets. Secondly, according to the online survey results, most of the respondents are between the ages of 25 to 34 and predominantly Indian, which suggests a bias toward younger generations and a single ethnic group. Therefore, future research is encouraged to broaden age range and population (including the various ethnic groups in Malaysia

who represent multicultural) for the more representative findings. Thirdly, CSR initiatives may be perceived differently by various customers. Evaluating the impact of CSR may be subjective and shaped by personal experiences, which complicates the process of generalizing results of this study across various groups. Future researchers should select the participants who are specifically experienced in CSR initiatives or familiar with CSR initiatives to provide more objective responses. Fourthly, this research targets final-year public university students in Malaysia, which could not fully represent the broader population of online consumers. The future researcher could broaden the target population who purchase online to get more representative findings. Fifthly, this study focused on cross-sectional empirical data to examine consumers' purchase intention, as it was an ideal methodology when the research was conducted. To attain more comprehensive data, future research is recommended to collect longitudinal empirical data to examining the relationships between variables over different periods of market performance. Lastly, SOR theory has been understudied in the context of CSR and consumer purchase intention. Therefore, future research could explore more in this context to add to the literature.

Conclusion

Online fashion products retailing is a popular and fast-growing industry in Malaysia. This study provides valuable insights into the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR), consumer trust, and purchase intention in the digital age, particularly within the Malaysian online fashion retail context. The findings reinforce the positive impact of CSR on both consumer trust and purchase intention, while highlighting the limited moderating effects of digital CSR communication and perceived risk. These results offer practical implications for retailers and policymakers, emphasizing the importance of genuine CSR initiatives that resonate with consumer values and align with transparent communication strategies.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire items

Variable	Items
Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR)	<p>CSR1: The company tries to sponsor pro-environmental programs.</p> <p>CSR2: The company tries to protect the environment.</p> <p>CSR3: The company tries to carry out programs to reduce pollution by controlling emissions.</p> <p>CSR4: The company has established ethical guidelines for business activities.</p> <p>CSR5: The company tries to become an ethically trustworthy company.</p> <p>CSR6: The company provides a wide range of indirect benefits to improve the quality of their employees' lives.</p> <p>CSR7: The company emphasizes the importance of their social responsibilities to society.</p> <p>CSR8: The company contributes to campaigns and projects that promote the well-being of society.</p>

Digital CSR Communication (DCSRC)	DCSRC1: Digital communication improves knowledge and awareness of society's needs and expectations. DCSRC2: Digitally communicating its social responsibility to meet society's expectations. DCSRC3: Digital communication enhances relationships and interactions with stakeholders. DCSRC4: Digitally communicating the contribution to online charitable fundraising. DCSRC5: Digitally communicating the launch of charitable societal activities. DCSRC6: Digitally communicating to provide society with the information and knowledge necessary to encounter crisis.
Perceived Risk (PR)	PR1: Purchasing from the Website would involve more product risk (i.e., not working, defective product) when compared with more traditional ways of shopping. PR2: Purchasing from the Website would involve more financial risk (i.e., fraud, hard to return) when compared with more traditional ways of shopping. PR3: I am very sure that products purchased online from the company are able to perform satisfactorily.
Consumer Trust (CT)	CT1: The services of the company make me feel a sense of security. CT2: I trust the quality of the company. CT3: Hiring services of this company guarantees quality assurance. CT4: This company is interested in its customers. CT5: This company is honest with its customers
Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI)	CPI1: I shall continue to buy products from this company in the next few years. CPI2: I would keep being a customer of this company even if another entity offered better rates. CPI3: I would recommend this company if someone asked my advice. CPI4: I would buy upcoming new products of this company.
