



“Leveraging Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to drive Customer Loyalty and Strengthen Brand Positioning”

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Abstract:

This research explores into the Automobile Industries in Karnataka, India, to find out how CSR projects have affected consumer loyalty and brand perception. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were collected from 164 respondents through structured questionnaires. The findings reveal that CSR initiatives significantly enhance customer loyalty by fostering trust and positive perceptions toward automobile brands. Additionally, effective CSR communication is shown to assume a basic part in forming customer mentalities and impacting buying choices. The results indicate that customers are more inclined to support brands engaged in socially responsible practices, which in turn strengthens brand positioning in a competitive market. Insights for car businesses seeking to strengthen their market position are offered by this research, which adds to our knowledge of how CSR methods may be used to increase consumer loyalty.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Customer Loyalty, Brand Positioning, Automobile Industry, Karnataka.

I. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from a philanthropic concept to a strategic business approach, especially in industries like automobile manufacturing. It entails companies meeting the expectations of their stakeholders by accepting responsibility for their economic, social, and environmental repercussions. CSR activities are now seen as vital for fostering goodwill, enhancing corporate reputation, and driving long-term success.

In today's competitive market, CSR has become a key driver in building customer trust and loyalty.

In the automobile industry, CSR plays an essential role due to the sector's significant environmental footprint and its responsibility to ensure ethical production practices. As consumers become more environmentally conscious and socially aware, automobile companies have the opportunity to improve their brand image through strategic CSR initiatives. Companies that adopt CSR not only comply with regulations but also gain a competitive edge by demonstrating their commitment to sustainability and community welfare.

Karnataka, one of India's leading automobile hubs, houses major players such as Toyota, Bosch, and Volvo. These companies have embraced CSR initiatives ranging from environmental sustainability to social welfare programs. By engaging in CSR, these companies strengthen their relationship with the local community, create a positive brand image, and build customer loyalty, contributing to long-term success in a competitive marketplace.

This paper explores how CSR activities within selected automobile companies in Karnataka have been leveraged to enhance brand positioning and cultivate customer loyalty. The study focuses on understanding the specific CSR strategies adopted by these companies and their influence on consumer behaviour and brand perception.

II. Review of Literature and Gap of the Study

Beyond its original philanthropic intent, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has turned



into a necessary part of current organization technique. Both the corporation and society benefit from CSR, as pointed out by **Kotler and Lee (2005)**, which helps businesses establish a good reputation and encourages consumer loyalty. **Carroll (1999)** provides a thorough framework for comprehending CSR by breaking it down into four aspects: economic, legal, ethical, and charitable duties. According to Carroll, companies should attend to the demands of various stakeholders. This model is particularly useful for industries like automobiles, where companies are expected to contribute beyond their core products, addressing environmental and social concerns.

According to **Sen and Bhattacharya (2001)**, people are inclined to back businesses whose CSR efforts are in line with their own beliefs, for example, sustainability programs in the car sector. This highlights the substantial impact of CSR on customer behaviour. **Luo and Bhattacharya (2006)** further assert that CSR initiatives can enhance customer satisfaction, which in turn drives market value. However, CSR must be effectively communicated, as **Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010)** stress the importance of transparency and consistency in CSR communication. Companies that clearly articulate their social efforts, like reducing carbon emissions in the auto sector, can bridge the gap between their initiatives and consumer perceptions.

An organization's credibility may be greatly influenced by its CSR initiatives. Financial success and increased consumer loyalty are common outcomes for businesses with stellar CSR reputations, according to research by **Fombrun and Shanley (1990)**, **Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz (2006)** demonstrate that CSR can even help companies with damaged reputations improve public perceptions, as long as the initiatives are perceived as genuine. This is particularly relevant in industries like automobiles, where companies face scrutiny over environmental concerns.

Additionally, there is solid evidence between CSR with financial success. According to **McWilliams and Siegel (2001)**, CSR may help businesses differentiate their products and stand out in crowded marketplaces. More specifically, **Saeidi et al. (2015)** demonstrates that CSR boosts a company's reputation and customer happiness, which in turn increases the firm's competitive advantage and financial success. Especially in sectors like the automotive industry that are subject to public and regulatory scrutiny, CSR seems to be more than simply a moral imperative; it is also a

strategic asset that may propel company success, according to this research.

Research Gap

Even though there is a lot of literature on CSR and how it affects consumer loyalty and brand positioning, there are still a lot of unanswered inquiries, particularly with regards to certain sectors like the car industry. There is a dearth of data on the specific ways in which CSR programs affect regional markets' consumer loyalty and brand positioning—for example, the car industry in Karnataka, India—although several research have looked at the correlation between CSR and consumer behaviour in general. Additionally, most research focuses on global automotive giants, leaving a gap in understanding the role of CSR in smaller or regionally focused automobile manufacturers. Furthermore, while much attention has been given to environmental sustainability, there is insufficient exploration of how other dimensions of CSR, such as community engagement or employee relations, contribute to customer loyalty and brand differentiation in the automobile industry. Lastly, the effectiveness of CSR communication strategies in influencing customer perceptions and driving loyalty within specific cultural and regional contexts remains underexplored, representing a key area for future research.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate how corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs in Karnataka's automotive sector affect consumer loyalty
 2. To evaluate the role of CSR in enhancing brand positioning among selected automobile companies in Karnataka
 3. To investigate the effectiveness of CSR communication in influencing consumer perception and driving business performance
- These objectives will guide the study in identifying the strategic benefits of CSR for automobile companies in Karnataka, specifically in relation to customer loyalty and brand positioning.

Hypotheses of the Study

- H1: "CSR initiatives do not have a positive impact on customer loyalty in the automobile industry in Karnataka"
- H2: "CSR plays a significant role in enhancing brand positioning among selected automobile companies in Karnataka"
- H3: "Effective CSR communication positively influences consumer perception of automobile companies in Karnataka"



III. Research Methodology

The research methodology for the study on "Leveraging Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to Drive Customer Loyalty and Strengthen Brand Positioning – A Special Reference to Selected Automobile Industries in Karnataka" adopted a descriptive and causal research design to describe CSR practices and examine the cause-effect relationships between CSR initiatives, customer loyalty, and brand positioning within the automobile industry. A blended strategies approach will be utilized, using quantitative overviews to gauge the effect of CSR on customer loyalty and brand positioning, alongside qualitative interviews to explore in-depth insights from CSR and marketing managers.

The target population consisted of customers of automobile industries in Karnataka, with a sample size of 164 customers of 5 automobile companies (Toyota, Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra) selected through purposive or convenience sampling methods. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to customers. The survey was incorporated Likert scale questions to gauge customer perceptions of CSR initiatives and brand loyalty.

Data analysis involved reliability statistics, descriptive statistics and one sample t test using statistical software such as SPSS for quantitative data. In order to ensure content validity, we consulted experts and reviewed relevant literature, and we used Cronbach's alpha to measure the survey instrument's reliability. Strict adherence to ethical

principles, such as confidentiality and informed consent, was maintained throughout the investigation. The purpose of this technique was to provide a framework for studying how corporate social responsibility (CSR) affected brand positioning and customer loyalty in the Karnataka automotive industry.

IV. Data Analysis and Results

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of Variables used in the Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.847	16

Source: Primary Data

The Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.847 indicates a high level of internal consistency for the questionnaire, suggesting that the 16 items used to measure CSR, customer loyalty, and brand positioning are reliable and provide consistent results across respondents.

In general:

- Acceptable results are those with a Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.7.
- Values between 0.8 and 0.9 (as in this case) are considered good, implying that the items in the questionnaire are measuring the intended constructs reliably.

Thus, the questionnaire designed for this study is well-constructed and dependable for measuring the variables related to CSR and its impact on customer loyalty and brand positioning.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Customers of Automobile industries

Category	Options	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	25-34	44	26.8%	26.8%
	35-44	76	46.3%	73.2%
	45-54	44	26.8%	100.0%
	Total	164	100%	
Gender	Male	128	78.0%	78.0%
	Female	36	22.0%	100.0%
	Total	164	100%	
Occupation	Employed (Private Sector)	40	24.4%	24.4%
	Employed (Public Sector)	76	46.3%	70.7%
	Self-employed/Entrepreneur	44	26.8%	97.6%
	Retired	4	2.4%	100.0%
	Total	164	100%	
Annual Income	5-10 Lakhs	68	41.5%	41.5%
	Above 10 Lakhs	96	58.5%	100.0%
	Total	164	100%	
Purchase Frequency	Every 4-5 years	12	7.3%	7.3%



Rarely	152	92.7%	100.0%
Total	164	100%	

Source: Primary Data

1. **Age Distribution:** The respondents are almost equally distributed across two key age groups—26.8% fall within the 25-34 and 45-54 ranges, while 46.3% are in the 35-44 bracket. This suggests that middle-aged individuals (35-44) are the dominant demographic in this study, which can have implications for understanding purchasing behaviour and attitudes toward CSR in the automotive sector.

2. **Gender:** While 22% of respondents identify as female, men make up the vast majority of respondents (78%). This reflects a male dominance in car purchasing decisions, which could influence the types of CSR initiatives that resonate with this group.

3. **Occupation:** Most respondents (46.3%) are employed in the public sector, followed by self-employed/entrepreneurs (26.8%) and those employed in the private sector (24.4%). Only 2.4% are retired. This occupational mix may suggest a preference for stability in employment sectors, possibly impacting brand loyalty and expectations from automobile companies.

4. **Annual Income:** The majority of respondents (58.5%) earn above 10 lakhs annually, while 41.5% fall in the 5-10 lakh bracket. Higher income groups may have more purchasing power, making them more likely to be influenced by CSR initiatives, particularly those aligned with premium or environmentally sustainable products.

5. **Purchase Frequency:** A vast majority of respondents (92.7%) rarely purchase automobiles, with only 7.3% buying vehicles every 4-5 years. This indicates that the respondents might place a strong emphasis on long-term value, brand trust, and possibly CSR-related aspects when making infrequent but significant purchasing decisions.

This demographic profile suggests that CSR strategies for the automobile industry should be tailored to appeal to a middle-aged, male-dominated, and higher-income audience. Public sector employees and self-employed individuals form a significant portion of the respondents, making workplace stability and economic security important factors to consider in CSR communication. Finally, as most customers rarely purchase vehicles, brand positioning and trust are probably going to assume a basic part in consumer decision-making.

Testing of Hypotheses

Testing of 1st Hypothesis

Following null and alternative hypotheses are outlined in relation to 1st objective of the study.

H₀= “CSR initiatives do not have a positive impact on customer loyalty in the automobile industry in Karnataka”

H₁= “CSR initiatives have a positive impact on customer loyalty in the automobile industry in Karnataka”

Table 3: One-Sample T-Test Results of Impact of CSR Initiatives on Customer Loyalty

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
Environmentally sustainable practices	164	3.9024	0.69370	72.042	163	0.000	3.7955 to 4.0094
CSR positively impact on society	164	4.1220	0.59425	88.829	163	0.000	4.0303 to 4.2136
More likely to purchase vehicle for its CSR Activities	164	3.2927	0.77520	54.395	163	0.000	3.1732 to 3.4122
CSR enhances trust on the company	164	3.7073	0.55358	85.763	163	0.000	3.6220 to 3.7927
CSR initiatives make automobile brand more appealing	164	3.6829	0.64357	73.285	163	0.000	3.5837 to 3.7822
CSR programme enhances the reputation of automobile brand	164	3.8780	0.50495	98.353	163	0.000	3.8002 to 3.9559



Automobile brands that engage in CSR with high quality products	164	4.1707	0.37743	141.515	163	0.000	4.1125 to 4.2289
CSR influence perception of a brand's commitment to customer satisfaction	164	4.2195	0.41518	130.150	163	0.000	4.1555 to 4.2835

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 displays the results of a one-sample t-test that supports the alternative hypothesis (H1), which states that "CSR initiatives have a positive impact on customer loyalty." This hypothesis states that CSR initiatives in the Karnataka car sector have a substantial positive effect on customer loyalty. Each variable analysed yielded significant results, with mean scores ranging from **3.2927** to **4.1220**, reflecting respondents' agreement on the importance of CSR. Notably, the variable "CSR positively impacts society" received the highest mean score of **4.1220**, indicating strong consumer sentiment that societal benefits enhance loyalty. Other variables, such as "CSR enhances trust in the company" (**3.7073**) and "CSR makes automobile brands more appealing" (**3.6829**), also demonstrated significant t-values, reinforcing the notion that CSR initiatives are crucial in building trust and brand

appeal. Furthermore, the positive correlation between CSR efforts and perceived product quality (**4.1707**) emphasizes how CSR initiatives contribute to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Overall, these results highlight the basic job of CSR in improving customer loyalty and positioning brands favourably in the competitive automobile market of Karnataka.

Testing of 2nd Hypothesis

Following null and alternative hypotheses are drawn in relation to 2nd objective of the study.

H₀= "CSR do not play a significant role in enhancing brand positioning among selected automobile companies in Karnataka"

H₁= "CSR plays a significant role in enhancing brand positioning among selected automobile companies in Karnataka"

Table 4: One-Sample T-Test Results of Impact of CSR Initiatives on Brand Positioning

Variables	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
CSR initiatives make an automobile brand more appealing	41.050	163	0.000	3.48780	3.3200 to 3.6556
CSR initiatives enhance the reputation of an automobile brand	97.094	163	0.000	4.36585	4.2771 to 4.4546
CSR engage with higher quality products	154.795	163	0.000	4.80488	4.7436 to 4.8662
CSR influences customer perception of a brand's commitment to customer satisfaction	76.342	163	0.000	3.95122	3.8490 to 4.0534

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 displays the findings of a one-sample t-test that assesses the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts on brand positioning for a subset of Karnataka-based automotive businesses. The test compares the null hypothesis (H0) that CSR has no effect on brand positioning with the alternative hypothesis (H1) that it does. The findings indicate a strong positive perception of CSR initiatives among respondents, suggesting their significant role in shaping brand

positioning. Firstly, the statement that CSR initiatives make an automobile brand more appealing received a mean score of **3.48780**, with a t-value of **41.050** and a significance level of **0.000**, indicating strong support for the hypothesis that CSR contributes to brand appeal. Moreover, the mean score of **4.36585** for the claim that CSR initiatives enhance the reputation of an automobile brand, supported by a t-value of **97.094** ($p < 0.001$), reinforces the assertion that CSR efforts are crucial



for improving brand reputation. Additionally, the results show that CSR initiatives are perceived to correlate with higher quality products, with a remarkable mean of **4.80488** and a t-value of **154.795** ($p < 0.001$). This finding strongly affirms that consumers associate CSR engagement with product quality, which is vital for brand positioning. Lastly, the mean score of **3.95122** indicating that CSR influences customer perception of a brand's commitment to customer satisfaction, coupled with a t-value of **76.342** ($p < 0.001$), further supports the idea that CSR initiatives significantly impact consumer trust and brand loyalty. Overall, these results provide robust evidence in favor of the

alternative hypothesis (H1), demonstrating that *CSR initiatives play a significant role in enhancing brand positioning among selected automobile companies in Karnataka.*

Testing of 3rd Hypothesis

Following null and alternative hypotheses are drawn in relation to 3rd objective of the study.

H₀= "Effective CSR communication does not positively influence consumer perception of automobile companies in Karnataka."

H₁= "Effective CSR communication positively influences consumer perception of automobile companies in Karnataka."

Table 5: One-Sample T-Test Results of Impact of CSR initiatives on CSR Communication

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
CSR initiatives undertaken by my preferred automobile brands	164	4.2195	0.78364	68.955	163	.000	4.0987 to 4.3403
CSR efforts by automobile companies influences my purchasing decisions.	164	3.9512	0.85662	59.070	163	.000	3.8191 to 4.0833
CSR communication from automobile companies to be clear and informative	164	3.9756	0.41374	123.055	163	.000	3.9118 to 4.0394
Effective communication increases my trust in the brand	164	3.9512	0.44037	114.904	163	.000	3.8833 to 4.0191

Source: Primary Data

The results of the one-sample t-test can be seen in Table 5. They evaluate how CSR initiatives have affected CSR communication in the Karnataka automobile sector, with the null hypothesis (H0) being that there is no positive influence of CSR communication on consumer perception and the alternative hypothesis (H1) being that there is. The findings reveal an elevated degree of understanding among respondents regarding the effectiveness of CSR initiatives by their preferred automobile brands. The mean score for the perception of CSR initiatives is **4.2195**, with a significant t-value of **68.955** ($p < 0.001$), indicating that respondents perceive these initiatives positively. Additionally, a mean of **3.9512** for the influence of CSR efforts on purchasing decisions, accompanied by a t-value of **59.070** ($p < 0.001$), underscores that CSR initiatives play a significant role in shaping consumer choices.

Moreover, respondents indicated that CSR communication from automobile companies is clear and informative, reflected in a mean score of **3.9756**

and a robust t-value of **123.055** ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that effective communication significantly enhances consumer understanding of CSR efforts. The final result shows that CSR communication has an impact on brand trust, with an average score of 3.9512 and a t-value of 114.904 ($p < 0.001$), implies that clear and effective CSR messaging fosters greater trust in brands. Overall, the data strongly supports the alternative hypothesis (H1), demonstrating that *effective CSR communication positively influences consumer perception of automobile companies in Karnataka.*

V. Findings of the Study

In accordance with the findings of your research "Using Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to Advance Brand Positioning and Customer Loyalty," – A Special Reference to Selected Automobile Industries in Karnataka," the findings can be summarized as follows:



i. Positive Impact of CSR on Customer

Loyalty: The study confirms that CSR initiatives significantly enhance customer loyalty in the automobile industry. Respondents strongly agreed that CSR activities positively influence their purchasing decisions and perceptions of brands.

ii. Influence of CSR Initiatives on Brand

Positioning: Researchers have shown that corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs significantly boost the brand positioning of car businesses. Respondents indicated that brands engaging in CSR are perceived as more appealing and trustworthy, thereby strengthening their overall market position.

iii. Importance of CSR Communication:

Customers have a more favorable impression of CSR activities when they are informed about them. The clarity and informativeness of CSR communication enhance customer trust and influence purchasing decisions.

iv. Consumer Awareness and Perception:

Consumers are increasingly aware of CSR initiatives undertaken by automobile brands, which significantly affects their perception of the brand's commitment to customer satisfaction. This awareness contributes to a stronger emotional connection with the brand.

v. CSR as a Competitive Advantage:

Automobile brands that actively engage in high-quality CSR practices are viewed more favourably compared to those that do not. This engagement acts as a competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace.

vi. Significance of Environmental

Sustainability: Initiatives focused on environmentally sustainable practices are particularly well-received, with respondents expressing strong support for brands that prioritize sustainability in their CSR efforts.

vii. Overall Satisfaction with CSR

Initiatives: The overall mean scores from the survey indicate that respondents are largely satisfied with the CSR initiatives of their preferred automobile brands, further reinforcing the idea that CSR is essential for brand loyalty and customer retention.

These discoveries feature the basic job of CSR in forming customer perceptions and loyalty, indicating that automobile companies in Karnataka can leverage CSR initiatives not only for ethical reasons yet in addition as an essential device for enhancing brand value and competitiveness.

VI. Conclusion

The study on "Leveraging Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to Drive Customer Loyalty

and Strengthen Brand Positioning in Selected Automobile Industries in Karnataka" highlights the significant role that CSR plays in enhancing customer loyalty and brand positioning within the automobile sector. The findings reveal that consumers increasingly value ethical considerations, with a clear preference for brands engaged in socially responsible practices. Effective communication of CSR initiatives is crucial, as it positively influences consumer perception and trust, linking CSR efforts to a brand's commitment to quality and customer satisfaction. Notably, CSR initiatives focused on environmental sustainability significantly shape consumer preferences, underscoring the necessity for companies to integrate sustainable practices into their corporate strategies. Ultimately, the study suggests that automobile companies in Karnataka can leverage CSR not only as a moral obligation but also as a strategic differentiator, fostering stronger customer relationships, enhancing brand loyalty, and driving long-term business success. The findings from this study will be of considerable use to researchers in the fields of consumer behaviour, brand management, and CSR.

Limitations of the Study

- i. The study is confined to Karnataka, limiting the generalizability of findings to other regions or countries.
- ii. The sample size may not adequately represent the diverse perspectives of all stakeholders, and non-response could introduce bias in the results.
- iii. Customer perceptions of CSR initiatives are subjective and may vary significantly, impacting the reliability of the collected data.
- iv. The study may not encompass all CSR initiatives undertaken by automobile companies, leading to an incomplete understanding of their impact.
- v. Rapid changes in the automobile industry and CSR practices could affect the relevance and applicability of the findings over time.

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