

# Unpacking the Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on Consumer Purchase Intentions: Policy Implications for Organizations

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<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.1.96>

## Abstract

*Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) persuades organizations towards upward mobility in society, and presently, organizations' involvement in societal issues is a promise for successful, profitable business. Recently, CSR has grabbed the attention of academic scholars and practitioners. Thus, this study hypothesizes an organization can enthrall consumer purchase intention by upholding CSR activities. The current study also determines the relationship between legal responsibility (LR), economic responsibility (ECOR), ethical responsibility (ER), philanthropic responsibility (PR) and consumer purchase intention (CPI). Furthermore, it determines the mediating role of CSR awareness in the relationship between CSR and CPI. Four hundred (400) data were collected from consumers of Pakistan's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), and the findings were evaluated through SPSS 22.0. The findings of this deductive and quantitative study exhibit that CSR, LR, ECOR, ER, and PR significantly influence CPI. The results also support the mediating role of CSR awareness in the relationship between CSR and CPI. The results have valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers.*

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Consumer Intentions, Organizational Behavior.

## Introduction

Consumers' reactions to a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities also determine its performance. Prior researchers have concluded that consumers care about CSR activities that benefit a business (Rodriguez-Rad & Ramos-Hidalgo, 2018). CSR plays a critical role in influencing consumer purchase decisions, and these activities reduce uncertainty related to purchase decisions (Uslu & Sengun, 2021). It is an effort from organizations to take necessary actions to resolve social and environmental problems and fulfil their commitments towards society (Naqvi et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2022). CSR's core function is ensuring organizations work for social improvement (Wirba, 2023). It has gained considerable attention in recent years (Dubey, 2024; Emmanuel & Priscilla, 2022), and now business contribution to society is considered an important element of a successful business (Raman et al., 2012; Emmanuel & Priscilla, 2022).

It is a global phenomenon due to which businesses are facing new requirements of responsibility and transparency globally (Khojastehpour & Jamali, 2021), but in developing countries, research

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is in the early stages, and CSR programs are still in the formative stage (Kim et al., 2022; Zara et al., 2022). In developing countries, there is a lack of knowledge about the practices of CSR in organizations (Khojastehpour & Jamali, 2021; Zou et al., 2021). Organizations adapt these initiatives to expand their business globally and explore new opportunities (Khojastehpour & Jamali, 2021; Tarnovskaya et al., 2022). CSR in Pakistan is a relatively new concept, and most people are not aware of this (Uddin, 2024). Many large food processing companies in developing countries suffered severe losses due to their negligence towards social and environmental issues (Mohezar et al., 2023). Pakistan is an emerging and developing economy with ever-changing trends and market conditions (Khan & Majeed, 2023). Pakistan's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector is the fastest-growing sector in South Asia (Dantas et al., 2023).

Some companies follow standards, laws and codes of conduct and issue public reports for interested parties (Bauer et al., 2023). Although there is evidence of the increased Asian consumers' interest in socially responsible companies, relatively, there is little CSR and consumer research. So, there is a need to bridge this identified research gap. Thus, the current study examines the relationship between CSR, legal, economic, ethical and philanthropic responsibility and consumer purchase intention (CPI). Additionally, it determines the mediating influence of CSR awareness in the relationship between CSR and CPI in the FMCG sector of Pakistan. The research findings provide helpful insights for organizations to enhance CPI through CSR activities. The research is significant in helping policymakers, management, and organizations develop strategies to resolve community and ecological problems and accomplish their obligations towards society.

## Literature Review and Hypothesis Formulation

The present study is based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which deals with how a person exhibits a specific behavior. Ajzen and Fishbain (1991) developed the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and later developed TPB, which is an extension of TRA.

TPB states that the intention results from three components: attitude toward behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Li et al., 2023; Ajzen, 1991). Attitude toward behaviour refers to the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable appraisal of the behaviour. Subjective norm refers to the assumed social pressure to perform or not to perform a specific behavior. Perceived behavioral control in the TPB model depicts an individual perception of ease and difficulty in performing a specific behavior (Xi et al., 2023; Huong, 2012; Ajzen, 1991). Lodorfos and Dennis (2008) also concluded that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control influence the purchase of organic products. Kim and Chung (2011) used the TPB model to conclude that environmental and appearance consciousness affects consumer's attitudes toward buying organic personal care products.

Hence, TPB provides the theoretical base to predict the relationship between CSR and CPI and examine CSR awareness as an explanatory mechanism. The current study also explores the relationship between economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility and CPI.

## Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Purchase Intention

Carroll (1979), Marakova et al. (2021), and Mohr et al. (2001) define CSR as a tool to differentiate from competitors and minimize the harmful impact of conducting business in society. CSR establishes an environment of earning profit to develop society (Razaq et al., 2013; Zara et al., 2022). According to Carroll (1979), these activities are known as the Carroll Pyramid of CSR. It is a valuable means, and stakeholders are a source of reputation for firms (Khuong et al., 2021; Branco & Rodrigues, 2006). Pomeroy and Dolnicar (2009) state that companies engaged in CSR

always result in positive outcomes. Hence, CSR practices in developing countries try to improve the social, ethical, and environmental conditions formally or informally (Visser et al., 2010). Maignan and Ferrell (2004) and Carroll (1991) reported a positive relationship between CSR and customer loyalty. According to Carroll (1991), a socially responsible firm should endeavor to make reasonable profits (economic aspect), abide by laws (legal aspect), behave ethically (ethical aspect) and be a good corporate citizen (philanthropic aspect). Earlier literature evidence that CSR affects the CPI (Sen et al., 2001). Organizations that want to improve customer satisfaction and financial performance should include CSR activities in their business (Emmanuel & Priscilla, 2022). Lee & Shin (2010) concluded that CSR activities related to social and community concerns greatly influence consumers' purchase intentions compared to environmental concerns. Bright et al. (2005) asserted that an organization's involvement in social or environmental activities positively affects their choices. Smith (1996) concluded that an organization's participation in CSR programs increases consumer willingness to purchase. So from the above literature, it can be inferred that:

**H1:** There is a positive and significant relationship between CSR and CPI.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility, Consumer Purchase Intention and CSR Awareness**

Literature shows a relationship between CSR activities and consumer purchase decisions (Gupta et al., 2021; Sen et al., 2006). Sufficient information about CSR initiatives taken by an organization can also be a reason for frequent consumer purchases (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). However, the result of many past studies concluded that consumers have little awareness of CSR action by companies (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Sen et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2022; Zara et al., 2022; Khojastehpour & Jamali 2021; Zou et al., 2021).

According to a prior study by Pomeroy & Dolnicar (2009), CSR initiatives taken by an organization only affect consumers' purchasing behavior if the consumers know about CSR. However, past studies concluded that consumers are unaware of CSR activities (Sen et al., 2006; Bhattacharya et al., 2020; Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000). Charitable donations should be promoted to enhance the organization's position in the market (Daugherty, 2001). Consumers' familiarity with CSR initiatives affects the consumer's purchase intentions (David et al., 2005). When customers understand CSR activities, their understanding and awareness react positively and have higher purchase intentions (Khojastehpour & Jamali, 2021; Lee & Shin, 2010). Lack of consumer knowledge regarding CSR activities is a significant reason (Schuler & Cording, 2006). For a successful CSR initiative, consumers should be fully aware of such activities (Dubey, 2024; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). The lack of consumers' knowledge regarding CSR activities is a significant reason restricting consumers' response to these activities (Schuler & Cording, 2006). So, from these studies, it can be inferred that

**H2:** CSR awareness positively mediates the relationship between CSR and CPI.

### **Economic Responsibility and Consumer Purchase Intention**

Intention is a person's motivation to perform a specific behavior (Pop et al., 2020). Purchase intention is the consumer's decision to buy a product after evaluating it (Madahi & Sukati, 2012). Espejel et al. (2008) described purchase intention as a future purchase plan based on consumer attitudes and beliefs. The perception of consumers about fair prices depicts the economic responsibility of the organizations, and the price is considered the most critical factor in the purchase decision of the customers (Chaerudin et al., 2021; Onlaor & Rotchanakitumnuai, 2010). If the consumers feel that the product is priced unfairly, then this affects the customers' choices negatively.

According to Maignan and Ferrell (2004), the claim of Ben Jerry's Inc. to be socially responsible was dangerous as economic achievements were not up to the mark, and he was sentenced for ignoring economic responsibility. Companies that ignore CSR are perceived as socially irresponsible and can result in negative consumer attitudes, leading to a financial crisis (Bhattacharya et al., 2020; Werder, 2008). So, based on these studies, it can be inferred that

**H3:** There is a positive relationship between ECOR and CPI.

### **Legal Responsibilities and Consumer Purchase Intention**

Legal responsibilities are the basic requirements for fair operations in society (Carroll, 1991). Implementation of CSR policy is also a requirement of law (Phillips et al., 2003; De Schutter, 2008). Organizations should follow these stated laws to achieve business goals and to execute business activities (Carroll, 1991; Carroll, 2021). These activities make businesses accountable and harmless toward society, the environment, employees, consumers, and other stakeholders (Afridi, 2008; Dubey, 2024).

BP in the US (an oil market leader) faced serious boycotts from the public and government due to the oil leakage in Mexico, which caused substantial infrastructure damage (Crane & Matten, 2007). Legal responsibilities also include administering competition in the market (Aharoni, 2024; Conchius, 2006). Microsoft Corporation Inc. in the USA faced legal cases that resulted in severe penalties for the company (Dudovskiy, 2015). Exxon Mobil claimed that the world's number one oil company is behaving like the world's number one criminal by damaging nature in such a way that no other multinational company is doing (Crane & Matten, 2007). So, based on these studies, it can be proposed that

**H4:** There is a positive and significant relationship between LR and CPI.

### **Ethical Responsibility and Consumer Purchase Intention**

Ethical responsibility is the business activities, situations and decisions in which the question of right and wrong is addressed (Trevino et al., 2021; Crane & Matten, 2010). Creyer and Ross (1997) claimed that most participants expected business to be socially responsible. An organization's unethical behaviour can lead towards the boycott of the company's products, and consumers can refuse to purchase products from an organization (Lasarov et al., 2023; Sen et al., 2001).

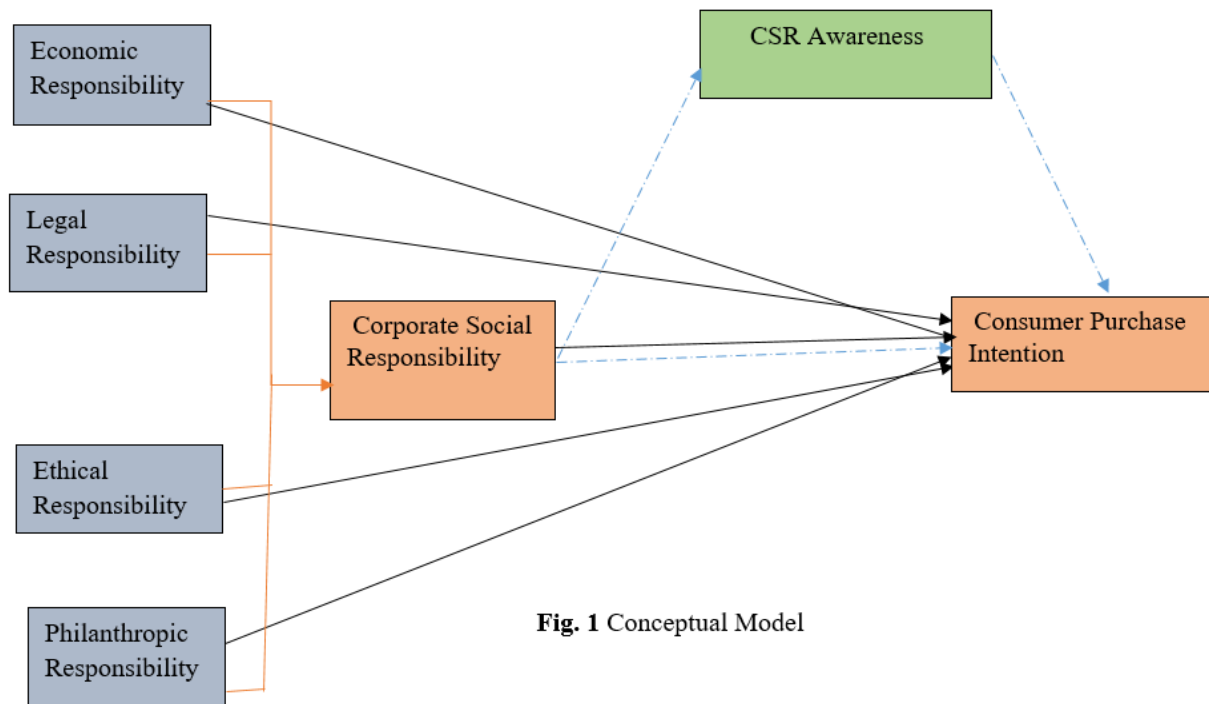
An organization is trusted if it follows good citizenship practices. Many studies show that consumers consider a company's ethical behavior when purchasing (Creyer & Ross, 1997). Many studies have also proved that consumers are more likely to purchase products from a company that they find ethically responsible than the competitors that are perceived as less ethically responsible by consumers (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2010). So from these studies, it can be inferred that:

**H5:** There is a positive relationship between ER and CPI.

### **Philanthropic Responsibility and Consumer Purchase Intention**

Philanthropic responsibility includes donations in the form of money, products and services. These activities refer to the organization's voluntary actions (Smith, 2021; Carroll, 1991). According to Carroll (1991), organizations should participate in voluntary charitable and welfare activities in communities that enhance the quality of life. By performing these activities, an organization may not acquire direct financial benefits but surely grow benefits indirectly as better organization image, improved legality and loyalty of stakeholders (Bebchuk et al., 2022; Safi et al., 2013). So, based on the above, it can be proposed that

**H6:** There is a positive relationship between PR and CPI.



**Fig. 1** Conceptual Model

## Research Design

In the current research study, the deductive, explanatory, and quantitative research approach was used as in the prior research of Gull et al. (2023). Deductive reasoning is best in cases where existing theories are used (Saunders et al., 2007). A survey questionnaire was used as per the earlier study of Gull et al. (2023) because it helps collect more data from respondents in less time (Neuman, 2000).

## Population and Sampling

In this research, the population of the study was the consumers of FMCG in Pakistan. The data was collected from 400 consumers with the help of convenience sampling as per the earlier research of Gull et al. (2023). 400 samples are adequate as a sample size of less than 500 and greater than 30 is suitable for most researchers (Roscoe, 1975).

## Instrument Development and Data Collection

Self-administered and closed-ended questionnaires were used to collect data, which helped obtain instant responses from the respondents (Morrow et al., 2011). The questionnaire has two parts. The first part deals with demographic information like age, gender, profession, and education. The second part consists of questions regarding the variables of the study.

## Measures

The items to measure the dimensions of CSR were selected from the scale developed by Wu & Lin (2014), the items to measure the purchase intention were selected from the scale developed by

Kumar et al. (2009), and the items to measure the CSR awareness were selected from the scale developed by Ali et al. (2010). The 7-point Likert scale was used to measure the understudied variables.

### Analysis

The data analysis segment is interpreted using different techniques like regression and correlation through SPSS 22.0.

### Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis explored the relationship between CSR and PI, as exhibited in table 1 (a). The results obtained from the analysis showed that CSR has a significant positive relationship with PI. This relationship was found positive as  $r=0.632$  with  $P < 0.01$ .

**Table 1(a): Correlations analysis**

	CSR	PI
CSR	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.632**
	N	400
PI	Pearson Correlation	.632**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1
	N	400

Table 1 (b) shows that CSR awareness has a positive relationship with economic responsibility with coefficient  $r=0.487$ , which is significant at  $p < 0.01$ , legal responsibility is also positively related to CSR Awareness with  $r=0.424$  which is significant at  $p < 0.01$ , ethical responsibility is also positively related to awareness as  $r=0.400$  which is significant at  $p < 0.01$  and philanthropic responsibility is also positively related to CSR awareness as  $r=0.321$ . Similarly, purchase intention shows a positive significant relationship with CSR awareness with  $r=0.542$  at  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 1 (b) Correlation analysis**

		CSR Awareness	ECOR	LR	ER	PR	PI
CSR Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.487**	.424**	.400**	.321**	.542**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400
ECOR	Pearson Correlation	.487**	1	.487**	.517**	.356**	.504**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400
LR	Pearson Correlation	.424**	.487**	1	.526**	.468**	.452**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400
ER	Pearson Correlation	.400**	.517**	.526**	1	.529**	.470**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400
PR	Pearson Correlation	.321**	.356**	.468**	.529**	1	.551**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400
PI	Pearson Correlation	.542**	.504**	.452**	.470**	.551**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400

## Regression Analysis

### Influence of CSR and Purchase Intention

In table 2, CSR shows a significant influence on PI, with a 0.000 p-value. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of the model is 0.398, and the R<sup>2</sup> is .400. This means that the regression explains 40% of the variance in the data.

**Table 2: CSR and Purchase Intentions' correlations**

Regression	B	Sig.	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
(Constant)	18.215	.000	0.632	.400	0.398	265.318	.000
CSR	0.784	.000					

The beta for the CSR is  $\beta=0.784$  with  $p \leq 0.05$ . From this information, the regression model equation is

$$PI = 18.215 + 0.784(CSR)$$

### Mediating Effect of CSR Awareness

For the mediating role of CSR awareness, the Baron and Kenny (1986) test is used. The regression test was performed with the CSR and the mediator CSR Awareness to fulfil the first condition. The relationship was also found significant, with  $\beta = 0.143$ ,  $t(399) = 12.166$ , and  $p = .000$  displayed in table 3 (a).

**Table 3(a): First condition of mediating effect**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.008	.426		7.053	.000
	CSR	.143	.012	.521	12.166	.000

a. Dependent Variable: CSR Awareness

After satisfying the first condition, the second condition is the regression between independent and dependent variables. The relationship of CSR on PI was significant with  $\beta = 0.784$ ,  $t(399) = 16.289$ , and  $p = .000$ , as displayed in table 3 (b).

**Table 3(b): Second condition of mediating effect**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	18.215	1.741		10.463	.000
	CSR	.784	.048	.632	16.289	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PI

To fulfil the third condition of mediation, a regression was performed between CSR Awareness and PI. The analysis showed a significant relationship between the mediator CSR Awareness and PI, where  $\beta = 2.438$ ,  $t(399) = 12.858$ ,  $p = .000$ , displayed in Table 3 (c).

**Table 3(c): Third condition of mediating effect**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	25.796	1.617		15.952	.000
	CSR Awareness	2.438	.190	.542	12.858	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PI

To fulfil the fourth condition of mediation, the regression was also performed on PI with CSR and CSR Awareness. The results of the mediation process showed that the mediator CSR Awareness relationship with PI was significant, with  $b = 2.438$ ,  $t(399) = 12.858$ , and  $p = .000$ , as shown in table 3 (d). All four conditions are fulfilled. So, from the result above, it can be concluded that CSR awareness partially mediated the relationship between CSR and PI.



**Table 3(d): Fourth condition of mediating effect**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.270	1.751		8.150	.000
	CSR	1.311	.194	.291	6.759	.000
	Awareness					
	CSR	.596	.053	.481	11.148	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PI

### Influence of Economic Responsibility on Purchase Intention

Economic responsibility significantly influences PI, as it has a p-value of 0.000 (See table 4). The value of  $F = 135.541$  and  $DF = 399$ , where the p-value is 0.000. It depicts a significant relationship between Economic Responsibility and PI ( $R = 0.504$ ).

**Table 4: Correlations between ECOR and CPI**

Regression	B	Sig.	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
(Constant)	29.931	.000	0.504	0.254	0.252	135.541	.000
ECOR	2.052	.000					

From this information, the regression model equation is

$$PI = 29.931 + 2.052 (\text{economic responsibility})$$

Focusing on economic responsibility activities can increase the purchase intention of companies' products.

### Influence of Legal Responsibility on Purchase Intention

Table 5 exhibits that Legal Responsibility significantly influences PI as the value is 0.000. The results show that the adjusted  $R^2$  is 0.202 and the  $R^2$  is 0.204. This means that the regression explains 20.4% of the variance in the data.

**Table 5 Correlation between LR and CPI**

Regression	B	Sig.	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
(Constant)	30.277	.000	0.452	0.204	0.202	102.266	.000
LR	1.642	.000					

From this information, authors can develop the following regression equation.

$$PI = 30.277 + 1.642 (\text{legal responsibility})$$

The model above infers that low involvement in economic responsibility results in low purchase intention. It shows a positive and significant relationship among these variables.

### Influence of Ethical Responsibility on Purchase Intention (PI)

Table 6 indicates a highly significant relationship between ethical responsibility and PI ( $R = 0.470$ ). From this information, the following regression model equation is developed.

$$PI = 28.197 + 1.914 (\text{Ethical Responsibility})$$

It can be inferred that low involvement in ethical responsibility results in low purchase intention.

**Table 6: Correlations ER and CPI**

Regression	B	Sig.	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
(Constant)	28.197	.000	0.470	0.221	0.219	112.879	.000
ER	1.914	.000					

### **Influence of Philanthropic Responsibility and Purchase Intention**

In table 7, philanthropic responsibility significantly influences PI as the p-value is 0.000. Thus, the regression model equation is

$$PI = 26.431 + 2.071(\text{Philanthropic Responsibility})$$

It can be inferred from the above regression equation that companies can increase the purchase intention of their products by focusing on philanthropic responsibility. Moreover, low involvement in philanthropic responsibility results in low purchase intention.

**Table 7: Correlation between PR and CPI**

Regression	B	Sig.	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
(Constant)	26.431	.000	0.551	0.303	0.302	173.284	.000
PR	2.071	.000					

### **Concluding Remarks**

Managers must understand how CSR initiatives influence CPI in Pakistan's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector. Managers and policymakers should customize CSR activities according to the preferences of customer, which positively influences CPI. Organizations should accurately communicating the CSR activities to consumers since augmented CSR awareness can progress consumer purchase intentions.

Managers and policymakers should efficiently highlight the sustainable company plans to acknowledge the impact of ECOR on CPI. LR can also meaningfully influence CPI by guaranteeing compliance with legal rules and regulations. Organizational can increase consumer purchase intentions by integrating ethical considerations. Policymakers should intentionally encourage philanthropic responsibility according to consumer values and it possibly decreasing the negative effects on the CPI.

The study solely surveys Pakistan's FMCG sector, restricting the findings' generalizability to other sectors or cultures. Future researchers should increase the scope to incorporate other sectors or cultures. In future researchers should conduct a systematic literature review and follow to the guidelines stated by Gull et al. (2022). This study also employs a cross-sectional design, which hampers the causality. Longitudinal or experimental research designs can establish a more robust causal relationship between CSR activities and CPI. Qualitative research studies (interviews or focus groups) should be used with quantitative research studies to explore diverse mediating and moderator factors in fostering the relationship between CSR activities and CPI.

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