

Consumers' Identification of Corporate Social Responsibility Activity in Taiwan: Does It Matter for Emotional Dimension and Purchase Intention?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of the consumer identification of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities on the emotional dimensions and consumer purchase intention. Confirmatory factor analysis and stepwise regression analysis are used in the data analysis and comparison. Three main conclusions are formed in verifying the hypothesis in this study. (1) Consumer identification of CSR activities, brand image, and brand attachment all have significant positive effects on consumer purchase intention. (2) An increase in the identification of CSR activity increases the effect of brand image on consumer purchase intention. (3) An increase in the identification of CSR activity does not increase the effect of brand attachment on consumer purchase intention. This study fills the gap of most prior studies on CSR that focused on environmental protection or financial performance, and not on emotional dimensions.

JEL Classifications: M140, M310

Keywords: brand attachment; brand image; consumer identification; corporate social responsibility; emotional attachment; purchase intention

I. INTRODUCTION

Practicing social responsibility proactively is a trend in leading international firms. For instance, Yu and Chen (2014) proposed a corporate environmental responsibility (CER) framework as inferred from corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports issued by leading high-technology electronic firms with international levels of technology. Yu et al. (2016) proposed CER performance measurement indicators to understand the actual intention of businesses practicing environmental management and protection. Contemporary companies must commit to society, environment, and consumer health regarding CSR (Chen and Lin, 2011). Moreover, reduced environmental pollution and improved efficiency of energy utilization are critical. The active performance of environmental protection activities and social responsibilities by the leading firms worldwide has become an international trend (Wang et al., 2015; Hsu, 2011). Companies should adopt and implement a CSR strategy as early as possible to prevent future negative publicities (Chen et al., 2016). Most studies on CSR focused on environmental protection or financial performance (Yoon and Tello, 2009; Surroca et al., 2010; Hsu, 2011; Yu and Chen, 2014; Wang et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2016). Intangible emotional dimensions, such as brand image and brand attachment, received less attention. Creating emotional brand attachment is a key branding issue in the present marketing world (Lucia et al., 2011). Emotions are often evoked when attachment is strong, resulting in a psychological state where a strong cognitive and affective bond connects a brand with an individual, which in turn results in the brand being viewed as an extension of one's self (Park et al., 2010). According to Mudambi et al. (1997), the intangible aspects of brand value often contain emotional dimensions. The research by Lynch and de Chernatony (2004) also showed that brands based on intangible, emotive characteristics are perceived as durable and less likely to suffer from competitive erosion. Therefore, brand image and brand attachment belong to the emotional dimension. Yoon and Tello (2009) pointed out that CSR is a moderating driver, and the consistent commitment to CSR can help an organization continue being innovative and competitive. However, previous research underemphasized the moderating effects of CSR on the emotional dimension. Moreover, the 2011 CSR report stated that the service industry in Taiwan failed to implement CSR activities, especially within the restaurant business. However, restaurant businesses have become an interesting discussion topic within the greater China area.

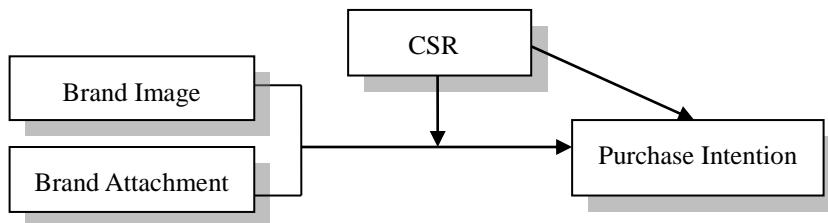
The focus of the CSR research has shifted from why to what to how, and the current focus is on adopting CSR practices that are most compatible to business strategies to bring maximum outcomes for both the companies and the societies where they operate (Basu and Palazzo, 2008). Studies also support the belief that adopting CSR initiatives benefits companies, particularly in terms of enhancing the consumer perceptions of the company (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). According to Polonsky and Speed (2001), the three major CSR research topics are sponsorship, cause-related marketing, and philanthropy. Sponsorship is the most popular activity adopted by companies that intend to realize their CSR. A study published by the International Events Group (IEG) noted that, "Sponsorship without activating is like buying an electronic device but not the batteries. Yet even when sponsorship is activated, all too often the batteries are the wrong size" (IEG, 2006^b). Moreover, "Sales and other results from business-building activation were the most important factors in companies'

decision to renew or drop a sponsorship" (IEG, 2006^a). The present study examines the strength of consumer purchase intention with regard to sponsoring brands.

The recent rise in ethical consumerism has seen increasing numbers of corporate brands that project a socially responsible and ethical image. However, does having a corporate brand that is perceived to be ethical influence the variables of interest for its product brands? Moreover, empirical studies on the effects of brand image and brand attachment are rare and are conducted mainly in the context of Western global brands. Therefore, the generalization of the results of these studies to include the Asian consumer setting is uncertain. The present study adds to the body of literature on CSR by using a sample of Chinese consumer brands, particularly, a fast-growing leading catering brand. Hence, the present study is significantly different from previous, Western-focused studies.

The effects of CSR activities, brand image, and brand attachment on consumer purchase intention, and the moderating effects of CSR activities on the relationship of brand image and brand attachment with the consumer purchase intention are investigated. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this study.

Figure 1
Conceptual framework



II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

A. CSR and Purchase Intention

Survey evidence shows that Asian consumers demand greater social responsibility from businesses (Ramasamy et al., 2010), and Chinese consumers who show high levels of awareness and trust in CSR are more likely to transform a favorable CSR record into positive corporate evaluation, product association, and purchase intention (Tian et al., 2011).

According to Putrevu and Lords (1994), purchase intention is the behavior or action that indicates consumer willingness to purchase certain brands after an attitude toward that brand has been formed. Purchase intention is also defined as the attitude toward a brand that significantly affects the intention of the consumer to buy that brand (Brown and Stayman, 1992). Brand attitude and intention to purchase have a significant and positive relationship. Purchase intention is a value that is routinely used in various advertising domains, including copy tests, tracking studies, brand evaluations, and brand extensions (Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994).

Meenaghan (1991) described sponsorship as “an investment, in cash or in kind, in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity.” Therefore, sponsorship can achieve a range of goals, such as improving corporate image, broadening brand exposure, and increasing marketing sales, as well as effects, such as image-building, generation of good will, or changes in attitude (Meenaghan, 2005). Carrillat et al. (2005) demonstrated the influence of sponsorship for a brand with high versus low familiarity on attitudes and purchase intentions in single and multiple sponsorship contexts. The study revealed that the effect of sponsorship on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions is stronger for sponsoring brands with relatively low familiarity. Against this background, the present study proposes that the perception of CSR activities improves purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis 1 for this study is formed as follows:

H1: The identification of CSR activity has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention.

B. Brand Image and Purchase Intention

Spears and Singh (2004) defined purchase intention as “an individual’s conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand.” Madrigal (2000) analyzed the influence of social alliances with sport teams on the intention to purchase the products of corporate sponsors. Their study suggested that an important benefit derived from sponsorship is the opportunity for a company to link itself to an object that represents part of the extended self of a consumer.

In this context, Madrigal (2001) tested a beliefs-attitude-purchasing intention hierarchy in the context of sponsorship of a major university sport team. The study revealed that team identification influences consumer intention to purchase the sponsored products. Koo et al. (2006) also examined the effect of perceived brand/sport event image-fit on the cognitive and affective responses of consumers, and the effects of the cognitive and affective responses of consumers on purchase intentions. They found that the cognitive and affective responses of consumers are significantly linked to their intent to purchase. Against this background, the present study proposes that perceptions of brand image enhance purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis 2 is formed as follows:

H2: Brand image has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention.

C. Brand Attachment and Purchase Intention

Attachment is a term that originated from the psychology field. Psychological research on attachment concentrates on the bond of individuals to other individuals (Weiss, 1988). Bowlby’s (1982) pioneering work on attachment in the realm of parent–infant relationships defined attachment as an emotion-laden, target-specific bond between a person and a specific object. Extant research in marketing (Kleine III et al., 1993) suggests that attachments can extend beyond the person to person relationship context. Consumers can also develop attachments to collectibles (Slater, 2001), brands (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), and other types of special or favorite objects

(Richins, 1994). Brand attachment is characterized by a strong linkage or connectedness between the brand and the self (Kleine III et al., 1993).

Park et al. (2010) were the first researchers to study the relationships between the brand attachment and the consumer behaviors driven by such relationships. They defined brand attachment as the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self. According to the attachment theory (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007), this bond is exemplified by a detailed and accessible memory network (or mental representation) that invokes thoughts and feelings toward the brand and the relationship of the brand to the self. Moreover, Park et al. (2010) found that brand attachment accurately predicts intentions to perform behaviors that use significant consumer resources (time, money, or reputation). They observed these effects in terms of the consumer purchase behavior, brand purchase share (choice among directly competing brands), and need share (choice among brands targeting similar needs) after controlling consumer inertia (past behaviors) and other potential factors.

The literature on attachment suggests that emotional attachments have strong motivational and behavioral implications. These emotional and behavioral outcomes imply that an individual who is intensely attached to a person or object is likely to be committed to investing in or protecting and preserving the interactions with that person or object (Van Lange et al., 1997). Moreover, brand attachment, such as bonds, connections, and identifications with the brand, strongly predicts the frequency of past and future purchases of the brand (Thomson et al., 2005). The current study proposes that the perception of brand attachment enhances consumer purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis 3 is formed as follows:

H3: Brand attachment has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention.

D. Moderating Effects of CSR

Brand image plays an important role in consumer goods-purchasing behavior, especially when differentiating products or services based on tangible features is difficult (Mudambi et al., 1997). Singh et al. (2012) demonstrated the positive relationship between the perceived ethicality of a brand with brand trust and brand affect. Brand effect also positively influences brand trust. Furthermore, brand trust and brand effect show a positive relation with brand loyalty. Companies enter into sponsorship activities for various reasons. The most common of which are to increase brand awareness and to establish, strengthen, or change their brand image (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998).

Evidence generally shows that sponsorship can influence brand image (Meenaghan, 1999) and brand association (Polonsky and Speed, 2001). Yoon and Tello (2009) pointed out that the CSR, as a moderating driver, and the consistent commitment to CSR can help an organization continue to be innovative and competitive. Thus, the present study proposes that the identification of CSR activities moderates the relationship between brand image and consumer purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis 4 is formed as follows:

H4: An increase in the identification of CSR activity increases the effect of brand image on consumer purchase intention.

Polonsky and Speed (2001) specified three major types of corporate giving,

namely, corporate philanthropy, sponsorship, and cause-related marketing. Meenaghan (1999) defined sponsorship as "... the provision of assistance, either financial or in kind, to an activity by the commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives." According to Sandler and Shani (1989), sponsorship is the direct provision of resources (money, people, or equipment) by an organization to an event or activity in exchange for direct association to that event or activity. The sponsoring organization can then use this direct association to achieve their corporate, marketing, or media objectives.

Studies on sponsorship resulted in affective outcomes, such as attitude, liking, preference, psychological attachment, or favorable thoughts, of sponsorship activities. Moreover, brand attachment to a specific object, such as a sponsee, sponsor, or product of the sponsor, could be relatively strong or weak (Chavanat et al., 2009). Meanwhile, Yoon and Tello (2009) pointed out that CSR, as a moderating driver, and the consistent commitment to CSR can help an organization continue to be innovative and competitive. Therefore, the present study proposes that the identification of CSR activities moderates the relationship between brand attachment and consumer purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis 5 is formed as follows:

H5: An increase in the identification of CSR activity increases the effect of brand attachment on consumer purchase intention.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Procedure and Participants

This study investigated a blood-donation activity sponsored by Tasty Steak (<http://www.tasty.com.tw/ABO/note.htm>) of Wowprime Corp in Taiwan. In the initial part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked whether they have visited Tasty Steak in the past year, the number of times they visited, and whether they have heard about the blood donation activity sponsored by Tasty Steak. These limitations were established to increase the accuracy of the resulting intention data. The initial sample comprised 588 eligible informants. After eliminating 25 invalid surveys, including incomplete questionnaires, 563 usable questionnaires were retained, indicating an effective return rate of 95.7%.

B. Measures

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Linear Structural Relationships (LISREL) were used in data analysis and comparison. The Cronbach's α value was used in examining whether the measurement of variables in this paper satisfied the consistency requirements. Composite reliabilities (CR) and average variances extracted (AVE) were used in examining the convergent validity and the discriminant validity. Stepwise regression analysis was employed in testing the hypotheses.

Initially, 10 respondents were asked to take a pre-test of the measures to determine the full extent of the constructs. Subsequently, three academic experts were interviewed and asked to assess the measures for clarity and relevance. Finally, a sample of 30 respondents was employed to fine-tune the measures, instructions, and

layout of each construct. All items were rated using a 6-point scale: 1 represents strongly disagree and 6 represents strongly agree.

The notion on sponsorship and cause-related marketing was adopted as reference from Polonsky and Speed (2001). The present study defined CSR as the moment when an organization intends to make a direct connection with an event or activity and provide resources, such as money, manpower, and equipment, to support this event or activity in the field of sponsorship. In this study, CSR was measured using the 3-item scale adopted from Lachowetz et al. (2002).

The brand image definition was adopted as reference from Keller (1993). The present study defined brand image as perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory. Brand image was measured using the 10-item scale adopted from Keller (1993).

The definition of brand attachment was adopted as reference from Kleine III et al. (1993). This study defined brand attachment as the strong connection or relationship between brand and consumer. In this study, brand attachment was measured using the 6-item scale adopted from Park et al. (2010).

The definition of purchase intention was adopted as reference from Laroche et al. (1996). This study defined purchase intention as the possibility of the willingness of a consumer to purchase a specific brand. In this study, purchase intention was measured using the 4-item scale adopted from Putrevu and Lords (1994).

The possibility of alternative explanations was reduced through the inclusion of four important controls. Gender and age were controlled because they are considered as important variables that affect purchase intention. Education and personal income were also controlled because they are considered critical variables.

C. Descriptive Statistics

The gender variable is dichotomous. Age was measured on an 8-point scale, with 1 < 20 (9.1%), 2 = 20 to 24 (15.8%), 3 = 25 to 29 (9.1%), 4 = 30 to 34 (12.6%), 5 = 35 to 39 (17.6%), 6 = 40 to 44 (18.5%), 7 = 45 to 49 (10.1%), and 8 = over 50 (7.3%) years old. Education was measured on a 4-point scale, with 1 = less than junior high school (0.4%), 2 = senior high school (6.0%), 3 = college/university (53.5%), and 4 = graduate school (40.1%). Income was measured on a 6-point scale, with 1 < USD 667 per month (28.6%), 2 = USD 667 to USD 1,333 per month (13.0%), 3 = USD 1,333 to USD 1,967 per month (24.7%), 4 = USD 1,967 to USD 2,633 per month (14.9%), 5 = USD 2,633 to USD 3,300 per month (7.8%), and 6 = over USD 3,300 per month (11%).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

A. Reliability, Validity, and Correlations

The present study adopted Cronbach's α value as a tool for reliability examination. Guilford (1965) suggested that an α value higher than 0.7 indicates high measurement reliability. The examination results in Table 1 show that the Cronbach's α value in each variable is higher than 0.7, indicating the high reliability and relatively good internal consistency of each variable.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess the dimensionality,

reliability, and validity of the scales, which had six latent variables. Table 2 shows the analysis results, including the loadings, CR, AVE, and fit indices. The NNFI, CFI, and IFI in the CFA model all exceeded 0.90 (NNFI = 0.97; CFI = 0.98; IFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.078; RMR = 0.056; GFI = 0.88; AGFI = 0.840), indicating that these factors reasonably fit the data, as suggested by Gerbing and Anderson (1992). CRs were calculated using the procedures suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The CRs ranged from 0.81 to 0.93, all exceeding 0.70, which is the acceptable CR level suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Table 2 suggests that in all the cases, the AVE values are higher than the shared variances presented, and that the square root values of the AVE of each construct are significantly greater than the correlations.

Table 1
Reliability of questionnaire

Variables	Cronbach's α value
CSR	0.794
Brand image	0.883
Brand attachment	0.881
Purchase intention	0.887

Table 2
Correlation matrix and descriptive statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Purchase intention	0.824							
CSR	0.250	0.779						
Brand attachment	0.431	0.191	0.711					
Brand image	0.442	0.211	0.392	0.775				
Gender	-0.017	-0.039	-0.001	-0.107	1			
Age	-0.105	0.019	-0.176	-0.221	-0.126	1		
Education	0.034	0.073	0.066	0.168	-0.205	0.006	1	
Income	-0.054	0.039	-0.117	-0.097	-0.200	0.744	0.179	1
Number of items	4	3	6	10	1	1	1	1
Mean	5.092	3.551	4.0528	4.448	1.567	4.462	3.334	2.934
SD	0.705	0.936	0.689	0.902	0.496	2.079	0.604	1.651
Skewness	-0.878	-0.035	-0.385	-0.858	-0.270	-0.093	-0.409	0.417
Kurtosis	1.350	-0.400	0.246	1.339	-1.934	-1.072	-0.113	-0.913

Note: The figures underlined and presented diagonally are the square roots of the AVE. The figures next to the variables are the correlations among the composite measures (ψ).

B. Results

The data collected in this study were subjected to stepwise regression analysis to verify the hypotheses. Eight stepwise regression models were developed for hypotheses testing, and the results of testing are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Stepwise regression analysis

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Gender	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Age	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Income	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CSR								
			β= 0.43					
Brand image				✓		✓	✓	
					β= 0.96			
Brand attachment					✓		✓	✓
						β= 0.63		
CSR×Brand image							β= 0.02	✓
CSR×Brand attachmen								β= -0.04
F	2.55**	16.42***	131.4***	73.53***	112.7***	96.49***	68.29***	58.58***
R ²	0.018	0.129	0.541	0.398	0.549	0.549	0.424	0.425
Adj-R ²	0.011	0.121	0.537	0.392	0.542	0.543	0.418	0.418
Overall model	0.038	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
p value								

Note: ** means $p < 0.05$; *** means $p < 0.01$; β: regression coefficient.

The testing results from Model 2 show that the p value that determines the goodness of fit is $0.000 < 0.01$, which indicates statistical significance. Thus, the identification of CSR activities has distinct effects on consumer purchase intention. The regression coefficient of 0.427 indicates that the identification of CSR activities has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported.

The testing results from Model 3 show that the p value that determines the goodness of fit is $0.000 < 0.01$, indicating statistical significance. Thus, brand image has distinct effects on consumer purchase intention. The regression coefficient of 0.961 indicates that brand image has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is supported.

The testing results of Model 4 indicate that the p value that determines the goodness of fit is $0.000 < 0.01$, indicating statistical significance. Thus, brand attachment has distinct effects on consumer purchase intention. The regression coefficient of 0.631 indicates that brand attachment has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is supported.

The testing results from Model 6 indicate that the p value that determines the goodness of fit is $0.000 < 0.01$, indicating statistical significance. Thus, CSR and brand image have an interactive relationship. The regression coefficient of 0.015 indicates that as the identification of CSR activity increases, the effect of brand image on consumer purchase intention also increases. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is supported.

The testing results from Model 8 show that the p value that determines the

goodness of fitness is $0.000 < 0.01$, indicating statistical significance. Thus, CSR and brand attachment have an interactive relationship. However, the regression coefficient of -0.036 indicates that an increased identification of CSR activity does not increase the effect of brand attachment on consumer purchase intention. Therefore, hypothesis 5 is not supported.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

A. Research Results

The following research results were obtained by verifying the hypothesis in this study. (1) The consumer identification of CSR activities, brand image, and brand attachment has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention. (2) An increase in the identification of CSR activity increases the effect of brand image on consumer purchase intention. (3) An increase in the identification of CSR activity does not increase the effect of brand attachment on consumer purchase intention.

Research on CSR focused almost exclusively on the effect of CSR on environmental protection or financial performance. Thus, this study fills the gap of most prior studies on CSR by focusing on the emotional dimensions. Moreover, the results of the present study show that consumer identification of CSR activities is very important for firms.

B. Managerial Theory

This study provides a thorough structure for CSR research and verifies the relationship between and influence of the identification of CSR activity of consumers on emotional attachment dimensions and consumer purchase intention. Moreover, this study contributes to the correction of the false notion that CSR practice is restricted only to global firms and brands.

A firm with a well-directed CSR strategy has a better chance of surviving hard times. The consumer identification of CSR activities significantly enhances brand image and consumer purchase intention. Hence, contemporary companies should recognize CSR as a strategic marketing tool and include the tool in the corporate marketing mix.

Yoon and Tello (2009) pointed out that CSR as a moderating driver and the consistent commitment to CSR can help an organization continue being innovative and competitive. Moreover, the overall sample analysis in the present study reveals that CSR moderates the effects of brand image on consumer purchase intention. These results imply that although brand image plays an important role in improving the willingness of consumers to purchase a particular brand, companies should adopt CSR policies that are positively and directly related to consumer purchase intention. Thus, companies should continue to monitor and strengthen the consumer identification of CSR through sponsorship activities, such as blood-donation activity, even if the current brand image is good. According to the empirical results, CSR does not moderate the effects of brand attachment on consumer purchase intention. Therefore, establishing strong brand attachment among consumers reduces the need for companies to propagate CSR activities. Furthermore, companies must attempt to differentiate between CSR activities and consumer emotions toward the brand.

C. Management Practice

Companies with plans to adopt CSR as a strategy should consider it not only in the context of sponsorship activities, but also in the context of various social concerns, including environmental issues, social welfare, education, and employment quality. Enterprises should recognize the huge benefits that the CSR strategy can bring to them. (1) Consumers who are tired of noisy and invasive marketing might form stronger attachment to brands that present a caring public image. (2) CSR improves brand perception and plays an important role in product differentiation in the current, highly homogenized market; thus, preventing the competitive erosion of brands. (3) CSR activities improve brand image and offer two intangible advantages, namely, increased willingness of shareholders to hold onto their stocks and increased pride of employees in working for the brand and the enterprise.

Companies should remember that every detail of a past consumption experience affects the attachment of consumers to a company brand and its image. Therefore, companies must always prepare well and provide satisfactory products, services, and ambiance by addressing every detail of each consumer visit to their outlets. Every positive consumption experience contributes to strengthening the brand image. Moreover, the image of an event shifts to a sponsor brand image when they are linked through sponsorship activities. Therefore, companies must carefully evaluate the kind of events that they sponsor and the organizations or causes that benefit their sponsorship. The random selection of sponsorship partners could cause companies to be associated with scandals or abuses involving their partner organizations, ultimately hurting the company brand.

The operational activities of companies often create unavoidable social and environmental problems. Market failure often leads to the adoption of many business policies aimed at promoting CSR. Therefore, companies should adopt and implement the CSR strategy as early as possible as a bulwark against possible future negative publicity for their brands.

D. Limitations

The three limitations of this study are as follows. (1) The findings have limited generalization power because they are based only on a sample of restaurant industry consumers. (2) This study only considers the consumer identification of CSR activity as a moderator and excludes other moderators that could be present in this relationship. (3) Some consumers might find the prices at Tasty Steak to be too high, which could affect their future purchase intention.

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