



The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility as a Moderation in the Relationship Between Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction, and Customer Trust– A Conceptual Analysis

*Dadik Sri Karyanto ¹ Ambar Lukitaningsih²

^{1,2}Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

^{1*} dadik0274@gmail.com, ²ambar.ita@ustjogja.ac.id

* Corresponding Author

Abstract. This study aims to analyze the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a moderation variable in the relationship between Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction, and Customer Trust. In today's digital age and competitive business environment, organisations now more than ever have to establish a favorable brand perception and win the trust of customers. The positive influence of CSR including social and environmental contributions on the brand image, customer satisfaction, and consumer's trust would lead to a competitive advantage. This research developed a model that integrates CSR as a moderator that strengthens the relationship between Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction, and Customer Trust. Based on the Stakeholder theory, CSR is considered a form of corporate responsibility towards various stakeholders, which plays a role in increasing the company's legitimacy in the eyes of consumers. The results of this study are expected to provide new insights into how CSR can be an important strategy in building long-term relationships between companies and consumers, especially in diverse industries.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Trust.

1 Introduction

In the era of globalization and digitalization that continues to develop, the main challenge for PT Pos Indonesia lies not only in improving the quality of products and services, but also in efforts to maintain consumer trust in the midst of increasingly fierce competition with private logistics and digital services companies. Consumer trust is now a strategic asset that determines business sustainability, especially when consumers are increasingly critical of the company's social values and responsibilities. One of the factors that affect the formation of this trust is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Through the implementation of CSR that is consistent and relevant to the needs of the community, companies can build a positive image and strengthen emotional relationships with customers. According to [1], consumers in different countries tend to trust companies that are actively engaged in social responsibility activities.

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This phenomenon is not without interest for PT Pos Indonesia, which despite of having conducted CSR programs in the form of community empowerment, MSME assistance, and environmental conservation, challenges their level of consumer trust in the midst digital transformation and new rivals.. This condition raises important questions about the extent to which CSR implementation can play a role as an effective strategy in building and strengthening customer trust in PT Pos Indonesia in an increasingly competitive business era. Several previous studies have identified Brand Image as an important factor in building Customer Trust. Brand Image A strong one doesn't just reflect the company's reputation [2], but also the basis for consumers to make purchasing decisions [3]. Several articles and field studies have found a similar pattern, namely that *brand image* has a positive influence on *customer trust*, which in turn drives increased loyalty and purchase intent [4], [5], [6].

However, in many cases, the influence Brand Image and Customer Trust not always significant [7], [8]. In addition, the research [9] shows that although Brand Image Positive, customer trust levels can be hampered by external factors, such as a lack of transparency in CSR implementation. Moreover, Customer Satisfaction is often considered a bridge that connects Brand Image with Customer Trust. In other words, there is still a research gap in understanding the relationship between Brand Image and Customer Trust.

Answering this problem, this study focuses on the development of a model that integrates CSR as a moderation variable that strengthens the relationship between Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction, and Customer Trust. This approach aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the strategic role of CSR in creating customer trust. By reviewing the current literature, such as research by Kim & Kim (2023) and Wu et al. (2021), which shows the potential of CSR in increasing customer loyalty, this study will examine how CSR can strengthen the relationship between these variables in various industry contexts.

Previous research has tended to place CSR as a mediating variable that connects Brand Image and Customer Trust. For example, research [10], [11] shows that CSR has a significant role in increasing customer satisfaction, which ultimately affects customer trust. However, this study lacks a spotlight on how CSR can function as a moderation variable that strengthens the direct relationship between Brand Image and Customer Trust. In addition, most studies focus more on specific industries, such as hospitality or retail, so the generalization of findings is limited. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the role of CSR moderation in various industry contexts.

This research is built on the theory *Stakeholder Theory* proposed by Freeman in 1984, then further developed [12]. This theory emphasizes the importance of companies to meet the needs and expectations of various stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the wider community [13]. In the context of this study, CSR is considered a form of corporate responsibility towards stakeholders, which can strengthen the relationship between Brand Image and Customer Trust. The model also integrates Customer Satisfaction as a mediation variable, with the aim of testing how customer satisfaction can amplify the effect Brand Image against Customer Trust, which is then moderated by CSR.

The novelty of this study lies in the new approach that identifies CSR as a moderation, not mediating variable, in the relationship between Brand Image, Customer

Satisfaction, and Customer Trust. Thus, this research not only makes a theoretical contribution in understanding the strategic role of CSR, but also offers practical implications for companies looking to increase customer trust through strengthening brand image and customer satisfaction. The research also expands the empirical context by testing models in various industries, so that the results can be more relevant and applicable in various business sectors.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory (Stakeholder Theory) was first introduced by R. Edward Freeman in the year 1984 through his book entitled *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Stakeholder theory (Stakeholder Theory) emphasizes that the company not only operates for the benefit of shareholders, but is also responsible for various other stakeholders, such as consumers, employees, communities, and the environment [14]. In the context of this research model, the involvement of companies in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) represents the implementation of the principle stakeholder, where the organization seeks to meet the expectations of the wider community while strengthening the brand image (brand image). Thus, CSR becomes a strategic instrument that is able to create shared value (shared value) and increase the company's legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders, especially consumers. In addition, the association between customer satisfaction will impact customer trust, brand image. In this model can be explained through a perspective Stakeholder Theory. Positive brand reputation and dedicated CSR not only define the perception of value among consumers but also build trust in the company. [15]. This trust arises because consumers see companies not only pursuing profits, but also caring about social and environmental interests. By creating satisfaction and trust, the company gains stronger support from stakeholders, which ultimately improves the sustainability of the long-term relationship between the company and its consumers.

2.2 Brand Image

Brand Image is the consumer's perception of the brand image formed from the experience, brand communication, and impression left by the brand. According to [16] Brand image is how the consumers perceive and interpret a brand based on their opinions, attitudes and emotions toward that brand, the cognitive and psychological aspects. This perception extends to the functional and emotional attributes as well as symbolic associations due to the brand (which is what distinguishes one brand from another in a competitive environment) [17]. Thus, brand image serves as a cognitive filter that influences the consumer's decision-making process, both consciously and unconsciously.

The formation of a brand image does not happen instantly, but through continuous interaction between consumers and various brand stimuli. [18] Identify the four dimensions of the brand experience: sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual. Consumer interaction with brands through these various stimuli forms subjective responses that reinforce brand associations in consumer memory. When

these experiences are harmonious, they form the basis of a strong consumer-brand relationship, which in turn strengthens the brand image.

Every brand Image is uniquely symbolic and personal: it symbolizes, personally, the characteristics of a product offering and, to consumers, even shapes into a person-like brand personality. Brand image is also used as an added value to differentiate a product or service from its competitors that creating trust (brand trust) and it strengthens the overall brand equity [19]. Research from [20] It also shows that a strong brand image can increase brand preference and consumer loyalty.

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

Customer Satisfaction is the level of satisfaction that consumers feel with the product, service, or experience provided by a brand. In the quality management literature, consumer satisfaction is defined as the degree to which a company's product or service is able to meet or even exceed customer expectations [21]. This means that customer satisfaction reflects a consumer's subjective evaluation of their experience with a product/service in which the consumer compares their initial expectations with their actual perceived performance. Research [22] generally defines satisfaction as "fulfillment response", namely the consumers' judgment that a product or service provides a pleasurable level of fulfillment related to consumption. Accordingly, consumer satisfaction is not merely a function of expectation fulfillment; rather it also includes an affective reaction to the consumption experience. Additionally, consumer satisfaction can be viewed as the outcome of a multi-dimensional evaluative process performed by consumers to evaluate the quality and value latent in firms' offerings vis-à-vis what they expected [23]. Type disconfirmation expectancy theory suggests that satisfaction manifests when a product or service performs better than expected (positive disconfirmation), and dissatisfaction takes place if the performance falls short of expectations (negative disconfirmation) [22]. The model emphasizes the significance of initial expectations and perceived performance driving consumer satisfaction. In a dynamic environment, however, consumer satisfaction is not considered the outcome of single transactions but an accumulation of histories and relationships that develop over time between the customer and service provider. Further [24] Highlighting the importance of the relationship lifecycle in value co-creation, it shows that the quality of a strong relationship can enhance the consumer's contribution to creating shared value over time. Thus, consumer satisfaction is the result of an ever-evolving collaborative and participatory relationship, where both parties actively contribute to creating a satisfying experience.

2.4 Customer Trust

Customer trust is an important foundation in building long-term relationships between consumers and brands. Conceptually, trust reflects a consumer's belief in the brand's integrity, competence, and goodwill in fulfilling its promises. According to [25] Consumer trust consists of three main dimensions: competence, integrity, and benevolence. Performance is whether a company can do what they said they would do for consumers. Honesty demonstrates the company is honest and reliable in fulfilling its obligations. On the other hand, kindness is when a company can put aside its own

interests to first consider the needs of customers and demonstrate authentic caring about those it works with. These three dimensions are interconnected and constitute the general level of consumer trust in the brand [26].

Further, consumer trust develops through continuous interaction and positive experiences with brands. [25] separate relational beliefs, based on a presumption of goodwill and resistant to change, from calculative beliefs based on past behavior that are fragile." Relational trust is when the consumers feel that the brand has good intentions and can be trusted in long term; while calculative trust is more transactional based on experience. Within this frame, relational trust-building is a more successful approach in terms of building sustainable consumer loyalty. Brand loyalty and repurchase behavior is also affected by consumer trust. Consumers are also more inclined to be loyal and less prone to switch to rivals if they have the confidence that a brand will live up their expectations over time. Study by [27] Shows that consumer trust includes important aspects such as reliability, integrity, and the company's competence in delivering products or services that meet expectations.

2.5 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept that reflects a company's responsibility for the social, environmental, and economic impacts of its business activities. CSR involves a company in a voluntary effort to improve the welfare of the community and the environment, beyond its legal and financial obligations. According to [28] CSR encompasses the entire corporate strategy system that focuses on the economic cycle and stakeholder welfare, with the aim of creating sustainable social value. So it can be concluded that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an effort made by companies to contribute to the welfare of society, the environment, and the economy through various social and environmental initiatives. In practice, CSR can be realized through various initiatives, such as reducing negative impacts on the environment, empowering local communities, and applying ethical principles in business operations. Carroll (1979) developed a framework known as the "CSR Pyramid", which emphasizes that companies have a responsibility to generate profits (economy), obey the law (legal), act ethically (ethically), and contribute to the well-being of society (philanthropy) [29]. This approach highlights the importance of companies not only focusing on financial gains, but also on the social and environmental impact of their operations. CSR also serves as a bridge between business strategy and sustainable development. In this context, CSR is not just a charitable activity, but an integral part of a company's sustainability-oriented strategy. [30] states that CSR plays a role in social management, which includes aspects of sustainability, ethics, and good corporate governance. Research conducted by [31] shows that companies with good governance practices tend to have better environmental performance and disclose higher quality CSR information.

3 Methodology

This study uses a conceptual approach to clarify theoretical constructs and develop new interpretations based on existing literature [32]. According to [33], a

conceptual review serves to identify research gaps and develop models for future empirical investigation. Relevant literature is incorporated to be consistent with the purpose of the study for a holistic and meaningful relationship among important concepts. The result of this approach is a working model that can be further tested empirically. Several fundamental questions the present framework aspires to tackle: (1) Does Brand Image have a positive effect on Customer Trust? (2) Does Brand Image have a positive effect on Customer Satisfaction? (3) Does Customer Satisfaction have a positive effect on Customer Trust? (4) Does CSR moderate the relationship between Brand Image and Customer Satisfaction? (5) Does CSR moderate the relationship between Brand Image and Customer Trust? (6) Does CSR moderate the relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Customer Trust?

4. Results & Discussion

4.1 The Influence of Brand Image on Customer Trust

Brand image strongly reflects consumers' positive perception of the brand in terms of quality, credibility, and emotional value offered [20]. This image is formed through direct experience, brand communication, and public opinion accumulated over time. When consumers consistently capture positive signals from brands, the perception of reliability increases.

A consistent brand image will reinforce the affective and cognitive dimensions of consumer trust. Values such as integrity, honesty, and commitment to quality are important aspects derived from the visual and verbal perceptions inherent in the brand. This image, indirectly, becomes the main reference in consumer decision-making. Trust arises because consumers feel the brand is able to deliver on the promises given in marketing communications [34], [35]. The higher the trust in the brand, the greater the chances of repurchase and long-term loyalty [5]. In a competitive market landscape, brand image-based trust is becoming a strategic asset that is difficult to replicate.

The results of the latest study confirm that brand image has a direct and significant influence on the formation of customer trust. This is seen in a variety of sectors, from retail, financial services, to the food and beverage industry, where brands with superior imagery tend to gain higher levels of trust from their consumers [36].

4.2 The Influence of Brand Image on Customer Satisfaction

Consumer perception of brand image is often an early indicator in forming expectations for a product or service. High expectations will encourage positive judgments if the brand is able to meet or exceed those expectations. In this case, the brand image plays the role of a bridge between the promise and reality of the service. Consumers who view brands positively tend to experience higher satisfaction because they feel confident in the quality and value they provide. Positive associations with brand image such as innovative, trustworthy, and premium create a sense of satisfaction even before real interaction with a product or service occurs [37].

The customer satisfaction that results from this positive perception is not only momentary, but also has a long-term impact on loyalty. In a market full of choices, consumers will be more likely to stick with brands whose image provides a sense of

security and emotional comfort [38].

Studies have shown that brand image is not only a strong predictor of customer satisfaction, but also strengthens a deeper emotional connection between customers and companies. The power of brand image creates a higher perception of value, which ultimately increases satisfaction levels significantly [39], [40].

4.3 The Effect of Customer Satisfaction on Customer Trust

The level of customer satisfaction with a product or service is the main foundation in building trust in the brand. A consistent positive experience will create the perception that the brand is able to meet expectations on an ongoing basis. In this process, satisfaction acts as a reinforcer of customer confidence in the integrity and capabilities of the service provider [41].

Satisfied customers will have an easier time trusting the brand because they already have tangible evidence of the quality offered. In addition, satisfying interactions also reinforce the perception that the company is fair, honest, and responsible. These elements collectively form the trust dimension in the customer-brand relationship. Satisfaction not only creates trust in the transactional aspect, but also at a deeper affective level, namely trust that is emotional. Consumers feel that brands not only meet their needs, but also care about their experience and well-being. This strengthens long-term loyalty and loyalty [42].

Recent research states that customer satisfaction significantly affects customer trust in various industry contexts. From online services to the financial services sector, the relationship between satisfaction and trust is proving to be strong and relevant, especially in the digital age where customer experience is a key focus for companies [43], [44], [45].

4.4 CSR as a Moderation of the Influence of Brand Image on Customer Satisfaction

A strong brand image reflects consumers' positive perception of the brand's value, quality, and characteristics. When companies integrate CSR into their brand strategy, it can reinforce those positive perceptions. Effective CSR can increase consumer confidence that companies are not only concerned with profits, but also with social and environmental welfare. CSR acts as a catalyst that strengthens the relationship between brand image and customer satisfaction. When consumers realize that a company is contributing positively to society, they tend to feel more satisfied with the products or services offered. This is because CSR adds emotional and ethical value to the brand's image, which in turn increases customer satisfaction.

However, the effectiveness of CSR as moderation depends on the extent to which consumers are aware of and appreciate the CSR initiative. If CSR is not communicated well or is considered insincere, then the impact on customer satisfaction can be minimal or even negative. Therefore, transparency and effective communication regarding CSR activities are essential. Research [46] suggests that CSR can strengthen the relationship between brand image and customer satisfaction, especially when CSR is perceived as authentic and relevant by consumers. This emphasizes the importance of an integrated CSR strategy that focuses on issues that are important to the company's

target market.

4.5 CSR as a Moderation of the Influence of Brand Image on Customer Trust

A positive brand image forms the basis of consumer trust in the company. When a company demonstrates a commitment to social responsibility, it can reinforce the perception that the company can be trusted and responsible. Consistent and transparent CSR reinforces consumers' belief that companies are not only focused on profit, but also on social values. CSR serves as an element that strengthens the relationship between brand image and consumer trust. Relevant and positively impactful CSR initiatives can improve consumers' perception of the company's integrity and ethics. This, in turn, deepens consumer trust in the brand.

However, if CSR is considered a mere marketing effort without any real commitment, it can damage consumer trust. Therefore, it is important for companies to ensure that their CSR activities are authentic and in line with the company's values. Research [47] suggests that CSR can strengthen the relationship between brand image and consumer trust, especially when CSR is considered a reflection of true company values. This emphasizes the importance of integration between brand strategy and CSR initiatives.

4.6 CSR as a Moderation of the Influence of Customer Satisfaction on Customer Trust

Customer satisfaction is often an early indicator of deeper trust in the company. When customers feel satisfied with a product or service, they are likely to develop trust in the company. However, this trust can be further strengthened through CSR initiatives that demonstrate the company's commitment to social values. CSR can strengthen the relationship between customer satisfaction and trust by showing that the company cares about issues that matter to customers. When customers see that a company is contributing positively to society, they are likely to feel that the company is trustworthy and has integrity.

However, the effectiveness of CSR as moderation in this relationship depends on the customer's perception of the authenticity and relevance of the CSR initiative. If CSR is considered insincere or irrelevant, then the impact on customer trust can be minimal. Research [48] suggests that CSR can strengthen the relationship between customer satisfaction and trust, especially when CSR initiatives align with customer values and expectations. This emphasizes the importance of a deep understanding of customer values in designing a CSR strategy.

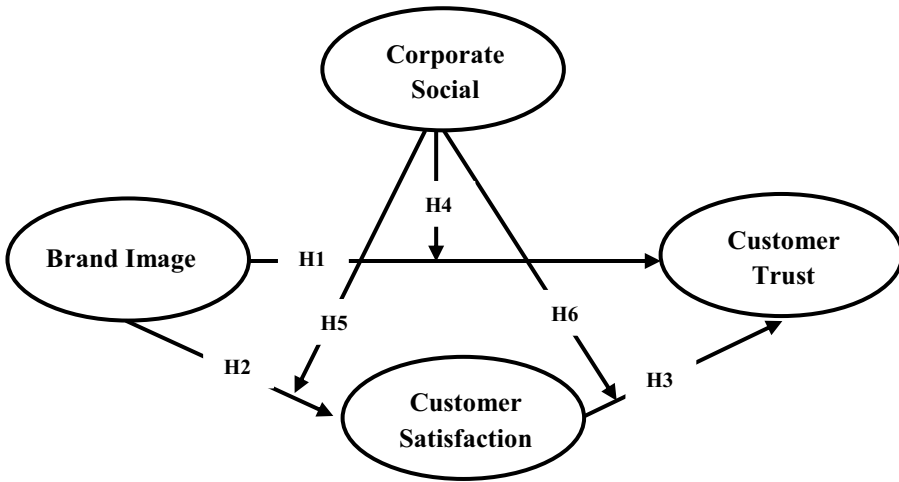


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

Based on theoretical studies and the results of previous research, a framework of thought was formulated that describes the relationship between the main variables in this study. The framework explains how brand image and corporate social responsibility (CSR) play a role in shaping customer satisfaction and subsequently influencing customer trust. In addition, this model also shows the direct and indirect relationships between variables, thus providing a more comprehensive picture of the mechanisms underlying the influence of CSR and brand image on consumer trust. The framework of this research can be seen in the following Image." This study explains that Brand Image has a direct effect on Customer Trust (H1) and Customer Satisfaction (H2). Furthermore, Customer Satisfaction also affects Customer Trust (H3), which shows that customer satisfaction can strengthen trust in the brand. In addition, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is assumed to have an important role in building these relationships, with a direct influence on Brand Image (H4), Customer Trust (H5), and Customer Satisfaction (H6). Overall, the framework illustrates how a company's brand image and social responsibility can increase customer satisfaction and trust, ultimately strengthening the relationship between the company and consumers.

5 Conclusion

This research reveals that CSR plays an important role in strengthening the relationship between Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction, and Customer Trust. A positive brand image serves as the basis for forming consumer trust in the company. However, these relationships can be strengthened through transparent and relevant CSR initiatives. CSR serves as a reinforcer, which shows that the company is not only focused on profit but also on social responsibility, which increases customer

satisfaction and trust. In this case, CSR not only improves the brand image but also strengthens the emotional connection with customers. This research also highlights the importance of effective and authentic communication in the implementation of CSR, so that its impact on customer satisfaction and trust can be maximized. Additionally, well-executed CSR can have a long-term positive impact on consumer loyalty, especially in a highly competitive market. Therefore, companies are advised to strategically integrate CSR in their business models, to create mutually beneficial relationships with consumers, strengthen trust and increase the competitiveness of the company.

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