

Understanding Consumers' Attitudes and Behavioural Intentions towards Corporate Social Responsibility in the Airline Industry: The Role of Perceived Value and Expectations

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Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to investigate consumers' attitudes and behavioural intentions towards corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices in the airline industry by exploring the role of consumers' perceived values and expectations towards CSR initiatives in the airline industry. Data collected from airline industry customers, were used to empirically test the role of consumer values and expectations in relation to the attitudes and behavioural intentions towards CSR initiatives. Results indicate that consumer perceptions of value dimensions and CSR expectations have a significant positive effect on customer attitudes when purchasing services in the airline industry. Results also indicate that customer attitudes have a significant positive relationship with consumers' purchase intentions in the airline industry. The paper offers valuable insights to airline company managers with on how CSR initiatives can be used towards increasing companies' value proposition.

Keywords: CSR expectations, Airline Industry, perceived value

1 Introduction

The context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been argued over 50 years, and it has never been this vital for companies even before this time [1]. Also, consumer support for CSR is well established and companies are now expected to engage in some form of CSR [2]. Over the last 25 years, consumers have become much more aware of the environmental issues caused by human activity [3]. There is a growing interest towards companies that in relation to their social responsibility whilst doing business [2]. Tourism sector has received a significant attention at this point that while providing economic and social benefits to the society, it also has negative impacts socially, economically and environmentally [3]. As the industry is expected to grow significantly, pressure on the companies within the sector for socially responsible tactics is also increasing [4]. Within the tourism sector, airline industry has at-

tracted consumers' attention in relation to socially responsible tactics within its businesses [3]. For this reason, there is a growing interest among the society towards the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives within the airline industry and companies are now expected to engage in some form of CSR [5].

CSR literature, suggests that expectations and values are important factors for understanding consumers' behaviours towards socially responsible companies and their CSR initiatives. Consumers' evaluation of CSR initiatives can be related to consumers' expectations; consumer's expectations on CSR initiatives are one of the variables that affect society's opinion about companies [6], [7]. In addition, literature suggests that consumers' behaviours may be dependent on the value they receive from a specific service/ product [8], [9], [10]. However, none of the studies has explicitly measured consumers' perceived values and expectations from CSR within the airline industry [10]. For this reason, the current study focuses on the consumers' attitudes and behavioural intentions in order to underpin the reasoning behind the consumer behaviour towards CSR initiatives in the airline industry. The roles of values and expectations have examined in order to explore both attitudes and behavioural intentions of the airline industry consumers.

2 Theoretical Background

Although CSR importance is increasing, there is still no clear identification for CSR in the literature [11], [12]. The reason can be the unclear boundaries and debatable legitimacy, or different definitions and unidentified corporate benefit of it [13]. Among the dispute about the CSR and its borders, Carroll's [14] four-part model of CSR (The Pyramid of CSR) is a widely accepted approach [1], [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23], [24], [25], [26]. Although many researchers have used Carroll's [14] four categories of CSR in the past, it still carries some weaknesses that identified by Schwartz and Carroll [27]. However, because of its incomplete structure and the increasing need to provide better and much clearer definition for the four-part approach, Schwartz and Carroll [27] provided a revised version of the pyramid of CSR by Carroll [14]: The Three-Domain Model of CSR. The three-domain model consists of 3 domains (Economic, Legal, and Ethical) which, in total, include 7 sub-categories: (i) purely economic, (ii) purely legal, (iii) purely ethical, (iv) economic/ethical, (v) economic/legal, (vi) legal/ethical, (vii) economic/legal/ethical [27]. The current study employs the revised Three-Domain Model [27], to empirically investigate CSR and its relationship with consumer attitude and purchase intentions in airline industry.

2.1 CSR Initiatives in Airline Industry

There is a growing interest towards CSR initiatives in the airline industry in order to decrease the negative effects of the industry and contribute to sustainable development [3], [25]. However, there isn't enough number of studies that explore CSR practice in the airline industry, and additionally the industry's adaptation of CSR has been relatively slower compared to the one in other industries [5] and it is still considered

very limited [4]. Most of the studies towards CSR initiatives in airline industry focus on specific case studies [4], environmental management or limited aspects of CSR [25] and tend to have a limited depth in order to provide an overview towards the CSR initiatives in airline industry.

2.2 Consumers' Perceived Value Dimensions and CSR initiatives

In the marketing literature, perceived value has been identified as one of the most important measures for gaining competitive edge [28] and it has been argued to be the most vital indicator of purchase intentions. However, in the leisure and tourism services, including the airline industry, attitudes, purchase intentions and consumer loyalty are usually forecasted by measuring consumer satisfaction and/or service quality [29]. Woodruff [30] concluded that, perceived value that underlines customer evaluation has to be taken in to consideration in order to forecast consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Some studies suggest that the value consumers receive from CSR is variable [10] and consumer behaviour may be dependent on the value they receive [6], [8], [9], [10].

Prior studies in the literature also agree that consumer perceived value is an important pointer of the purchase intentions and attitudes [30], [31], [30], [29]. Since consumer perceived value has been found to be an important pointer of purchase intentions and attitudes, consumers' perceived values need to be examined in order to understand consumer attitudes and behaviour intentions towards CSR initiatives in airline industry. Seth et al. [32] suggest 5 different dimensions: (a) social, (b) emotional, (c) functional, (d) epistemic and (e) conditional value, regarding purchase decision at a product level or at a brand level. Their work gives the most useful foundation in the literature for extending existing value constructs since it was also validated in many fields including economics, social and clinical psychology [33]. Based on Seth et al. [32] framework for values, Green and Peloza [10] argued that CSR could provide 3 types of values for the customers; emotional value, social value and functional value: (a) emotional value is received when a consumer buys a product/ service that incorporate social or environmental attributes; (b) social value occurs from purchases related to companies that are applying CSR initiatives. This is due to the fact that people are making judgments about each other on the basis of their purchases and lastly, and (c) functional value, which is the benefit that consumers receive from the actual product or service that has been purchased.

2.3 Consumers' Expectations of CSR Initiatives

Expectations are playing an essential role in many types of consumer decisions (Creyer, 1997)⁶ and they are linked with CSR [7]. In the last decade, CSR issues have become a major driver for society's opinion [34] and as Creyer [6], consumers form expectations about the ethicality of corporate behaviour. Expectations towards CSR initiatives are increasing and consumers are intolerant towards companies, which are failing to do their obligations [34]. The evaluation of CSR initiatives by consumers can be defined via the consumer expectations [34], since the consumer expectations

are one of the variables that affect society's attitudes about companies [6], [7]. Consumers' expectations of CSR represent the minimum level of CSR initiatives that companies are expected to apply. On the other hand, recent studies suggest that consumer beliefs and expectations of CSR actually form consumer responses towards corporate behaviour [6], [7]. Consumer beliefs and expectations of CSR actually form the consumer responses towards corporate behaviour [6], [7]. In addition, consumers tend to project their expectations and concerns into their behaviour towards companies [35], [36]. Specifically, consumer expectations towards CSR initiatives significantly impact the consumer behaviour towards the companies [6], [37].

2.4 Consumer Attitudes, Behavioural Intentions and CSR Initiatives

Many studies support a positive relationship between CSR and consumer attitudes along with positive affective, cognitive and behavioural responses [38], [39], [40]. Also, it is suggested that some consumers pursue purchases based on company's engagement with CSR initiatives. Consumers have a supportive attitude towards companies which are involved in CSR initiatives and/or companies that are well known to have higher level of support and connection with the community. On the other hand, some studies suggest that CSR applications are not accepted easily by consumers and that the consequences (reward or punishment towards the company) when involving in CSR initiatives are still unknown [41], [6], [42]. Finally, some studies suggest that consumers punish the firms that are not considered sincere [42]. This inconsistency might be due to the fact that there is a significant range of consumer reactions and different ways to develop attitudes when it comes to CSR initiatives [10]. Thus, it also makes sense that different attitudes evoke variance in behavioural intentions, which could lead to important implications for the companies engaging in CSR initiatives.

As Green and Peloza [10] suggest, consumers assess how companies' CSR behaviour matches their own values, morals, standards, expectations and priorities and how CSR initiatives can add extra value to their purchase. In sum, following what is written in existing literature on the CSR practices, the consumers' expectations and perceived value of CSR related services, and in relation to their behaviour, this study aims to offer new knowledge and data in a quite neglected area, the airline industry. For this purpose, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1:** Consumers' perception of value dimensions when purchasing services involving CSR initiatives positively affect consumers' attitudes towards CSR initiatives in the airline industry.
- H2:** Consumer expectations from CSR initiatives in the airline industry positively affect consumers' attitudes towards CSR initiatives in the airline industry.
- H3:** Consumers' attitudes towards CSR initiatives in the airline industry positively affect consumers' purchase intentions towards services involving CSR initiatives in the airline industry.

3 Methodology and Results

A conclusive research design was selected in order to examine the relationships described in the conceptual framework. Convenience sampling was employed and an online questionnaire was developed and distributed via the social networks; 201 respondents agreed to participate. The sample consisted of 41.3% male and 58.7% female, similar to the gender structure of the airline industry customers [26]. The questionnaire was pretested in order to increase the validity and reliability and a pilot survey was conducted. The scale proposed by Kolodinsky et al. [43] was adopted to measure attitudes towards CSR in airline industry while the PERVAL scale [44] was used to measure the three consumer perceived value elements (functional, social and emotional), which can be gained via CSR initiatives [10]. The scale for measuring expectations towards CSR initiatives in airline industry was taken from [6] and purchase intention was measured with the use of the scale taken from David et al. [45] study. All variables were measured on 7-point scales ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7).

All scales were proved to be reliable and internally consistent (Cronbach’s alpha index) and the summated multi-item scales were constructed based on the mean scores [46]. Moreover, all measures were found to be unidimensional and valid in terms of both discriminant and convergent validity. To check the validity of our research hypotheses and the significance of all causal relationships of the model, we followed SEM analysis. According to the results (Table 1) there is a good fit of the hypothesized model to our data, and all hypotheses are accepted. Consistent with the previous findings, the significance tests for the path coefficients indicate a significant positive influence of all tested variables on Consumers’ attitudes towards CSR initiatives. Moreover, the latter were found to positively affect customers’ purchase intentions.

Table 1. Fit Indices and Path Coefficients

Path Model	CFI =0.90, RMSEA=0.07	Std. Beta	t-value	Sig.
PV → CA		0.13	4.33	< 0.05
CE → CA		0.09	2.25	< 0.05
CA → PI		0.52	3.14	< 0.05

Note: Customer Perception of Value (PV); Customer Attitude (CA); Purchase Intentions (PI)

4 Discussion

Even though there is a growing interest, there still aren’t enough studies on CSR practices in the airline industry [4] [5]. Also, the studies towards CSR initiatives in airline industry have a limited depth and are insufficient to provide an overview towards the CSR initiatives in airline industry [3]. This study contributes to the marketing litera-

ture by providing an insight to the consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions towards CSR practices in the airline industry via examining consumer perceived values and expectations. To begin with, this study revealed that the CSR practices in the airline industry increases the perceived quality of the airline companies, and it supports the idea that CSR initiatives is a useful tool for marketing tactics that aim to increase the perceived value of the airline companies. Moreover, data analysis revealed that there is a positive between consumers' attitudes towards CSR initiatives in the airline industry and consumers' purchase intentions in relation to services involving CSR initiatives in the airline industry. The results were consistent with the existing literature [47], [48], [49], and stressed out the role of attitudes as a significant predictor of purchase intentions within the airline industry. Expectations were also found to be a significant predictor of attitudes towards the companies with CSR initiatives in the airline industry. Airline companies can benefit from market research in order to thoroughly investigate consumers' profile and, thus, can determine the level of investment that is required in order to meet consumers' expectations. This can lead to the creation of favorable attitudes towards the company and, in turn, to increased purchase intentions. Advertising and promotion campaigns can also increase the perceived value of the consumers by focusing on the CSR initiatives of the company within the airline industry. Future research could be directed towards the CSR expectations research in the airline industry. Specifically, the development of a new scale to measure consumer expectations for CSR initiatives could increase the efficiency of measuring the expectations within airline industry.

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