



A Study on Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Image in Young Professionals in Davao City, Philippines

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the relationship between the effects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on brand image among young professionals in Davao City. The study used a descriptive-correlational research design. It used an adapted and modified questionnaire for 150 young professionals in Davao City as the study's respondents. It was identified by using a simple random sampling technique. The results were treated statistically using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Furthermore, the study revealed the effects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and a very high brand image among young professionals in Davao City. Additionally, correlation analysis results revealed a significant relationship between the level of effects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and brand image among young professionals in Davao City. The findings of this study demonstrate the critical role that corporate social responsibility (CSR), which includes both ethical and philanthropic components, plays in influencing and strengthening young professionals' perceptions of a company's brand image. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs can be formulated using these insights, allowing businesses to meet societal expectations and improve their brand's reputation.

Keywords

Corporate social responsibility, Brand image, Young professionals, Descriptive-correlational design, Davao City, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the world has contracted into a global village, wherein prominent international brands have fortified their presence across the mosaic of national boundaries, permeating diverse sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, retail, and consumption (Barić, Omazić, and Aleksić 2019). This ubiquity has engendered a complex milieu where the management of competitive dynamics significantly shapes stakeholder engagement with global brands (Roblek, Meško, and Krapež 2018; Kolić and Barišić 2019). In this intricate tapestry, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerges as a fulcrum for competitive differentiation (Smith 2020). Astute businesses are channeling billions into CSR initiatives and philanthropy, targeting minority support as a linchpin for curating an illustrious corporate image (Markota, Omazić, and Aleksić 2018). CSR transcends its traditional role as a barometer for societal welfare—addressing critical issues such as hunger, poverty, environmental stewardship, and labor conditions—to become a strategic instrument that is poised to augment brand equity and overall corporate triumph (Zapata-Ramos and Kim 2018). This paradigmatic shift positions CSR not merely as a metric of social well-being but as a strategic imperative that intertwines ethical imperatives with the corporate pursuit of success.

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the 21st century, it has become imperative for corporations to adapt to the dynamic interplay between social expectations and corporate conduct. Amidst this backdrop, companies are increasingly expected to assume a broader spectrum of responsibilities, transcending traditional business models. CSR emerges as a pivotal strategy in this context, facilitating differentiation in products and services that aligns with contemporary consumer consciousness (Liu, Tse, and He 2022). This differentiation is not merely about commanding premium pricing but also about cultivating a corporate ethos that resonates with values-driven market segments.

The passage of time has not only heightened the significance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) but has also crystallized its utility as a strategic business asset (Kang and Namkung 2018; Ma and Kaplanidou 2021). In the contemporary business milieu, CSR initiatives serve as a cornerstone for brand equity, crafting a resonant image that favorably influences consumer perception. The dual role of CSR extends beyond image crafting to act as a lever for revenue enhancement and acceleration of business growth. This trajectory is underpinned by the burgeoning consumer consciousness towards socially and environmentally responsible products and practices (Woo and Jin 2018). As such, CSR has emerged as an essential framework within which businesses calibrate their conduct, strategic orientations, and objectives (Chen and Hussain 2019). Despite its recognized importance, there remains a paucity of empirical clarity regarding the distinct influence of each CSR facet—economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic—on corporate branding outcomes. Therefore, there is a compelling imperative for future scholarly inquiry to elucidate and empirically substantiate the interrelations among these CSR dimensions and their collective impact on brand performance metrics (Chen and Hussain 2019; Safeer and Liu 2023).

Consumers today exhibit a sophisticated palette of preferences, with a growing segment demonstrating a penchant for ethically conceived products. These consumers are not only interested in the ethical aspects of production but are also drawn to products that manifest attributes of social responsibility, particularly in the realm of product innovation. Such strategic CSR initiatives are integral to the development of a company's repertoire, enhancing the intrinsic and perceived value of its offerings (Hafez 2018). By imbuing products and services with distinctive features that reflect consumer values, businesses can carve out a unique position in the competitive market landscape.

It is essential to acknowledge that the avenues for achieving such differentiation are manifold, encompassing various facets of business operations such as system distribution, product design, brand image, technological integration, and after-sales service (Phan, Le, Duong, and Phan 2021). These elements collectively contribute to a distinctive brand identity and value proposition that can be leveraged to garner consumer loyalty and competitive advantage. Furthermore, the concept of the social contract, which forms the foundational basis for interactions between businesses and the society in which they operate, is subject to continuous evolution, shaped by shifting societal norms (Liu, Wilsom, Plumley, and Chen 2019). In this dynamic interplay, a firm not only demarcates legal parameters for its operations but also engages in a process of self-reflection, acknowledging its wider responsibilities and actions. Through such engagement, a firm not only legitimizes its existence but also reinforces its commitment to societal welfare and sustainable development, thus redefining the parameters of its corporate identity in the eyes of its stakeholders (Lim, Kang, and Kim 2018). Such a strategic approach to CSR is indicative of a deep-seated recognition of the symbiotic relationship between business imperatives and societal well-being, an ethos that is increasingly becoming a hallmark of successful and sustainable business practices in the contemporary global economy.

Generally speaking, one of the biggest concerns for stakeholders is whether or not a certain brand will live up to expectations (Liu, Tse and He 2022; Swaen, Demoulin, and Pauwels-Delassus 2021). Regarding a company's ability to create value, the literature also names brand reputation as one of its most important resources (Chen and Lin 2020). For the major stakeholders to ascertain a brand's fundamental reputation, input from the market and industry is essential (Mahmood and Bashir 2020). Customers in the twenty-first century may now obtain comprehensive information about a product or service thanks to social media. A company's reputation is increasingly linked to brand equity, another organizational asset. Because building brand equity may boost the return on marketing efforts, so the study of brands and equity for organizations is becoming increasingly important (Lee, Bang, and Shonk 2021).

Moreover, consumers learn about brands by seeing their manifestations; the more a brand adheres to its original concept and is cohesive, the easier it will be for them to grasp (Liu and Schwarz, 2020; Yang, Basile, and Letourneau, 2020). As a result, a company's reputation plays a crucial role in developing brand equity. However, to maintain this relationship, a moderator who can positively impact it is needed, and this is where CSR comes in (Liu, Tse, and He 2022). A company's improved reputation and image through its CSR efforts and actions eventually translate into brand equity (Kim and Ham 2018). Therefore, brand equity and CSR are closely related in the modern corporate structure. Big international corporations today understand that it is hard to develop consumer brands if you do not take social responsibility seriously and don't address societal issues. However, it is also crucial that businesses only act appropriately in social situations when there is a chance that their operations will expand (Kim, Yin, and Lee, 2020).

The lack of local literature significantly contributed to the desire to have a better understanding of CSR and brand image, specifically among young professionals. Thus, the researchers are interested in discovering more about the effects of CSR on brand image among young professionals in Davao City. The main objective of this study is to determine the relationship between CSR and brand image among young professionals in Davao City. Specifically, this study aims to (1) present the profile of respondents in terms of age, sex, civil status, and corporate industry; (2) determine the level of CSR among young professionals in Davao City in terms of ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility; (3) determine the level of brand image among young professionals in Davao City; and lastly, (4) determine if there exists a significant relationship between CSR and brand image among young professionals in Davao City.

METHOD

Respondents

The research respondents of this study were young professionals in Davao City, the largest city in Mindanao Island, Philippines. A selection of participants from a population would be chosen at random by the researcher using simple random sampling. Simple random sampling is a type of probability sampling in which each member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen (Hayes 2021). In this study, certain inclusion criteria were implemented to determine the respondents. The respondents of this study were aged at least 18 years old, either male or female, could be single, married, or widowed, and voluntarily gave their permission to participate in the research. Otherwise, young professionals outside Davao City were excluded from the study.

Instruments

The researchers administered an adapted and modified questionnaire from the study by Hai Thuy and Minh (2020). It contains three sections that determine the profile of the respondents and the questions for the indicators as well. The profile contained the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, such as age, sex, civil status, income, and corporate industry. In this study, responses on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree, were used to indicate respondents' levels of agreement with a particular question item.

As a guide in determining the level of CSR among young professionals in Davao City, the researchers used a scale, range of means, descriptive levels, and interpretations as presented below:

Scale	Range of Means	Descriptive Level	Interpretation
5	4.20 – 5.00	Very High	CSR manifestation among young professionals is extremely high.
4	3.40 – 4.19	High	CSR manifestation among young professionals is high.
3	2.60 – 3.39	Moderate	CSR manifestation among young professionals is moderate.
2	1.80 – 2.59	Low	CSR manifestation among young professionals is low.
1	1.00 – 1.79	Very Low	CSR manifestation among young professionals is extremely low.

Meanwhile, in determining the level of brand image among young professionals in Davao City, the researchers used a scale, range of means, descriptive levels, and interpretations as presented below:

Scale	Range of Means	Descriptive Level	Interpretation
5	4.20 – 5.00	Very High	Brand image manifestation among young professionals is extremely high.
4	3.40 – 4.19	High	Brand image manifestation among young professionals is high.
3	2.60 – 3.39	Moderate	Brand image manifestation among young professionals is moderate.
2	1.80 – 2.59	Low	Brand image manifestation among young professionals is low.
1	1.00 – 1.79	Very Low	Brand image manifestation among young professionals is extremely low.

Design and Procedure

The researchers utilized the quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to gather data ideas, facts, and information related to the study. Creswell (2018) defines descriptive-correlational design as a study that primarily outlines correlations between variables without attempting to prove a causal connection. This study mainly focused on determining the relationship between CSR and brand image among young professionals in Davao City. In this study, descriptive correlation was appropriate since the researchers only focused on the behavioral aspect of the respondents.

To gather the needed data for the study's hypothesis, the secured letter of permission for the approval to conduct a study from the College of Business Administration Education of the University of Mindanao. After securing approval from the Dean and the research advisory committee, the researchers constructed the survey questionnaire adopted from two different scales and subjected the same for validation by experts. A pilot test involving 30 respondents was carried out to ensure reliability of the items. The adapted scales were found to have acceptable reliability values (Revelle 2023), wherein scale to measure corporate social responsibility obtained Cronbach's α of 0.925 and McDonald's ω of 0.929, while five-item brand image scale obtained Cronbach's α of 0.894 and McDonald's ω of 0.895.

After the pilot test, the researchers distributed the survey questionnaires to possible respondents in either face-to-face or online survey modality. A total of 336 respondents were contacted, but only 150 respondents were able to accomplish the survey with valid responses (valid response rate of 44.64%). The data generated from the survey were exported in spreadsheet software before subjecting to statistical analysis. All necessary analyses were performed in JAMOVI software (The JAMOVI Project 2023; R Core Team 2022).

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted contingent to the approval of the University of Mindanao College of Business Administration Education dated May 12, 2023, with approval number 303-0152024-0567. All ethical standards were complied before the administration of the survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

The distribution of survey respondents by various socio-demographic factors is shown in Table 1. The use of a thorough profiling approach makes it easier to understand the demographic and socioeconomic traits of the participants, placing their responses within the larger context of the study.

The age distribution indicates a clear skewness towards the younger population, with 42% of respondents falling within the 18-25 age bracket and the majority (53.3%) in the 26-36 age range. The proportion of individuals aged 36 years and above is small, comprising only 4.7% of the overall sample. Regarding gender distribution, the proportion of female respondents (53.3%) is marginally higher than that of male respondents (45.3%). A small proportion (1.3%) of participants opted to withhold their gender information, thereby promoting the incorporation of a wide range of viewpoints.

Table 1 Descriptive profile of the respondents (N=150)

Profile	f	%
Age		
18-25 years old	63	42
26 to 36 years old	80	53.3
above 36 years old	7	4.7
Sex		
male	68	45.3
female	80	53.3
prefers not to say	2	1.3
Civil Status		
single	127	84.7
married	22	14.7
widow(er)	1	0.7
Income		
Php 15,000 below	70	46.7
Php 15,001 to 30,000	56	37.3
above Php 30,000	24	16
Corporate Industry		
financial services	3	2
commerce	18	12
education	18	12
financial services	11	7.3
food	13	8.7
health services	16	10.7
tourism	3	2
media	5	3.3
public services	25	16.7
transport	5	3.3
utility	2	1.3
others	31	20.7

Also, a significant proportion of the participants self-identified as unmarried, constituting 84.7% of the total respondents. A significantly smaller percentage of individuals indicated being married (14.7%), while an insignificant portion identified themselves as a widow(er) (0.7%). As to respondents' income, a notable percentage (46.7%) of individuals earn a sum of Php 15,000 or less. The subsequent significant income bracket comprises individuals earning between Php 15,001 and Php 30,000, accounting for 37.3% of the population. The segment of participants with a higher income bracket, specifically those earning above Php 30,000, accounts for 16% of the total population.

Finally, the distribution among various corporate industries exhibits greater diversity. The category labeled "others" comprises the largest group, accounting for 20.7%. This finding indicates the involvement of professionals from various industries not explicitly mentioned in the data. The "public services" category also exhibits a noteworthy representation of 16.7%. Additional noteworthy sectors encompass health services, accounting for 10.7% of the overall industry landscape, and commerce and education, which contribute 12% to the economic framework. Certain industries, such as financial services, tourism, media, transport, and utility, exhibit comparatively lower levels of representation, with each sector comprising less than 10% of the overall respondents.

Perceived Level of Corporate Social Responsibility Among Young Professionals

Table 2 presents a comprehensive overview of the descriptive statistics about the perceptions regarding the degree of corporate social responsibility (CSR). These perceptions are further classified into two distinct indicators: ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility. The ratings were evaluated using a standardized scale, and the statistical measures of mean scores, standard deviations (SD), and their respective interpretations for each category were provided.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics results for corporate social responsibility indicators (N=150)

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Ethical Responsibility	4.62	0.55	very high
Philanthropic Responsibility	4.36	0.61	very high
Overall	4.49	0.541	very high

The respondents assigned a mean score of 4.62 to ethical responsibility (SD=0.55). This finding indicates that many participants believed that companies have a strong ethical obligation, rating it as important. The narrow range of the standard deviation suggests a prevailing agreement among participants regarding the importance of ethical responsibility in corporate social responsibility (CSR). Concerning philanthropic responsibility, it also received a notably high rating, as evidenced by its mean score of 4.36 (SD=0.61). This indicates that, on average, participants perceive philanthropic endeavors by companies as highly valuable and essential to their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Compared to ethical responsibility, the marginally larger standard deviation indicates a slightly wider range of responses yet still demonstrates a significant tendency towards the "very high" interpretation.

The average value for the extent of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is reported as 4.49, accompanied by a standard deviation of 0.541. This comprehensive score integrates the evaluations of both ethical and philanthropic obligations. The interpretation of this score as "very high" aligns with the sentiments expressed in the individual indicators, highlighting the significant importance that young professionals attribute to corporate social responsibility in the contemporary business environment. The findings validated Smith's (2020) claim that every brand may employ CSR as a competitive advantage. This aligns with the claim made by Zapata-Ramos and Kim (2018) that CSR, as a strategy, affects a company's overall performance and, more specifically, is anticipated to increase brand equity.

Perceived Level of Brand Image among Young Professionals

The data presented in Table 3 highlights the significance and value that young professionals place on brand image within the current corporate environment. The data provided includes the average score, standard deviation (SD), and an associated interpretation of the overall brand image.

The average score for the perception of brand image is 4.35, indicating that respondents generally consider the importance of brand image to be "very high". The standard deviation of 0.630, while relatively small, suggests that there is a certain degree of variability in the responses. However, it should be noted that the deviation observed in the data is not significantly large. This suggests that there is a relative consensus among the respondents regarding their perception of the significant importance of brand image. In addition, the very high rating implies that the brand image is not merely a superficial or secondary concern for this particular demographic, but rather is regarded as a crucial element in their evaluation and perception of corporations or products. For companies that are focused on attracting or hiring young professionals, these findings emphasize the importance of developing and sustaining a robust and favorable brand image that can effectively connect with this demographic.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics results for brand image items (N=150)

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Brand Image	4.35	0.630	Very High

The result of the study is consistent with the study of Liu, Tse, and He (2022) that brand image is extremely important to building brand equity. In addition, the results of the study also supported the claim of Lee, Bang, and Shonk (2021) that brand image is significant since it increases the return on marketing expenditures.

The Relationship between CSR and Brand Image Among Young Professionals

Table 4 displays the findings of a Pearson correlation study that looks at the relationships between CSR and its indicators and overall brand image. The Pearson correlation coefficients, along with their corresponding p-values, and subsequent determinations regarding the null hypothesis (Ho), are consistently presented for each corporate social responsibility (CSR) indicator.

Table 4 Test of significant relationship between CSR and brand image

Corporate Social Responsibility	Brand Image		
	r_{xy}	p-value	Decision
ethical responsibility	.644**	<0.001	Reject Ho
philanthropic responsibility	.669**	<0.001	Reject Ho

The analysis of the ethical responsibility component of corporate social responsibility (CSR) revealed a significant correlation with brand image, as indicated by a coefficient of .644 ($p < 0.05$). The observed p-value, which is below the threshold of 0.001, provides additional evidence supporting the existence of a statistically significant relationship. Based on the obtained p-value, it is appropriate to reject the null hypothesis, indicating a statistically significant positive association between ethical responsibility and brand image.

Fundamentally, when ethical responsibility is perceived to be higher or regarded more favorably, there is a concomitant rise or improvement in brand image, and conversely. This is consistent with the pronouncements of Kim, Yin, and Lee (2020), wherein young professionals are seen to highly value the principles of organizational honesty, openness, and ethical compliance. The presence of ethical principles is becoming widely recognized as a defining characteristic of authentic corporate identity, resulting in heightened trust and a more positive brand image within this specific group of individuals (Mahmood and Bashir 2020). In addition, the results of the study agreed with Reikosky (2023) that the diligent endeavor of corporations to uphold ethical practices not only fulfills moral obligations but also enhances their brand resonance among young professionals.

The philanthropic responsibility component of corporate social responsibility (CSR) demonstrates a notably higher association with brand image, as indicated by a coefficient of .669. This finding also demonstrates statistical significance at the 0.05 level. The statistical significance of the p-value, which is less than 0.001, provides strong evidence for the durability and strength of this association. The rejection of the null hypothesis regarding philanthropic responsibility reaffirms the strong positive correlation between corporate philanthropic activities and their brand reputation. This suggests that organizations that are perceived as highly dedicated to philanthropic efforts are also more likely to have a positive brand image among the participants of the survey. This is consistent with the findings of Le (2022), highlighting those contemporary young professionals place importance on corporate altruism and community engagement, as they perceive these philanthropic endeavors as indicative of corporate authenticity, trustworthiness, and a favorable brand image.

Moreover, the results of the study agreed with the proposition of Mahmood and Bashir (2020) that engaging in philanthropic activities (in the case of small and medium enterprises) not only fulfills the needs of society but also strategically enhances the brand's reputation among this discerning demographic.

To summarize, there exists a robust and statistically significant positive correlation between both ethical and philanthropic responsibilities and brand image. The results of this study highlight the significant importance of CSR, encompassing both ethical and philanthropic aspects, in shaping and enhancing the perception of corporations' brand image among young professionals. These insights can play a crucial role for corporations in formulating their CSR initiatives, enabling them to not only fulfill societal expectations but also bolster their brand reputation.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the correlation between CSR and brand image within the demographic of young professionals residing in Davao City. The study's results demonstrated a significant impact of CSR on this specific demographic, particularly about ethical obligations and philanthropic endeavors. Additionally, the study's findings revealed a very high value of CSR among young professionals in terms of business in Davao City. Furthermore, a notable improvement in the perception of the brand's image was noted among this demographic of young professionals. The research effectively rejected the null hypothesis, providing evidence of a statistically significant association between CSR initiatives and the brand image perception among individuals in this demographic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Companies involved in CSR initiatives should customize their programs to align with the values and interests of young professionals, specifically those residing in Davao City. Given the demonstrated receptiveness of this particular demographic towards ethical and philanthropic endeavors, companies must accord utmost importance to transparency, ethical conduct, and initiatives that benefit the community. By emphasizing these aspects within their CSR initiatives, organizations have the potential to enhance their brand image and foster loyalty among young professionals. In addition, it is advisable for companies to actively involve themselves in direct interaction with this particular demographic by utilizing social media platforms and organizing community events. This approach serves the purpose of enhancing awareness and encouraging active engagement in their corporate social responsibility endeavors.

Academics, particularly those specializing in business, marketing, and social sciences, could use these discoveries to enhance their pedagogy and facilitate meaningful conversations regarding CSR. By integrating case studies and empirical evidence from this study, educators can provide students with tangible illustrations of how CSR impacts brand perception, specifically among the younger professionals. They could foster student involvement in research or projects that explore the dynamic nature of CSR across various industries and its potential impact on business strategies and brand establishment. This methodology has the potential to foster a cohort of individuals who possess a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental tenets and methodologies of socially responsible commerce.

Future researchers could investigate the dimensions of CSR that have the greatest impact on this specific demographic and examine potential variations in these preferences across various industries. Moreover, engaging in research collaborations with corporate entities can offer valuable practical perspectives on implementing effective CSR strategies and their influence on brand perception.

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