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## The Interplay of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Employees in the Convenience Store Sector, and Net Promoter Score (NPS) Impact

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## **The Interplay of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Employees in the Convenience Store Sector, and Net Promoter Score (NPS) Impact**

### **Abstract**

*In the realm of a convenience store business, this study aims to examine: 1) customer perceptions of CSR activities, employee behavior, and value congruity; 2) the potential impact of respondent demographics on CSR activities, employee behavior, value congruity, and the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses; 3) the relationships between CSR activities, employee behavior, and value congruity, and 4) the impact of CSR activities and gender on the likelihood of customer recommendation of the brand. Based on 2000 surveys from the loyalty members, the study found that CSR activities, employee behaviors, and value congruity are important for business success and are significantly correlated, which indicates synergistic relationships. Particularly, the strong correlation between value congruity and CSR activities supports the importance of congruity (or alignment) between customer values and CSR activities. The findings indicate that CSR activities are significant predictors of the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses. As the first study to show this relationship empirically, this paper discusses the implications of the findings.*

### **Introduction**

Since the 1970s, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a major concern for businesses, especially as consumers demand – and expect – that companies offer more than a high-quality product at a low price (Araujo et al., 2023). Also known as ESG (Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance), People/Planet/Profits, and the triple-bottom-line, CSR refers to a business paradigm that transcends the traditional sole focus on financial performance by additionally incorporating social and environmental issues.” The concept of

CSR continued to evolve over the decades, with a growing emphasis on environmental sustainability, ethical business practices, and the need for businesses to address social and environmental challenges. In response, companies have considered CSR as an important marketing tool (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020) to strategically position and differentiate the brands from those of competitor brands (Harjoto & Salas, 2017). CSR has become important in the business world because committing to socially responsible actions leads to positive outcomes for companies (Araujo et al., 2023). Furthermore, firms can employ CSR initiatives as strategic tools to effectively manage their interactions with key stakeholders (Lamberti & Lettieri, 2009). Companies engaging in CSR activities may gain potential benefits from their customers. For instance, if two brands offer similar pricing and quality, customers may be more likely to choose the brand actively involved in CSR activities (Servaes & Tamayo, 2013). Additionally, CSR offers societal benefits (Han et al., 2020) and serves as a lever for companies with a sustainability focus across economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Hiep et al., 2021).

Regarding the benefits of CSR for organizations, prior studies (Lamberti & Lettieri, 2009) indicate that firms could leverage CSR as a strategic tool in managing their relationships with key stakeholders. Furthermore, research (Jamali, 2008; Melo & Galan, 2011) suggests that synergistic interactions between brand equity<sup>1</sup> and CSR initiatives could generate added value for firms beyond the value created by brand equity alone. A study by Rahman et al. (2019) revealed that CSR plays a complementary role, positively moderating the relationship between corporate brand equity and firm performance. Earlier studies (e.g., Huang & Liu, 2020; Jung et al., 2018) also identify positive consequences for companies that are actively engaged in CSR activities. For example, the benefits of CSR activities include improved financial performance (Jung et al., 2018), increased stronger brand loyalty (e.g., Huang & Liu, 2020; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2020), increased competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2006), and better brand image and brand reputation (Kim & Ham, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2014).

Moreover, research indicates that companies are finding ways to make their products more environmentally friendly to increase their brand equity (Mehraj & Qureshi, 2021), thereby increasing the likelihood of customer repurchase. Dzipina et al., (2019) state that CSR policies can create mutual trust, satisfy customer needs, and subsequently induce purchases, which confirms that CSR is a significant factor in building brand equity. Research by Wang et al. (2015) indicates that awareness about the firm's CSR activities reinforces the brand's positive CSR associations. CSR perception can also contribute to favorable word-of-mouth (WOM) and purchase intention (e.g., Negassa & Japee, 2022). While these studies offer valuable insights into the potential outcomes and benefits for the companies implementing CSR, it remains unclear whether CSR has any impact on recommending a company or a brand to others. As WOM and recommendations are critical for sales growth and profitability, the main goal of this study is to examine the potential impact of CSR on the likelihood of recommending the brand and its relationship with net promoter score (NPS).

Prior studies indicate that consumption values serve as a significant predictor of satisfaction (e.g., Carlson et al., 2015; Lam et al., 2016), which has been widely acknowledged as a reliable predictor of satisfaction (Ryu & Han, 2009). This suggests that if consumers believe a brand is fulfilling their personal values, their satisfaction with that brand increases. Han

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<sup>1</sup> Brand equity is defined as “the commercial value that derives from consumer perception of the brand name of a particular product or service, rather than from the product or service itself.” It is the social value or perceived worth of a brand (Miller, 2020).

(2015) points out that consumers' purchases and consumption of environmentally friendly products are influenced by their values. Consumers will trust environmentally responsible firms if the firms can meet their values (Butt et al., 2017). This behavior can be explained by self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985) and the similarity attraction paradigm (Baron & Pfeffer, 1994). These theories suggest that, when customers find their values to be consistent or congruent with firm values and its CSR activities, this alignment tends to draw them towards brands that share these values. This, in turn, could influence consumers' purchase decisions (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Consequently, this study aims to investigate how well consumer values align with the CSR activities of firms, and how this alignment (congruity) affects the likelihood of recommending a brand.

In addition, this study examines the role of employees in implementing CSR activities. Several authors (i.e., Pinar et al., 2016; Ragheb et al., 2018) highlight the importance of employees in creating differentiation within an increasingly competitive environment. This suggests that employees must have a clear comprehension of the brand's promise and internalize its meanings and values. By doing so, employees can effectively convey the brand promise to external customers (Murillo & King, 2019; Pinar et al., 2016). Hence, it is essential to investigate whether customers perceive that a company's CSR commitments and employee behaviors are consistent with their personal values. In this regard, this study also examines the relationship between customer perceptions of the company's CSR activities and its employee behavior (i.e., friendliness and helpfulness) to determine whether these factors contribute to the likelihood of customer recommendation of the brand.

## **Theoretical Background**

Several prior studies investigated the relationship between CSR and various business activities, as well as the effects of CSR on consumer behavior and brand performance. For example, Araújo et al. (2023) studied how CSR influences brand image, brand equity, and consumer satisfaction. Their results show that CSR initiatives have a positive effect on consumer satisfaction through the mediating effect of brand image and brand equity. Moreover, they state that companies employing CSR initiatives experience improvements in both brand image and brand equity. Rahman et al. (2019) examined the relationship between corporate brand equity and firm performance and investigated the moderating effect of CSR strategy. They find that CSR plays a complementary role that positively moderates the relationship between corporate brand equity and firm performance. Based on their findings, Rahman et al. (2019) state that there is a positive synergistic interaction between brand equity and CSR, leading to increased long-term value beyond the direct impact of corporate brand equity. This indicates that CSR perception can influence consumer behavior, and create favorable WOM, purchase intention, and loyalty (Negassa & Japee, 2022). Moreover, research (Bolton & Park, 2022) studying the economic benefits of socially responsible actions has shown that CSR activities can contribute to the well-being of society and customers (Wang & Juslin, 2013).

Moreover, utilizing the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010), prior research (e.g., Shim et al., 2021) examined various dimensions of CSR, including customer, employee, environmental, and community issues. Several studies have also examined the positive outcomes for companies actively involved in CSR activities (e.g., Huang & Liu, 2020; Jung et al., 2018). For example, some of the beneficial outcomes of CSR activities for companies include improved financial performance (e.g., Jung et al., 2018), enhanced brand loyalty (e.g., Huang & Liu,

2020; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2020), improved brand image and brand reputation (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2014), and a decreased customer tendency to switch (Khan & Fatma, 2023). In addition, through CSR activities, companies may be able to enhance reputation and corporate image (e.g., Kodua et al., 2022), can positively affect brand equity (e.g., Cowan & Guzman, 2020; Zhao et al., 2021), and consumer satisfaction (e.g., Agyei et al., 2021). Furthermore, CSR has benefits for society (Han et al., 2020), where it could serve as a lever for companies with sustainability to focus on three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental (Hiep et al., 2021). Dzapina et al. (2019) state that CSR policies can create mutual trust, satisfy customer needs, and subsequently induce purchases, confirming the importance of CSR in building brand equity.

### **Consumer Value Congruity and CSR**

Climate change (MacMillan, 2020) has significantly influenced how consumers value products, leading companies to be more concerned about the environment and adopt “green strategies.” Prakash and Thakur (2023) argue that to understand the consumers’ desires for the products, brand managers need to understand consumers from behavioral perspectives (e.g., beliefs and values). In this regard, Tanrikulu (2021) states that values are widely acknowledged as the fundamental component of marketing. Schwartz (1992) defines values as a “desirable trans-situational goal varying in importance, serving as a guiding principle in the life of a person or other social entity” (p. 21). Consumer values influence consumer purchases and consumption of environmentally friendly products (Han, 2015) because consumers trust environmentally responsible firms if they meet their values (Butt et al., 2017). This can be explained by self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 2018), which suggests that the match between the brand image and the consumer’s self-concept positively influences consumption behavior, leading to favorable outcomes such as customer loyalty, brand trust, and positive WOM communication (Sirgy, 2019). Therefore, companies must understand consumer values in relation to their CSR activities and the potential impact of these values on consumer purchases.

Ha (2021), based on the “Value-Belief-Norm Theory” (VBN), asserts that personal values and beliefs are critical motivators of pro-environmental behavior. In this regard, customers could perceive the brand’s values as harmonious with their own values; thus, creating a congruity of their values with the brand’s values (Gagné & Deci, 2005). This suggests that if a brand aligns with consumers’ values, consumers may view the brand as favorable and beneficial (Dibley & Baker, 2003) and may consider purchasing it. Research by Butt et al. (2017) indicates that when consumers associate a brand with favorable environmental feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and actions, the brand is more likely to remain in their minds. Moreover, based on the Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 2018, 2029), the congruity (or alignment) between consumer values and CSR activities suggests that consumers’ desire to maintain and/or improve their self-concepts influences their product choices (Ha, 2021). This indicates the importance of consistency or congruity between customer values and CSR activities for the CSR strategies to be successful.

In addition, it is important that customer values be congruent with CSR activities. Research (Pinar et al., 2016; Xiong & King, 2015) indicates that when employees internalize and regard the brand as part of themselves, they contribute to the brand’s success through their brand-aligned behaviors. When consumers associate a brand with favorable environmental feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and actions (e.g., Butt et al., 2017), their values influence the



consumption of environmentally friendly products (Han, 2015). Based on self-congruity theory, an alignment or consistency of CSR activities with the values held by customers contributes to the success of CSR strategies. Therefore, the stronger the alignment of CSR activities with the values of customers, the more likely it is to realize the desired outcomes of CSR. Hence, this study aims to examine the alignment of CSR activities and customer values.

## **Role of Employees**

Traditionally, marketing has centered on external communication with customers, but recently the importance of employees as internal customers has been recognized. This prompted the need to internally promote the brand and brand-related values and activities (i.e., Barros-Arriete & Garcia-Cail, 2021). As a result, employees are considered key actors in establishments, as they play a pivotal role in achieving company objectives and cultivating brand equity (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Especially in service-oriented companies, employees are the visible face of the organization, (Piehler et al. 2016) and their behaviors directly influence the brand experience for customers (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015). A study by Baker et al. (2014) indicates that when employees perceive a brand's values as aligning with their own values, employees internalize and identify with that brand's entity as a standard of behavior. The focus on employees shows how internal branding is crucial in implementing CSR activities along with internal branding that supports the business strategy (Aurand et al., 2005).

It is suggested that the interactions between employees and customers significantly impact customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and finally, corporate brand equity (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016). One of the beneficial outcomes of CSR activities is that CSR can improve internal branding and marketing communications (e.g., Park et al., 2018). King and Grace (2012) point out that employees are important in brand management because they deliver the functional and emotional values of the brand through their interactions with customers. Xiong and King (2015) assert that, based on motivation theory, perceived alignment with brand values drives employees to internalize the brand and exhibit brand-aligned behaviors. This is no exception for implementing CSR strategies. Employees strongly influence how customers perceive the organization and its brand (e.g., Du Preez & Bendixen, 2019).

The above literature indicates that, given the importance of employees in implementing the business strategy, internal branding could help employees to understand and internalize the CSR strategies; thus, contributing to a successful implementation of CSR. This shows the importance of consistency or congruity between employee values and CSR activities for CSR strategies to be successful. When companies initiate CSR activities, they communicate their CSR activities with external branding to inform their external stakeholders, including customers. However, the successful implementation of CSR strategies depends on employees understanding and internalizing the CSR activities, as research suggests (e.g., King & Grace, 2012; Piehler et al., 2016; Pinar et al., 2016). This emphasizes the importance the necessity to promote the company's CSR strategies internally (Barros-Arriete & Garcia-Cail, 2021) and of employees and employees' involvement in the success of CSR activities. CSR and employee involvement can be viewed from the branding triangle framework (Pinar et al., 2016) where external branding communicates the CSR activities to customers, internal branding helps employees understand and internalize the CSR activities, and interactive branding delivers the CSR experience as promised by external marketing to the external stakeholders.

## Likelihood of Recommending and NPS

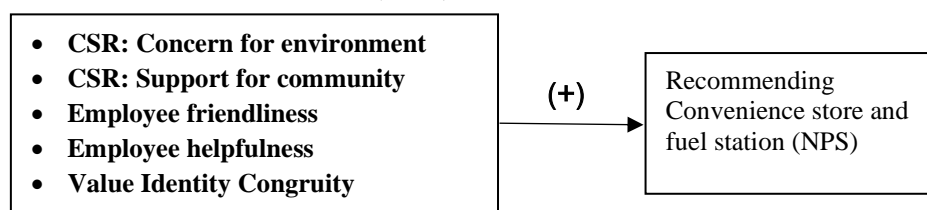
The existing literature presented above indicates that CSR benefits organizations and provides favorable outcomes. A study by Khan and Fatma (2023) found that consumer perception of CSR positively and directly influences brand trust, serving as a crucial mediator between CSR, brand image, and WOM. While studies allude to the impact of CSR on WOM, brand experience, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty (e.g., Dzapina et al., 2019), there is no specific research that investigates the effects of CSR on the likelihood of recommending the brands. Moreover, CSR provides positive benefits of better corporate reputation and image (e.g., Kodua et al., 2022), stronger brand equity (e.g., Zhao et al., 2021), and increased consumer satisfaction (e.g., Agyei et al., 2021; Prayag et al., 2019). It is reasonable to expect that these benefits of CSR would have a positive impact on recommending the brand and the company's net promoter score (NPS).

Prior research (Reichheld, 2003) indicates that NPS measures customer satisfaction and likelihood to recommend a product/brand, making it one of the best predictors of customer retention (de Haan et al., 2015). The NPS is measured by the question: On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely is it that you would recommend an organization, product, or service to a friend or colleague? (Reichheld, 2003, 2006). NPS is a method to predict referral and purchase behaviors (Rowe, 2021), which helps firms find loyal users (Rajasekaran & Dinesh, 2018). Several studies identified the factors that influence the likelihood of recommending a brand and the NPS. For example, Srirahuyu et al. (2021) found that loyalty directly affects NPS scores, but satisfaction exerts an indirect influence through its impact on loyalty. In a study, Eger and Micik (2017) identified satisfaction, trust, commitment, and/or re-purchase intention as the factors influencing the NPS and the likelihood of recommending a brand. However, despite extensive existing research, there has been no study linking CSR activities to NPS. This study intends to fill this void by examining the impact of CSR activities on the likelihood of recommending the brand, in turn, on NPS.

## Study Objectives

The study examines the customer perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities employees' behaviors, and value congruity within the context of convenience store business. In addition, it explores the impact of CSR activities on the likelihood of recommending the convenience store business (i.e., NPS). The NPS is a measure of customer satisfaction and loyalty proven to increase the likelihood of recommending the convenience store's products and services. In the study, the CSR activities included concerns for the environment and the community, and the employee behaviors included helpfulness and friendliness. Further, the study includes value identity congruity to examine the existence of an alignment between the customer and the firm's values and examines the impact of these values on the likelihood of recommending the brand. These factors and their proposed relationships are presented in *Figure 1*.

**Figure 1: Perception of CSR Activities and Employees and their Impact on Recommending Convenience Store and Fuel Station (NPS)**



The specific research objectives (ROs) of the study are to examine:

- RO1: The customer perceptions of CSR activities including concern for the environment and community, employee friendliness and helpfulness, and value congruity in relation to convenience stores and fuel business.
- RO2: If the customer perceptions of CSR activities, employee behavior, and value identity congruity significantly differ by gender, education, age, income, and whether they were a user of the loyalty card.
- RO3: The relationships between the CSR activities (CSR-Environment, CSR-Community), employee friendliness and helpfulness, and value congruity.
- RO4: a. If CSR activities (CSR-Environment, CSR-Community) significantly predict the likelihood of recommending the brand, and  
b. If CSR activities (CSR-Environment, CSR-Community) significantly predict the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses based on gender.

## Methodology

To address the ROs, a survey instrument was developed, which included the variables outlined in *Figure 1*. The survey questions were compiled from the relevant literature: two questions on CSR (CSR-Environment, CSR-Community) (e.g., Khan & Fatma, 2023; Toshmirzaev et al., 2022), two questions on employee behavior (friendliness and helpfulness) (e.g., King & Grace, 2012; Pinar et al., 2016), and one question on value identity congruity (e.g., Butt et al., 2017; Sirgy, 2018, 2019) using an 11-point scale ranging from 0=strongly disagree to 10=strongly agree. Each variable was measured with a single item, as a single-item measurement has been effectively used in measuring the constructs in prior research (e.g., Carlson et al., 2009; Kunkel et al., 2014). Additionally, Kunkel et al. (2014) assert that a single-item question is as valid and an acceptable measurement as multiple items. Additionally, respondents are more likely to complete shorter surveys over extensive ones. For the likelihood of recommending the brand in determining the NPS, the respondents were asked, “How likely is it that you will recommend the convenience store (and fuel station) of (the company) to a friend or family member?” which is measured with an 11-point scale, ranging from 0=not at all likely to 10=extremely likely. The survey also included demographic questions including gender, education, age, income, whether the respondents were regular customers, have a loyalty card, use the loyalty card, and how often they make a purchase.

The survey underwent two rounds of pilot testing: first with academic experts and then with several customers of the convenience store and fuel service. These pilot tests improved the survey for clarity of the concepts and easy comprehension of the questions, which improved the face validity of the statements included in the study (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). To administer the survey, a hyperlink containing the survey questions was prepared in Qualtrics. The target population of this study was the current customers enrolled in the convenience store’s loyalty program. The survey link was provided with proper instructions explaining the purpose of the research, indicating that taking the survey was voluntary and they could stop at any time while taking the survey. To improve the response rate, ten \$50 gift cards were offered to those who completed the survey and were willing to participate in a random drawing. Data for this study were collected in two phases. In the first phase, the link was sent to the entire list of 50,000 loyalty members. Two email reminders were sent one week apart. Within three weeks, this process produced a total of 6,099 usable surveys. For the second phase, 2,000 responses were randomly selected from the first survey poll. A sample size of



randomly selected 2,000 responses minimized the detection of statistical significance in differences to be amplified.

## Respondent Profiles

Table 1 shows that 56.5% of the respondents were female, 41.3% were male, and 2.3% preferred not to disclose their gender. As expected, 93.6% were regular customers, and 100% had a loyalty card. Among these, 99.0% used their loyalty cards. About 4.2% shopped daily, 7.7% shopped 2-3 times a week, 18.4% shopped once a week, 33.1% shopped every two weeks, and 24.0 once a month. In terms of the age distribution, 26.3% were between 56-65 years old and 24.8% were between 46-55 years old. Concerning income, 31.2% earn between \$30,001 and \$60,000, 13.9% earn from \$15,001 to \$30,000, and 23.3% earn between \$60,001 and \$90,000.

**Table 1: Respondent Demographic Profiles**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Use loyalty card</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	825	41.3	Yes	1979	99.0
Female	1129	56.5	No	21	1.1
I prefer not to disclose	46	2.3	<b>Total</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>age</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Regular customer</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>	18 to 25	67	3.4
Yes	1878	93.9	26 to 35	182	9.1
No	122	6.1	36 to 45	364	18.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>100.0</b>	46 to 55	495	24.8
<b>Have loyalty card</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>	56 to 65	526	26.3
Yes	200.0	100.0	66 or older	366	18.3
No	0	0	<b>Total</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>200.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Purchase frequency</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Household income</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>	Daily	83	4.2
Less than \$15,000	121	6.1	2-3 times a week	154	7.7
\$15,001 to 30,000	278	13.9	Once a week	368	18.4
\$30,001 to 45,000	318	15.9	Every two weeks	662	33.1
\$45,001 to 60,000	306	15.3	Once a month	479	24.0
\$60,001 to 75,000	239	12.0	< once a month	254	12.7
\$75,001 to 90,000	225	11.3	<b>Total</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>100.0</b>
\$90,001 to 105,000	175	8.8			
More than \$105,000	338	16.9			
<b>Total</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>100.0</b>			

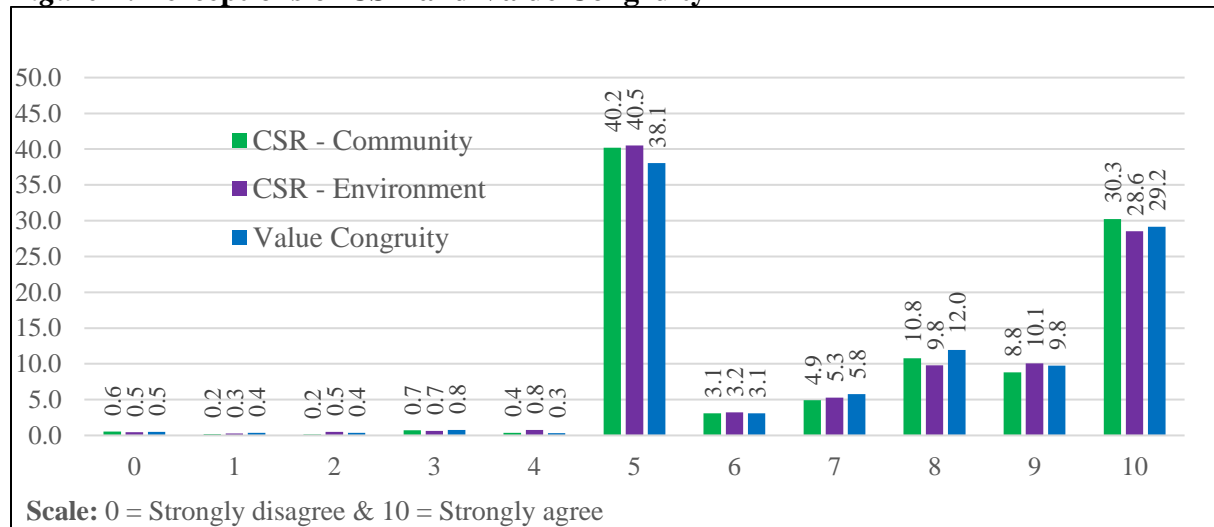
## Results

RO1 aimed to examine the customer perceptions of CSR activities including concern for the environment and community, employee friendliness and helpfulness, and value congruity in

relation to convenience stores and fuel business. To gain initial insights into the respondent perception of the CSR activities of the firm, the frequency distributions are presented in *Figure 2*.

The results show that the respondents have favorable perceptions regarding the company's CSR related to community and environment as well as value congruity. More specifically, 30% of respondents strongly agree with the firm's community activities and 28.6% strongly agree with its environmental activities. Additionally, 29.2% of the respondents believe that their values are congruent with those of the firm's values. The favorable perceptions of these factors are also supported by the responses given to scale values of 8 and 9. It is interesting to note that a high number of responses were reported at the neutral value of 5, where about 40% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the firm's CSR activities and values. This indicates that respondents (customers) may not be aware of the firm's CSR activities and company values. Very low responses for scale measures of 0 to 4 also support that respondents have favorable perceptions of the company's CSR and value congruity. As will be discussed later, given the growing importance of CSR and value congruity for customers, the awareness of these activities should be enhanced with effective strategies to realize the potential benefits both for the company and the customers.

**Figure 2: Perceptions of CSR and Value Congruity**

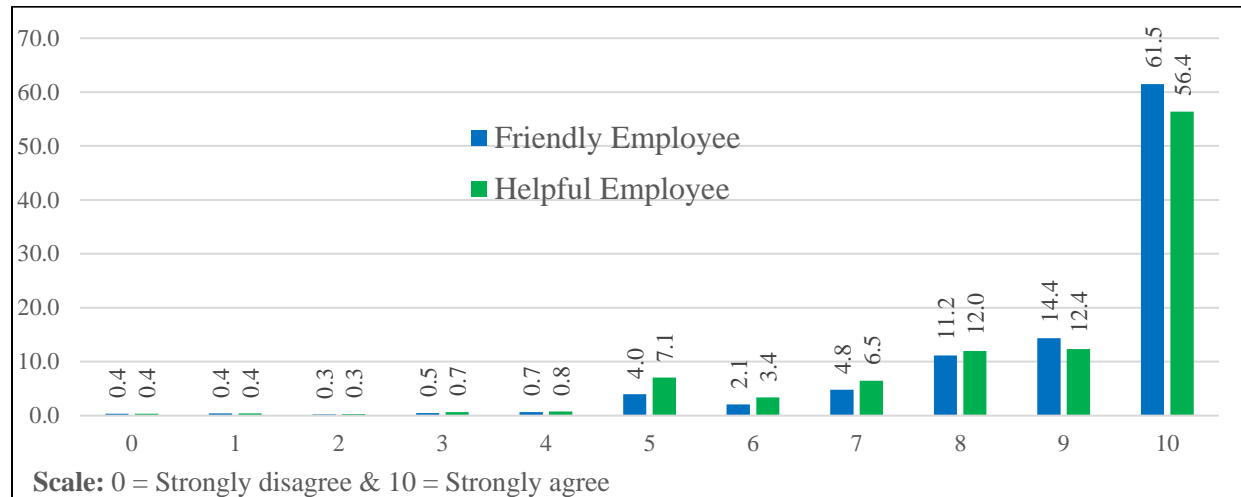


In addition, *Figure 3* presents respondents' perceptions of employee friendliness and employee helpfulness. The results show that 61.5% of the respondents strongly agree with employee friendliness and 56.4% strongly agree with employee helpfulness. The results suggest that the respondents have a highly favorable perception of employee friendliness and helpfulness. The low number of responses to the scale measures between 0 and 7 further supports the highly favorable perceptions of employee friendliness and helpfulness.

R02 aimed to determine if the perceptions of these factors significantly differ by customer demographics including gender, education, income, and age, and loyalty card user status. To address the R02, several analyses were conducted. A two-sample t-test comparison of the factors by gender is presented in *Table 2*. The results show no significant differences between male and female perceptions of community, environment, and value congruity ( $p > .05$ ), indicating that both genders have similar perceptions of these factors. However, the comparisons found significant differences between the perceptions of males and females in

employee friendliness and employee helpfulness ( $p < .05$ ), where male respondents perceive employees as significantly friendlier and more helpful than females ( $p < .05$ ). This indicates that male respondents (customers) appear to be happier with employee behaviors than female respondents.

**Figure 3: Perceptions of Employee Behaviors**



**Table 2: Comparisons of CSR, Employee Behaviors, and Value Congruity by Gender**

Factors	Gender	n	Mean	Std. De.	p-sig.
CSR - Community	Male	825	7.19	2.307	0.139
	Female	1129	7.34	2.292	
CSR - Environment	Male	825	7.13	2.299	0.181
	Female	1129	7.27	2.281	
Employee Friendliness	Male	825	<b>9.16</b>	1.524	<b>0.011</b>
	Female	1129	<b>8.97</b>	1.738	
Employee Helpfulness	Male	825	<b>8.91</b>	1.693	<b>0.013</b>
	Female	1129	<b>8.70</b>	1.942	
Identify Value	Male	825	7.32	2.265	0.856
	Female	1129	7.30	2.288	

Scale: 0 = Strongly disagree & 10 = Strongly agree

The two-sample test comparisons of the factors by users of loyalty cards vs non-users in Table 3 found significant differences between the two groups ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that users of loyalty cards have significantly higher perceptions of each of these factors. This shows the importance of getting customers to use loyalty cards, which seems that using loyalty cards has a significant positive effect on the perception of CSR activities, employee behaviors, and value congruity. In addition, one-way ANOVA comparisons of the above factors by age and income did not find any significant differences for any of the factors; therefore, the results are not presented in a table. These non-significant findings indicate that all age and income groups have similar perceptions of these factors.

**Table 3: Comparisons of CSR, Employee Behaviors, and Value Congruity by Loyalty Card Users vs. Non-users**

Factors	Loyalty Card User	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	p. sig
CSR - Community	Yes	1878	7.34	2.30	<b>0.000</b>
	No	122	6.10	2.00	
CSR - Environment	Yes	1878	7.26	2.30	<b>0.000</b>
	No	122	6.22	2.06	
Employee Friendliness	Yes	1878	9.08	1.63	<b>0.000</b>
	No	122	8.43	1.92	
Employee Helpfulness	Yes	1878	8.83	1.81	<b>0.000</b>
	No	122	7.92	2.30	
Identify Value	Yes	1878	7.37	2.27	<b>0.000</b>
	No	122	5.98	2.05	

*Scale: 0 = Strongly disagree to 10 = Strongly agree*

In R03, to determine the relationships between the CSR activities, employee friendliness and helpfulness, value congruity, and the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses, a correlation analysis was conducted. The results in *Table 4* indicate that while all correlations are significant at  $p < .01$  level, value congruity has the highest correlations with both CSR activities (environment and community), and employee helpfulness and the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses. It seems that concern for both the CSR activities (environment and community) have similar correlations with the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses. These findings emphasize the importance of the CSR activities in recommending both businesses of this firm.

In addition, *Figure 4* shows the correlations among all factors included in the study, where CSR factors are significantly correlated with employee friendliness and helpfulness. While these correlations show strong relationships between value congruity and all variables, the highest correlations of CSR factors imply the importance of aligning customer values with firm values for successful CSR efforts, particularly CSR-Environment and CSR-Community as well as Employee Friendliness and Employee Helpfulness are highly correlated aspects of the business.

**Table 4: Correlations between NPS and CSR, Employee Behaviors, and Value Congruity**

Factors	Recommend Fuel Station	Recommend Convenience Store	Friendly Employee	CSR - Community	CSR - Environment	Helpful Employee
Employee friendliness	.338**	.411**				
CSR - Community	.379**	.432**	.407**			
CSR - Environment	.378**	.443**	.418**	.831**		
Employee helpfulness	.373**	.454**	.845**	.473**	.484**	
Value Congruity	.433**	.469**	.441**	.688**	.713**	.516**

The R04a aims to examine the impact of the CSR activities (i.e., CSR-Environment, CSR-Community) on the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses. Regression analyses were conducted to address R04a. The results in Part A of *Table 5* show that the regression model for convenience stores is statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.209. The CSR-environment ( $\beta=0.30$ ) and CSR-community ( $\beta=0.21$ ) are statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ) in predicting the likelihood of recommending the convenience store.

Similarly, the regression results in Part B of *Table 5* show that the model for the fuel business is statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.156. The CSR-Community ( $\beta=0.21$ ) and CSR-Environment ( $\beta=0.20$ ) are statistically significant in predicting the likelihood of recommending the fuel business ( $p < .01$ ). The results show the importance of CSR in predicting the recommendation of both businesses by customers. These findings indicate that improving CSR activities and their customer perceptions would increase the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses to friends and family members.

**Table 5: CSR for Predicting the Likelihood of Recommending Convenience Store and/or Fuel Business**

<b>A: Convenience Store</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
(Constant)	5.25	0.15		36.16	<b>0.000</b>
CSR-Environment	0.25	0.03	<b>0.27</b>	7.55	<b>0.000</b>
CSR-Community	0.19	0.03	<b>0.21</b>	5.81	<b>0.000</b>
ANOVA: $F_{(2, 1997)} = 264.31, p < .0001$ ; Adj. R-square= .209					
Dependent Variable: The likelihood of recommending convenience stores					
<b>B: Fuel Business</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
(Constant)	6.36	0.13		47.83	<b>0.000</b>
CSR-Community	0.17	0.03	<b>0.21</b>	5.68	<b>0.000</b>
CSR-Environment	0.17	0.03	<b>0.20</b>	5.50	<b>0.000</b>
ANOVA: $F_{(2, 1997)} = 185.31, p < .0001$ ; Adj. R-square= .156					
Dependent Variable: The likelihood of recommending fuel businesses					

In addressing R04b, regression analyses were also conducted for each gender to determine if CSR activities significantly predict the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses. The results for the convenience stores in Part A of *Table 6* show that the model is significant for male respondents ( $p < .001$ ) with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.186. The regression model for female respondents in Part B of *Table 6* is statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.222. It is interesting to note that while CSR-community has a stronger predictive ability than CSR-environment for males, CSR-environment has a stronger predictive ability than CSR-community for females in predicting the likelihood of recommending convenience stores.

**Table 6: CSR for Predicting Likelihood of Recommending a Convenience Store by Gender**

<b>A: Male</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
(Constant)	5.46	0.22		24.68	0.000
CSR-Community	0.27	0.05	<b>0.30</b>	4.92	0.000



<b>CSR-Environment</b>	0.14	0.05	<b>0.15</b>	2.49	0.013
<b>ANOVA: F (2, 1997)= 95.40, p &lt;.0001; Adj. R-square=.186</b>					
<b>Dependent Variable: The likelihood of recommending a Convenience Store</b>					
<b>B: Female</b>	B	Std. Err.	$\beta$	t	Sig.
<b>(Constant)</b>	5.17	0.19		26.52	0.000
<b>CSR-Environment</b>	0.28	0.04	<b>0.30</b>	6.62	0.000
<b>CSR-Community</b>	0.18	0.04	<b>0.19</b>	4.17	0.000
<b>ANOVA: F (2, 1997) = 161.56, p &lt;.0001; Adj. R-square=.222</b>					
<b>Dependent Variable: The likelihood of recommending Convenience Store</b>					

Similarly, the results for the fuel operation in Part A of *Table 7* show that the model is significant for male respondents ( $p < .001$ ) with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.145. The regression model for female respondents in Part B of *Table 7* is also statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.160. It is interesting to note that CSR-Community is slightly better at predicting fuel business recommendations for both men and women ( $\beta = 0.23$ ) compared to CSR-Environment ( $\beta = 0.17$  and  $\beta = 0.19$ ). The results show that the CSR activities significantly predict the likelihood of recommending the convenience stores and fuel businesses regardless of gender differences.

**Table 7: CSR for Predicting Likelihood of Recommending Fuel Business by Gender**

<b>A: Male</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<b>(Constant)</b>	6.17	0.22		28.50	0.000
<b>CSR-Community</b>	0.20	0.05	<b>0.23</b>	3.66	0.000
<b>CSR-Environment</b>	0.15	0.05	<b>0.17</b>	2.75	0.006
<b>ANOVA: F (2, 1997)= 70.72, p &lt;.0001; Adj. R-square= .145</b>					
<b>Dependent Variable: The likelihood of recommending fuel business</b>					
<b>B: Female</b>	B	Std. Err.	$\beta$	t	Sig.
<b>(Constant)</b>	6.57	0.17		38.69	0.000
<b>CSR-Community</b>	0.18	0.04	<b>0.23</b>	4.82	0.000
<b>CSR-Environment</b>	0.15	0.04	<b>0.19</b>	4.05	0.000
<b>ANOVA: F (2, 1997) = 288.61, p &lt;.0001; Adj. R-square= .160</b>					
<b>Dependent Variable: The likelihood of recommending fuel business</b>					

## Discussion and Theoretical Implications

This study aimed to address four ROs: a) examine the consumer perceptions of CSR factors, employee behaviors, and value congruity within the convenience store business, b) assess the potential impact of respondent demographics on these factors, c) investigate the relationships between the CSR factors, employee behaviors, and d) evaluate the impact of CSR factors on predicting the likelihood to recommend convenience stores and fuel business, and identify the predictors of recommending by respondent's gender. The findings of the study concerning these ROs provided interesting insights into CSR factors and their relationships with the factors included in the study. Additionally, it shows the effects of CSR on the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses. These insights could be very beneficial in developing strategies to increase the NPS for both businesses.

The results for R01 indicate that the respondents generally hold positive perceptions of the CSR activities related to community and environment, as well as value congruity. This is evident from the responses, where about 30% of respondents rated these activities at 10. The results indicate a strong agreement with this company's CSR activities and that their values are congruent with those of company values. While these are positive findings, it is noteworthy that about 40% of the respondents seem to have a neutral perception as indicated by the rating of 5 on an 11-point scale. These findings indicate that the respondents (customers) may not be fully aware of the CSR activities and the values of this company. Given the growing importance of CSR activities (e.g., Arauji et al., 2023; Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020) and the relevance of value congruity between the company and customers (e.g., Butt et al., 2017; Han, 2015), it is essential for the company to develop effective strategies to inform their customers about their CSR activities and company values. This would increase customer awareness of these activities. Moreover, low or almost negligible ratings of the CSR factors indicate that respondents do not express disagreement with the company's CSR and company values. This further suggests that companies must develop strategies to effectively communicate their CSR activities and their values to increase awareness among customers. This can be achieved using appropriate social and digital media, banners in their stores, as well as traditional media to reach different customer segments.

Also, the findings concerning employee behavior show that more than half of the respondents strongly agree, with a rating of 10, that employees are very friendly and helpful. These results suggest that the company seems to have a good strategy in place for identifying and hiring the right people who are then trained to deliver the company's services and brand promise in a friendly and helpful manner. Given that services are delivered by personnel, their behaviors are important for service brands, as they represent the brand in the eyes of the customers (i.e., King & Grace, 2012; Piehler et al., 2016). These findings further confirm the existence of a strong internal branding strategy that allows the employees to understand and internalize the company's brand promise and brand values (i.e., Barros-Arriete & Garcia-Cail, 2021; Pinar et al., 2016).

Concerning the effects of respondent demographics on their perception of these factors, the results indicate that there is a difference between the perception of male and female respondents. Male respondents have significantly higher perceptions of employee friendliness and helpfulness than female respondents. This indicates that while the mean values for both genders rated these behaviors very highly, females seem to have significantly higher demand and/or standards for employee friendliness and helpfulness. Considering this finding, this company may consider training and motivating its employees to improve their friendliness and helpfulness, especially when interacting with female customers. Because female customers may have distinct expectations for friendliness and may require different types of assistance in convenience stores, it could be beneficial to conduct research to pinpoint the specific behaviors expected of employees. Subsequently, training programs can be designed to ensure that employees meet the expectations of female customers effectively.

The comparisons of these factors in *Table 3* by using the loyalty card found significant differences between users and non-users of the loyalty card for all measured factors. This could be expected because the loyalty card users may have closer and more frequent interactions with the company, which may allow these customers to have a higher level of awareness of the CSR activities and the company values, resulting from more interactions with the employees to experience employee friendliness and helpfulness. These findings imply

that, given that loyalty card users have significantly higher perceptions of all these factors, the company may benefit from strategies to increase their loyalty card membership and encourage them to use their loyalty cards more frequently. Such strategies could improve the perceptions of these factors that contribute to the company's success and performance. The findings regarding the loyalty program are consistent with prior research (e.g., Chaudhuri *et al.*, 2019). Since the comparisons of these factors with other demographic factors such as age and income were not statistically significant, it indicates that the perceptions of these factors are not impacted by the consumers' age and income.

In addressing R03, the study found significant correlations between CSR factors, employee behaviors, and value congruity. These significant correlations indicate that these factors have synergistic relationships that must be examined together to have a holistic manner to realize their benefits. As presented in *Table 4*, the likelihood of customers recommending both the fuel business and convenience stores is significantly correlated with CSR activities, employee behaviors, and value congruity, which means these factors contribute to the likelihood of garnering customer recommendations. It is interesting to note that since activities of CSR-Community and CSR-Environment are significantly correlated with recommending both businesses, it is important for this company to increase these activities and the awareness of these activities as recommended earlier in relation to the perception of these CSR activities. Additionally, given that value congruity is highly correlated with employee friendliness, CSR-Community, CSR-Environment, and employee helpfulness, these findings also indicate that customers value these factors, and they are important to them. Moreover, since CSR activities have the highest correlations with value congruity, this further shows that they are important for customers. This aligns with prior research (e.g., Butt *et al.*, 2017; Xiong & King, 2015) which indicates that the congruity or consistency of customer values with CSR activities could positively affect customer attitudes and intention to do business with this company. Again, these findings further emphasize the importance of CSR activities and increasing customer awareness of these activities by effectively communicating them, as suggested above.

One of the main objectives of the study (R04) is to examine the impact of CSR activities related to the community and environment on the likelihood of recommending both convenience stores and fuel businesses. The results from correlation and regression analyses showed that correlations and the regression models were significant, indicating that CSR factors are significant in predicting the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses. As both the correlation coefficients and the Beta coefficients of regression analysis are positive, an improvement in the perception of these CSR activities will increase the likelihood of recommending both businesses, which in turn increase their NPSs. These findings are consistent with prior research that CSR activities are important for businesses (e.g., Arauji *et al.*, 2023; Lamberti & Lettieri, 2009) with the CSR benefits of positive WOM effect on customer loyalty and satisfaction (e.g., Negassa & Japee, 2022). Given that NPS has a positive effect on sales and profitability, this study further emphasizes the important role of CSR activities in increasing the recommendations and NPS, consequently contributing to the company's performance and growth, as suggested in prior research (e.g., Jung *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, since a significant number of respondents hold a neutral perception of this company's CSR activities, as recommended above, the company should increase the awareness of their CSR activities among target markets, as well as be involved in new CSR initiatives and activities. Based on regression analysis results, this could increase the likelihood of recommending both businesses, leading to higher NPS and increased sales.

The study also examined whether responders' gender influences the likelihood of recommending convenience stores and fuel businesses and whether the CSR factors are significant predictors for recommending these two businesses. The results in *Table 6* showed that CSR activities are perceived as significant predictors of recommending both businesses by both genders. However, it is interesting to note that for convenience stores, while CSR-Community is more important as a predictor for male respondents, CSR-Environment is a more important predictor for female respondents. This reflects the differences in their perceptions of the CSR factors in recommending convenience stores. However, this is not the case for the fuel business as both genders share similar perceptions of the impact of CSR activities in its recommendation.

## **Managerial Implications**

These findings have several managerial implications for developing effective strategies to increase the likelihood of garnering a recommendation and NPS, ultimately increasing sales and profits. The first managerial implication is that given the growing importance of CSR activities for businesses as a marketing tool (e.g., Arauji et al., 2023; Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020) strategic positioning and differentiation, and effectively interacting with key stakeholders (Lamberti & Lettieri, 2009), this company must actively develop strategies not only to increase their CSR activities but also to enhance the awareness of their CSR activities and their concerns in the areas of community and environment. Since the results show that a significant percent of respondents expresses a neutral perception of the company's CSR activities, we recommend that this company increase the awareness of its CSR activities with an effective communication strategy by using appropriate social, digital, and traditional media. Considering the growing importance of CSR activities for all key stakeholders (Lamberti & Lettieri, 2009) and the benefits of CSR initiatives (Han et al., 2020) and CSR activities serving as a lever for companies with a sustainability focus across economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Hiep et al., 2021), we suggest that companies, regardless of sizes and industry, must develop effective strategies to actively initiate CSR activities to maintain their competitiveness and realize the benefits of CSR activities. As more companies are getting involved in CSR initiatives and activities, having well-defined CSR policies and strategies could become a necessity to survive, not a competitive advantage in the near distance.

The second managerial implication is related to value congruity. The results indicate that the congruity of customer values with company values is important for customers. Furthermore, significantly high correlations between value congruity and CSR-community, as well as CSR-environment, suggest that customers highly value these CSR activities, which are in alignment or congruity with their own values. Since consumption values serve as a significant predictor of satisfaction (e.g., Carlson et al., 2015; Dzipina et al., 2019; Lam et al., 2016) and are widely acknowledged as a reliable predictor of satisfaction (Ryu & Han, 2009), the findings confirm the importance of the congruity of consumer values with CSR activities of consumers and the potential influence of CSR values on consumers' purchases and consumption of environmentally-friendly products (Han, 2015). Moreover, as the Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 2018) suggests, this company must communicate its CSR values and activities to show the match between its values and those of its customers, influences consumption behavior, leading to favorable outcomes such as customer loyalty, brand trust, and positive WOM communication (Sirgy, 2019). Moreover, when a brand aligns with consumers' values, consumers may view a brand favorably and beneficial (Dibley & Baker, 2003), and associate

a brand with positive environmental feelings, perceptions, and attitudes, such that the brand is more likely to remain in their minds (Butt et al., 2017). In this regard, we recommend that the companies develop strategies to improve the congruity between consumer values and company values regarding CSR to realize the benefits of such a congruity.

The third managerial implication deals with employee behaviors. The study showed that customers rate employee helpfulness and friendliness very highly, which is an indication of successful implementation of internal branding (i.e., Barros-Arriete & Garcia-Cail, 2021; King & Grace, 2012) in getting the employees to understand and internalize the company values of being helpful and friendly. This is also supported by significant correlations between value congruity and employee behaviors. The implication is that since the employees play a pivotal role in achieving company objectives (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011), are the visible face of the organization, especially in service-oriented companies (Piehler et al., 2016), and their behaviors directly influence customer's brand experience for customers (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015), we recommend that the company must train and motivate their employees to accept and internalize the company values and CSR initiatives to deliver these values and deliver them in a friendly and helpful manner for a great experience that could contribute company's brand image, brand performance, and brand equity.

The final implication is understanding the relationship between CSR factors and the likelihood of recommending the brand and/or company. As presented earlier, prior studies identified several benefits associated with CSR activities. However, despite these benefits, it is not clear to what extent the CSR activities influence the likelihood of recommending the brands and the NPS, which was one of the main objectives of this study. The results from correlation and regression analyses show that CSR factors of community and environment are significantly correlated with, and they are significant predictors of the likelihood to recommend convenience store and fuel business of this company. These CSR factors are also significant predictors of recommendations for both male and female respondents. While prior research suggested that CSR is related to customer satisfaction (e.g., Agyei et al., 2021), WOM (e.g., Negassa & Japee, 2022), this is the first study to offer empirical evidence of the significant effects of the CSR on recommending the company's both businesses, potentially leading to a positive impact NPS, and, in turn, improving business sales and performance.

This is an important contribution of the study that shows the relationships between CSR and WOM in a way to increase the likelihood of recommending the brand, thus, NPS, which positively contributes to business performance. This emphasizes the relevance and importance of CSR activities for positioning and differentiation in highly competitive global markets. The other contribution of the study is the importance of value congruity between customer values and company values. The findings indicate that companies should make sure that their values, including CSR activities and employee behaviors, are consistent with those of customers. This can be accomplished with both external and internal marketing communications. The other contribution is that the study confirmed the critical role employees play in delivering customer experience. Their role is supported by the findings of the study, where employee behaviors are highly satisfactory. Since there is a high correlation between value congruity and employee behaviors, as well as CSR activities, we recommend that the company should keep training the employees to show the desired behaviors and values concerning CSR initiatives. This can be accomplished with effective internal branding and communications strategies. A final contribution of the study is that there is a need for a holistic approach to examine the effects of the CSR initiatives that must include value congruity, and



employee behaviors as shown by their significant correlations, to realize the benefits of these factors for enhanced business performance. Given the importance of involvement in CSR, employees, and value congruity to achieve business performance and higher NPS for growth and profitability, the findings of this study would benefit brand managers to develop effective strategies for promoting their brands in a more targeted way in the highly competitive convenience store industry.

## Limitations and Suggestions

While the study provided valuable insights into the relationships between CSR activities, employee behaviors, and value congruity, it is important to consider some limitations when interpreting the findings. The first limitation is that the study was conducted within one convenience store company. Including additional convenience stores could improve the generalizability of the findings. The second limitation, in alignment with the existing literature, each area is measured with a single item. While the results provided some insights into the proposed relationships, we recommend that the factors included in the study be measured with multiple items, which could improve the validity and reliability of the factors in examining the relationships. The third limitation is that the study was conducted in the convenience business sector. Conducting the same study in different service and non-service areas could provide an opportunity to validate the proposed relationships and could increase the generalizability of the findings. Finally, the study was conducted in the United States. A similar study should be conducted in different countries to examine the potential effects of the culture on the proposed relationships among the factors included in the study. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study offer new perspectives about CSR activities and their relationships with employee behaviors, value congruity, and their impact on the likelihood of recommending the brand and NPS that could have a significant effect on sales and business performance.

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