



Unveiling the Nexus: CSR, Corporate Image, Trust as a Mediator, and Hotel Guest Behavioral Intentions in Bangladesh

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Abstract

High increase in customer demand has significantly extended the hotel industry in Bangladesh in recent years. This increase could be a result of a number of issues, including expanding the health and social consciousness of customers. Nevertheless, the industry sometimes struggles to fulfil customer hopes. Keeping it in mind, this paper aims to evaluate the scope of corporate social responsibility (CSR) exercises within the industry and the influences they put forward on corporate image, which at the end impacts the customer behavioral intentions in Bangladeshi pretext. So, with a view to comprehending and assessing CSR practices, a quantitative research approach was applied along with a survey questionnaire on respective customers throughout the country. Three hundred participants from 45 hotels took part in structured interviews to share their experiences. All the hotels are located in Dhaka. Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach was used to analyze the collected data. CSR activities in the hotel industry impacting positive and crucial relationships on corporate image have been ratified by the findings of the study. Moreover, trust played a significant role in building relationships between customer behavioral intentions and corporate image. The study also unravelled the direct positive impact of CSR activities on customer behavioral intentions in the industry of the country. Besides, the research also focused on the intricate role of CSR in forming customer behavior, trust, and corporate image. It highlighted the significance of social responsibility in amplifying the reputation of the industry, implanting trust in customers, and in effect achieving positive behavioral objectives.

Keywords: Behavioural Intention; Corporate Image; CSR; PLS SEM; Trust

Introduction

Global companies are facing fierce competition and evolving consumer preferences, accompanied by growing scrutiny from consumers and stakeholders regarding their impact on society and the environment. This shift in perspective has emphasized the need for businesses to consider their broader impact (Sheikh & Beise-Zee, 2011). In response, marketing has been recognized as a vital discipline, facilitating connections between companies and their external environment (Shabbir & Wisdom, 2020), and adapting to the ever-changing business landscape (Vaaland, Heide & Grønhaug, 2008).

Marketing is considered an ever-evolving discipline. The American Marketing Association (2007) definition emphasizes the creation of value for customers, clients, partners, and society, and also suggests changing the stakeholder perspective from a traditional focus on shareholders and customers. Stakeholders are advocated to be treated as partners, with their values and norms being emphasized (Lu et al., 2021). Various marketing aspects such as ethical sales practices, environmental responsibility, consumer rights, product safety, transparent information sharing, community support, supplier relationships, and enhancing the well-being of consumers, employees, and other market participants are encompassed by this approach. The core concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) aligns with this important shift.

Several aspects, such as ethics, environment, social responsibility, and sustainability, are encompassed within CSR. Societal marketing, cause-related marketing, environmental marketing, socially responsible buying, and sustainable consumption related to marketing concepts intersect with several aspects of CSR (Vaaland, Heide & Grønhaug, 2008). Accountability to key stakeholder groups that judge a company's actions is emphasized by both CSR and marketing.

Strategic CSR is regarded as highly significant in marketing compared to other CSR approaches. It is seen as an investment, with expectations of long-term returns (Lantos, 2001; 2002). Marketers are expected to integrate CSR into their strategies, aligning with stakeholder values to achieve marketing objectives like sales growth, brand equity, trust, and enhanced customer preference, benefiting both the company and its stakeholders (Yang & Basile, 2021).

Presently, numerous companies are facing mounting pressure to embrace strategic CSR practices, which essentially mean adopting socially responsible behaviors (Mohr, Webb & Harris, 2001). Pomeroy and Johnson (2009) and Kabir (2011) found in their survey research that the key motivation behind recognizing the value of CSR practices is the establishment and reinforcement of a positive corporate reputation within the market. A favorable corporate image is represented as a crucial potential source of sustainable competitive advantage that is challenging for competitors to replicate, concurrently fostering consumer trust and reliance on the company and its products. It was concluded by Asongu (2007) in a historical review of CSR that companies should strategically assess CSR activities and integrate them into their business strategies to align with this objective. This integration is seen as serving to enhance the company's image, fortify its brand, and cultivate positive customer behavioral intentions in a competitive business landscape. Consequently, substantial financial resources are allocated by companies annually to initiatives like charitable contributions, cause-related marketing, environmental preservation, and community problem-solving (Liu & Zhou, 2009). Conversely, irresponsible corporate conduct or negative CSR practices, such as insincere efforts like greenwashing, have been found to have a detrimental impact on a company's image. Notably, consumers are more responsive to negative CSR actions than positive ones, underscoring the significance of responsible corporate behavior (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

Carvalho et al. (2010), Lee et al. (2012), and Hasan, Singh and Kashiramka, 2021 stated that CSR is gaining global prominence and is well recognized by researchers and practitioners. CSR is now integrated into strategies by many companies due to its positive effects on reputation and consumer behavior (Lai et al., 2010). Multiple researchers stated that the influence of CSR on consumers attitudes is still not a fully answered question, with questions such as why organizations engage in CSR, its impact on objectives and consumer behavior, and the influencing factors (Poolthong & Mandhachitara, 2009; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Some believe consumer perceptions and value recognition are voluntarily shaped by CSR (Le & Ferguson, 2016).

The motivation of this study lies in the impact of CSR initiatives and corporate image and trust as a mediating factor on customer behavioral intentions specifically within the hotel industry in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The choice of Dhaka is attributed to the uniformity in hotel service offerings in the region.

In recent years, Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has witnessed substantial growth driven by a burgeoning middle-income population. This surge has led to a rise in domestic tourism, prompting the hotel industry to expand by constructing new accommodations. A growing number of five-star, four-star, and three-star hotels are currently existing in Dhaka, as well as a trend seen in other major cities across Bangladesh.

Currently, around 45 hotels in these categories are present in Dhaka, with additional developments in progress. Over the span of the next two to five years, around 2,000 new rooms are anticipated in Dhaka alone. The key customer base in Dhaka's hotels encompasses business travellers, airline crew and leisure travellers.

The thriving hotel sector plays a pivotal role in Bangladesh's economic development, and the implementation of CSR activities within this sector has the potential to attract foreign patrons and stimulate domestic demand (Belal & Owen, 2007). Nevertheless, CSR practices in Dhaka's hotels are still in their nascent stages. Intriguingly, no prior research has explored the combined influence of CSR, corporate image, and trust on customer behavioral intentions within Dhaka's hotel industry. This research void is sought to be filled by this study, which aims to examine the impact of CSR on behavioral intentions in Dhaka's hotels while scrutinizing its effects on perceptions of hotel image and trust.

Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the influence of CSR initiatives on corporate image and customer behavioral intentions, with trust serving as a mediating variable within the context of Dhaka's hotel industry. The specific objectives are outlined as follows:

- To assess the relationship between CSR initiatives and corporate image.
- To examine the relationship between corporate image and trust.
- To examine the relationship between trust and customer behavioral intentions.
- To investigate the relationship between CSR initiatives and customer behavioral intentions.
- To provide valuable insights to policymakers in the hotel industry, aiding in the formulation and implementation of strategic plans.

Hypothesis Development

Based on an initial literature review, several hypotheses have been formulated to guide this research study.

1. CSR and Corporate Image

CSR's pivotal role in shaping and enhancing a positive corporate image in a highly competitive market has been well-documented. Previous research by Liu and Zhou (2009) and Vanhamme *et al.* (2012) convey that CSR has both direct and constructive effects on corporate image. Arendt and Brettel (2010), in their empirical research, argued that within product- and service-based industries, CSR has the potential to construct a corporate image that encompasses competitive advantages and boosts overall company performance. A favorable corporate image can lead consumers to be more inclined to purchase a company's products and recommend them to others. In fact, consumers often experience greater satisfaction when engaging with or purchasing products from CSR-engaged companies (Carvalho *et al.*,

2010). Therefore, CSR initiatives' expectations and perceptions are likely to positively influence the firm's image.

H1: CSR is positively related to corporate image

2. Corporate Image and Trust

Corporate image serves as a valuable tool in establishing trust in consumers' minds. Prior studies have indicated that corporate image significantly influences trust (e.g., Ball, Coelho & Machás, 2004; Flavián, Guinalíu & Torres, 2005; Liu & Zhou, 2009; Kim & Chao, 2019; Le, 2023). Additionally, a survey conducted by Orth and Green (2009) on family- and non-family-owned and operated grocery stores in the US found that store image has a substantial and positive effect on customer trust.

H2: Corporate image is positively related to trust

3. Trust and Behavioral Intentions

Several studies have established a direct and positive relationship between trust and behavioral outcomes. For instance, Keh and Xie (2009) investigated the role of trust in behavioral intentions, revealing that consumer purchase intention and the willingness to pay a higher price were significantly affected by trust perception. Another survey conducted by N'Goala (2007) in the financial service industry in France found that perceived trust directly and positively influenced customer switching intentions in critical situations. Moreover, trust has consistently been linked to increased customer loyalty in various studies (e.g., Liu & Zhou, 2009; Orth & Green, 2009; Yu *et al.*, 2021).

H3: Trust is positively related to behavioral intentions

4. CSR and Behavioral Intentions

Product trials and enhanced repeat purchases can be stimulated through positive CSR initiatives. Multiple researchers concur that CSR has both direct and indirect influences on consumer behavior (Mohr, Webb & Harris, 2001; Garcia de los Salmones *et al.*, 2005; Berens, Van Riel & Van Bruggen, 2005; McDonald & Hung Lai, 2011; Guchait, Anner & Wu, 2011; Ghosh, Islam & Bapi 2018; Nguyen-Viet, Tran & Ngo, 2024). For instance, Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001) found that CSR has a significant impact on consumer purchasing behavior in the US. In another study, McDonald and Hung Lai (2011) stated that CSR activities have a sturdier positive effect on customer behavioral intentions towards banks. Berens, Van Riel and Van Bruggen (2005), in their investigation of the relationships among corporate associations, CSR, and consumer product responses in the financial service industry, found that CSR suggestively affects product attitudes and purchase intentions. In recent times, Guchait, Anner and Wu (2011) explored the influence of customer perceptions of CSR on behavioral intentions (patronage intentions, switching intentions, and word of mouth) in the hospitality industry, concluding that consumer behavioral intentions were significantly influenced by perceptions of CSR. Consumers tend to show interest in future purchases and recommend products from firms engaged in positive CSR activities, such as those related to health, education, natural resource management, and product safety.

H4: CSR is positively related to behavioral intentions

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Based on the relevant literature review and hypothesized relationships, the proposed conceptual model is demonstrated in Figure 1.

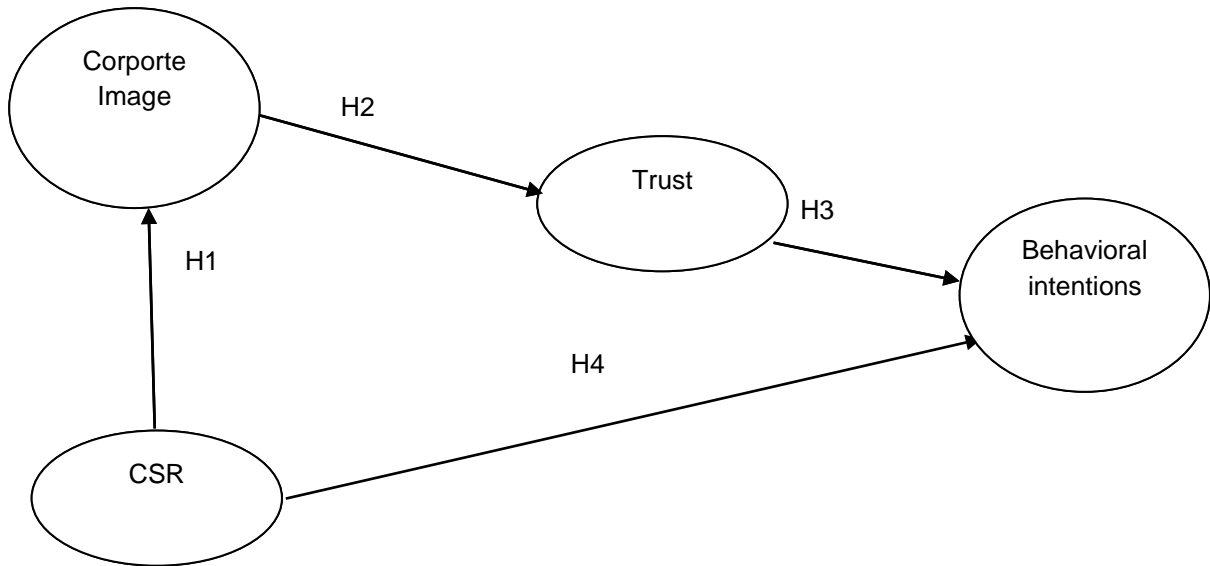


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Methodology

Data Collection and Sampling Procedures

A self-administered questionnaire, with minor revisions and amendments to suit the research objectives, was utilized to investigate the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), corporate image, and trust on the behavioural intentions of hotel customers in Dhaka city. Amid 50 hotel guests in Bangladesh, a pilot test was applied to specify any indicators that were either insignificant or difficult to interpret, ensuring clarity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire's wording before finalizing the questionnaire. To eliminate confusion and ensure overall clarity, minor revisions were made by enhancing its purity.

A reliability analysis was implemented on the questionnaire, which ensured its reliability statistically. This reliability was performed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients, a well-established measure of reliability ensuring the internal consistency of each item. As recommended by Nunnally (1978), coefficients exceeding 0.70 were considered acceptable for ensuring reliability.

Data collection took place during the peak season, from December to February, in Dhaka city, Bangladesh. Dhaka's hotels, classified from five-star to one-star by the national Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, were targeted. Out of the sixty-five hotels in Dhaka, approximately 70% were classified as five, four, and three-star establishments. This included eleven percent 5-star hotels, six and a half percent 4-star hotels, and eighty-two percent 3-star hotels.

The survey aimed to reach the entire client population staying in these hotels during the research period, based on the assumption that hotel clients in Dhaka city are particularly discerning about the services they receive compared to other regions within Dhaka. A purposeful client sampling approach was employed during the questionnaire survey interviews.

For data analysis, Partial Least Squares (PLS), a variance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) method, was utilized. A sample size of three hundred clients was deemed appropriate for the study, as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2006). They suggest that sample sizes falling within the range of 150 to 400 are suitable for PLS-SEM. Smaller samples, less than 150, can lead to unreliable results, while larger samples, exceeding 400, can make goodness-of-fit measures susceptible to indicating a poor model fit.

Therefore, the choice of a sample size of three hundred clients was well-suited to the research objectives.

Measurement and Scaling

All measurement items for each construct in the study were adopted from prior validated research to ensure reliability and validity. The questionnaire was structured into five distinct sections, with each section independently assessing CSR expectations, corporate image, trust, and behavioral intentions. The final section of the questionnaire focused on collecting essential demographic information from the respondents. All items, excluding those related to demographics, were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to systematically express their level of agreement or disagreement with each item.

Scale Dimensionality and Validation

Procedures employed to assess the dimensionality and validate the scales used for the four constructs—CSR expectations, corporate image, trust, and behavioral intentions—are discussed in this section. Both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were utilized for this purpose.

1. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

EFA was utilized to investigate the underlying structure of the data and, if necessary, simplify it. As indicated in Table 1, the EFA results revealed that the percentages of variance ranged from 65.43 percent to 76.51 percent, exceeding the recommended threshold and indicating a robust and well-structured data set. Additionally, high Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.811 to 0.877 signified strong internal consistency for each item within the constructs.

2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was employed to rigorously assess how well the measured items represented the constructs of CSR expectations, PSQ, corporate image, and behavioral intentions. This statistical method evaluates the correlational structure of the dataset against a hypothesized structure and assesses the "goodness-of-fit." Various goodness-of-fit indices, including the Chi-Squared test, RMSEA, SRMR, GFI, and AGFI, were utilized to examine convergent and divergent validity. A summary of the CFA results is provided in Table 2.

Table 1: Summary of EFA Results

Latent construct	No. of items	Variance explained %	α
CSR Expectations	18	65.43	0.811
Corporate Image	4	72.09	0.866
Trust	9	69.67	0.843
Behavioral Intentions	5	76.51	0.877

Table 2: Summary of CFA Results

	χ^2	Df	χ^2/df	P value	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	SRMR
CSR expectations								
All 18 items included	221.37	89	2.899	0.000	0.902	0.801	0.89	0.086
Corporate Image								
All 4 items included	51.23	21	2.093	0.000	0.932	0.834	0.85	0.084
Trust								
All 9 items included	185.119	91	2.729	0.000	0.912	0.821	0.87	0.088

Results

In the data analysis phase, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed. PLS-SEM was chosen for its ability to simultaneously assess complex and interconnected relationships among multiple variables, as recognized by Hair *et al.* (2006). The outcomes of the PLS-SEM analysis are divided into two key components: outer relations, which pertain to measurement models, and inner relations, involving hypothesis testing.

Outer Relations (Measurement Models)

The examination of the measurement models, detailed in Table 3, reveals several important findings. Firstly, the loadings associated with each construct fall within a range of 0.723 to 0.912, comfortably exceeding the recommended minimum threshold of 0.71. Secondly, the Critical Ratios (C.R.) consistently exceed the threshold value of 1.96 at a significance level of $p < 0.05$. These findings collectively affirm the reliability of the measurement model. Additionally, composite reliabilities for the constructs surpass the established benchmark of 0.70. Furthermore, the average variance extracts (AVEs) range from 0.702 to 0.797, providing strong evidence of the measurement model's reliability and validity. A detailed overview is provided in Table 3, summarizing PLS factor loadings and other essential measurement indices.

Inner Relations or Hypothesis Testing

Turning to hypothesis testing, the significance of structural paths and their implications was assessed. Critical Ratios that surpass the threshold of 1.96 at a significance level of $p < 0.05$ indicate the statistical significance of the structural paths under scrutiny. Furthermore, individual R^2 values exceeding the threshold of 0.10 signify the high relevance of these structural paths within the research model.

A visual representation of these relationships is provided in Figure 2, which presents the path coefficients and their corresponding Critical Ratios. This visual aid facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the strength and significance of each hypothesized relationship.

In addition, Table 4 succinctly summarizes the outcomes of the hypothesis testing, drawing from the results of the PLS analysis. These results encapsulate the statistical significance and impact of each hypothesized relationship, offering valuable insights into the structural dynamics within the research model.

Table 3: Summary of Measurement Models Results

Construct	Loadings	Critical ratio
CSR expectation (AVE=0.710, Composite reliability=0.870, Cronbach's alpha=0.756)		
Community support (5 items)	0.823	22.839
Employee relations (4 items)	0.765	22.311
Product and service-oriented(6 items)	0.888	32.097
Environmental support(3 items)	0.812	27.833
Corporate Image (AVE:0.702, Composite reliability: 0.899, Cronbach's alpha:0.856)		
Had a good impression of my hotel	0.879	52.356
Has a good image in the minds of consumers	0.796	24.579
Has a better image than its competitors	0.912	22.236
Have a good image about my hotel to spend a/ more night(s)	0.888	46.514
Trust (AVE=0.789, Composite reliability:0. 812, Cronbach's alpha=0.749)		
Committed to meet expectations and satisfaction	0.779	27.739
Feel that hotel value as a customer	0.896	20.511
Hotels treats fairly and justly	0.812	37.167
Hotels avoid doing anything that detrimental to customers	0.788	22.863
Hotel has a very good reputation	0.771	37.386
Hotel is of high integrity	0.856	29.591

hotel is very dependable	0.902	27.286
Hotel is very competent	0.789	36.924
Have complete trust in my hotel	0.723	30.467
Behavioral intentions		
(AVE=0.797, Composite reliability:0.807, Cronbach's alpha= 0.749)		
Come back to the hotel in the future	0.883	22.514
Say positive things about the hotel	0.807	42.534
Recommend the hotel to friends or my others	0.823	35.233
Visit the hotel more frequently	0.812	34.765
Like to pay more for the hotel	0.799	29.277

Analysis and Interpretations

Accomplishment of this research study is hinged on the robust validation of all four hypothesized relationships through the analysis of consumer study data.

At the outset, it was evidenced that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) exhibited a substantial and positive relationship with both corporate image ($\beta= 0.321$, CR=5.222) and behavioral intentions ($\beta= 0.559$, CR=7.991). This alignment with the hypotheses (H1 and H4) underscores the pivotal role of CSR in shaping corporate image and influencing customer behavioral intentions.

Furthermore, the significant impact of corporate image on trust ($\beta= 0.271$, CR=4.343) was confirmed, substantiating the validity of H2. This result highlights the crucial role of a positive corporate image in fostering trust among customers, a cornerstone of the study's theoretical framework.

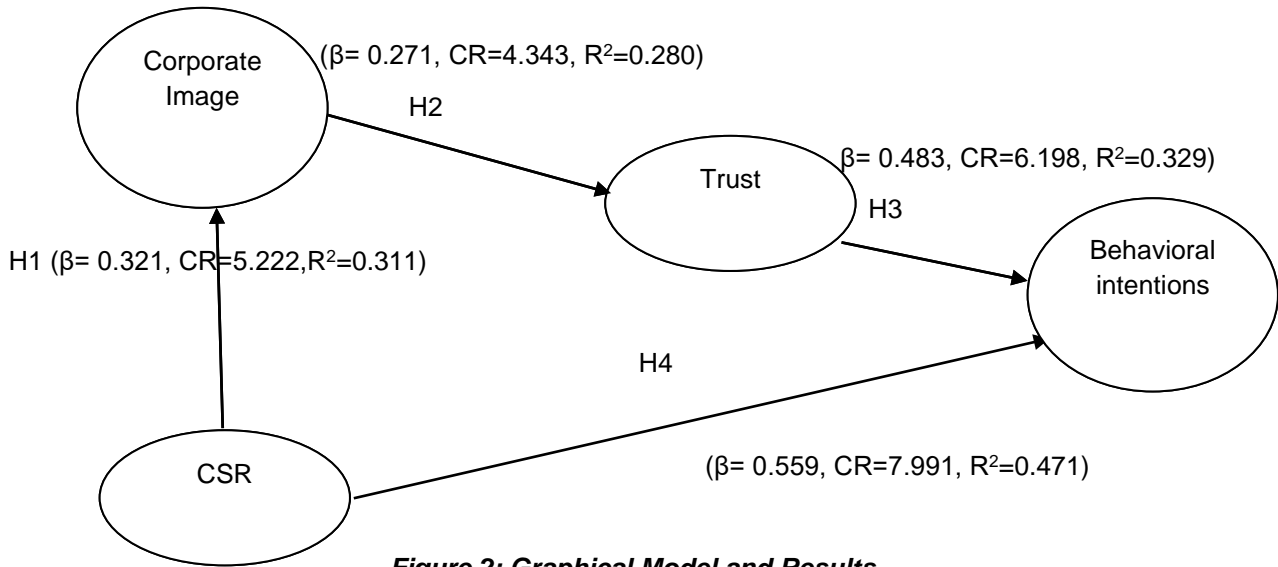


Figure 2: Graphical Model and Results

Additionally, trust was found to be notably associated with behavioral intentions ($\beta= 0.483$, CR=6.198), offering empirical support for H3. This finding underscores the pivotal role trust plays in shaping customer behavioral intentions, a fundamental element of the research model.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the significant path relationships established in this research within the context of Bangladesh align with findings from past research studies conducted in various other countries. For instance, studies by Liu and Zhou (2009) and Vanhamme *et al.* (2012) corroborate this research by confirming the positive relationship between CSR and corporate image. Correspondingly, the positive and extensive link between CSR and behavioral intentions uncovered in this study resonates with the work of McDonald and Hung Lai (2011) and Ghosh, Islam and Bapi (2018). Furthermore, the association between

corporate image and trust, as revealed in this research, aligns with the findings of Flavián, Guinalú and Torres, (2005), Liu and Zhou (2009), and Kim and Chao (2019). Finally, the research's assertion that trust significantly influences behavioral intentions is consistent with the conclusions drawn by Liu and Zhou (2009), Orth and Green (2009), and Yu *et al.* (2021), all of whom have reported a positive relationship between trust and behavioral intentions.

This convergence of findings across diverse studies and geographical contexts reinforces the credibility and generalizability of the research, underscoring the broader relevance of these relationships in the realm of CSR and customer behavior.

Table 4: Result of Hypothesis Testing Based on PLS Analysis

Hypothesis	Independent	Dependent	B	CR	R ²	
H1	CSR	Corporate Image	0.321	5.222	0.311	Supported
H2	Corporate Image	Trust	0.271	4.343	0.280	Supported
H3	Trust	Behavioral intentions	0.483	6.198	0.329	Supported
H4	CSR	Behavioral intentions	0.559	7.991	0.471	Supported

Discussion:

The findings drawn from the study include a deep understanding of the intricate relationship between CSR activities, corporate image, trust, and customer behavioral intentions in the hotel industry of Dhaka city. However, several crucial nuances have come to light in a critical review. Whereas CSR positively highlights an impact on corporate image, research of recent times emphasizes the need for authenticity and strategic alignment in CSR initiatives (Yang & Basile, 2021; Park, 2024). Outward CSR efforts can direct skepticism and destroy corporate image (Nguyen-Viet, Tran & Ngo, 2024). The established connection between a company's image and trust is impacted by its activities' consistency and conformity to client expectations, as Khan, Halabi and Samy (2009) noted. A consistent and authentic corporate image is crucial for building trust in the changing market of Dhaka. Building confidence in the hospitality sector is a continual process that demands constant participation and transparency, as highlighted by Yu *et al.* (2021). The effects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on consumer behavior depend on factors such as cultural background and customer knowledge, hence requiring customized CSR tactics that align with regional norms (Nguyen-Viet, Tran & Ngo, 2024). Generic CSR may not effectively engage customer behavior (Tosun & Köylüoğlu, 2023). Context-specific CSR strategies are vital to policymakers that address local needs and require deep customer understanding and stakeholder engagement. The study's exclusive emphasis on Dhaka restricts the findings' applicability, indicating that more studies are significant in various settings and the long-term impacts of CSR on financial performance and customer loyalty. Recent studies show the need for authentic and strategically integrated CSR initiatives to achieve positive customer behavior and business outcomes (Khan, Halabi & Samy, 2009; Yang & Basile, 2021, Yu *et al.*, 2021; Hassan *et al.*, 2023; Nguyen-Viet, Tran & Ngo, 2024).

Conclusion

CSR has become a very interesting area in the field of business over the last decade, and its impact on customer behavior has been significant. Despite this increasing interest, very few studies elaborate on the relationship between CSR initiatives and customer behavioral intentions. New insights into this relatively unexplored area of research are aimed to be bridged by this study.

The core framework of this study is based on the integration of several key factors: CSR, corporate image, trust, and customer behavioral intentions. By examining these elements collectively, the study seeks to uncover the direct influence of CSR on customer trust, mediated through the corporate image of a company, as well as the direct impact on customer behaviour.

The implications of this research extend beyond academia, holding practical significance for industry professionals, particularly those working in the hotel industry in Bangladesh. Policymakers and strategic planners in the hotel sector can gain valuable guidance from the findings of this study. Insights are offered into how CSR practices can influence customer trust and subsequently impact customer behaviors.

It is worth noting that the study's scope was limited to Dhaka city, involving data collection from hotels categorized as five-star, four-star, and three-star establishments. Consequently, caution should be exercised when attempting to generalize the study's findings to encompass the entire spectrum of hotels in Dhaka, let alone the broader hotel industry. Nevertheless, this study paves the way for further research opportunities in this vital area. Expanding the sample size and conducting more extensive investigations could yield even more precise and comprehensive insights into the complex relationships between CSR, corporate image, trust, and customer behavioral intentions.

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Conflict of Interest:

There is no conflict of interest from the authors. Additionally, the research was conducted without any commercial or financial support, which could be interpreted as a potential conflict of interest.

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