



Article

The Relationship of CSR Communication on Social Media with Consumer Purchase Intention and Brand Admiration

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Abstract: With the advent of the Internet and other digital technologies, contemporary businesses from all sectors are using social media for communication with consumers to engage them meaningfully with a brand. However, the use of social media for corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication is relatively new to the existing literature. Likewise, the impact of CSR communication through social media (CSR-S) on consumer emotions and behavior is, to date, underexplored. To address this, the present research aims to test the relationship of CSR-S on brand admiration and consumer purchase intention. The study proposes a direct relationship between CSR-S and purchase intention with a mediating effect of brand admiration. The data were collected from the banking consumers of Pakistan through a self-administered questionnaire. The authors distributed 800 questionnaires and received 463 questionnaires useful for data analysis, so the present research study response rate was around 59%. The data were analyzed using the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique in AMOS. The results revealed that CSR-S is positively related to purchase intention ($\beta = 0.233$). The results further showed that brand admiration partially mediates this relationship ($\beta = 0.079$). The survey respondents confirmed that their bank's CSR communication helps enhance their purchase likelihood and their feelings of admiration for their bank. These findings will help policymakers at banking institutions better understand the importance of CSR communication on different social media platforms to achieve consumer-related outcomes.

Keywords: social media; CSR; brand admiration; sustainability; consumer behavior; digital transformation; purchase intention



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1. Introduction

With the advent of the Internet and other digital technologies, contemporary businesses worldwide are using social media for meaningful communication with different stakeholders, including consumers [1]. Social media popularity for use by modern businesses for different communication objectives is increasing more than ever before. It is evident from the literature that conventional media is losing its attractiveness compared to its new counterpart, social media [2,3]. There are several reasons for organizations to adopt social media as an effective communication medium. One is social media's interactive environment [4], which is non-existent in conventional media. Social media's interactive nature makes it possible to exchange information between the sender (the organization) and the receiver [5] by posting, messaging, or sharing.

Moreover, social media are flexible medium of communication. This flexibility in communication is a major attraction for social media users. Modern businesses are turning

their attention to it [6]. Another important takeaway is the vast, swift coverage of social media to a broad audience over a short space of time. Organizations can achieve different communication objectives by using different social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. [7]. Contemporary businesses in the digital age can use social media to share different content, such as videos and messages in text, with stakeholders to communicate their latest activities [8]. Social media popularity is unmatched in the present era of digitalization; currently, more than 3.8 billion people use social media worldwide [9]. Moreover, the rate of social media adoption is on the rise. According to an estimate, there is an increase of 10.9% per year in the number of social media users worldwide [10]. Leading global brands, such as Johnson & Johnson, Ford Motors, Pfizer, Bosch, Starbucks, and TOMS, are actively using social media to engage their consumers in interactive communication [11].

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a phenomenon that existed even in ancient times. Ancient business history shows that businesses were involved in society-related causes [12]. The era of industrialization, especially in Europe, gave birth to many large enterprises. With their emergence, the debate over social responsibility also came to the surface. Hence, the first book of CSR, *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, by Bowen and Johnson, appeared in 1953 [13]. Since then, to date, the concept of CSR has been in discussion among policymakers and academics. Contemporary businesses practice CSR activities to address pressure from different stakeholders, including consumers, competitors, governments, and others. These stakeholders expect businesses to be engaged in sustainable practices to preserve society and the environment at large [14]. In the present digital age, contemporary businesses acknowledge social media's importance in communicating CSR activities with consumers and other stakeholders [1]. Different studies in the literature have concluded that social media can be an important medium for CSR communications [15–17].

The discussion of CSR has received considerable attention from scholars in the literature in the past two decades. Nevertheless, its boundaries are ever-evolving, even in 2021 [18,19]. Prior literature has broadly examined CSR to achieve different organizational-related outcomes, such as organizational performance [20], quality management [21], and organizational commitment [22]. Likewise, contemporary CSR researchers have also investigated CSR from an employee's perspective; for example, in their study, Gao and He [23] noted that CSR could positively influence employees by improving their citizenship behavior. Similarly, Kong et al. [24] acknowledged CSR's importance in improving employees' pro-environmental behavior.

Nevertheless, recent literature has largely ignored how CSR can be used to achieve consumer-related outcomes, such as consumer purchase intention. Some studies have examined the concept of CSR to induce purchase intentions of consumers [25–27], but these are inconclusive. Furthermore, it is not clear from the existing studies how CSR can affect consumer emotional aspects, such as brand admiration. Hence, the present study aims to test the relationship of CSR communication on social media (CSR-S) and purchase intention with a mediating effect of brand admiration.

CSR has become an essential element in the field of business. Undoubtedly, the world faces changes in social, political, and economic activities, developing new cultural integration. Globalization and technological development have paved the way for a new model of society that includes new players and patterns of behavior [28]. New issues, such as governance and social responsibility, have raised concerns for stakeholders. Even more companies in every sector realize the importance of their role in society and the real benefits of adopting a CSR approach [29]. The literature also highlights many business benefits that a company can derive from its involvement in CSR [30]. For example, companies can reap the benefits of CSR from different stakeholders, including consumers. As a socially responsible organization, a company can increase loyal consumers and turn them into brand ambassadors who strongly advocate for a brand [31]. Consumers respond to CSR actions in various ways, not only by purchasing certain products but also by recommending the brand to other friends and peers [32]. In this regard, the literature

provides ample evidence of CSR's positive impact on consumer behavior, such as purchase likelihood [25,33,34].

Social media are critical in disseminating CSR messages to companies. Compared to technical specifications, such as product quality and innovation, the company's CSR-related information reveals aspects of its integrated identification that are very important for an organization to recognize a socially responsible organization from consumers' end [35]. The key challenge in developing a good CSR communication strategy is how to engage with stakeholders to reduce their skepticism and communicate dynamic progress to the company's CSR activities [36]. Recent research on CSR suggests that consumer's engagement in CSR on social media allow companies to build a strong organizational image, strengthen consumer-company relationships, and improve collaboration [17,35,37]. Moreover, this is why well-communicated CSR activities with partners not only increase their level of trust, involvement with the company but also induces their brand love and purchase intentions [38,39].

The present research study has selected the banking sector of Pakistan to test the proposed relationship. This research study has selected the banking sector to test the proposed relationship because of two critical reasons. First of all, the banking sector is described as a homogenized sector in which most banking institutions provide the same kind of standard banking products or services to their consumers [40,41]. This homogenized nature of the banking sector makes it challenging for policymakers to increase consumers' purchase intentions. It is worth mentioning here that increasing consumers' purchase intention is complicated in an industry that is homogenized in its character. The present research study argues that a bank's CSR strategies can provide a solid ground to convince consumers and increase their purchase likelihood. Modern consumers in the present digital age prefer to buy from organizations that earn an image of a socially responsible organization [42]. Second, the cut-throat competitiveness in the Pakistani banking sector adds to the difficulties for policymakers to increase their intended consumers' purchase intentions. The present research study, in this regard, contends that well-planned CSR activities of a bank directed toward the consumers may serve as an additional source of competitive advantage. Hence, there is every likelihood that a bank that participates in CSR activities and communicates with the consumers on social media can overrule the counterparts that do not practice it.

The present research study significantly adds to the existing literature. For example, this research study enriches the existing CSR literature to achieve consumer-related organizational objectives. The past studies in this regard primarily focused on CSR to address organizational-related outcomes [20,21,43] but ignored the importance of CSR to shape consumer behavior. Similarly, this is relatively new in the literature that scholars have realized the importance of CSR to influence consumers [32,44]. Moreover, in past studies, CSR's phenomenon was associated mainly in the manufacturing sector [45–47]. However, the service sector received little attention, especially from the perspective of developing economies. Lastly, the present research study is an important addition to the existing literature as it produces a blend of CSR and social media to induce positive consumer emotions. Therefore, the present research study aims to close all such gaps of the existing CSR literature from a developing economy's perspective, like Pakistan. The remainder of this article is composed in the following parts. The next section deals with the literature review in which the authors included relevant studies and theoretical support to formulate different hypotheses of the current research study. After this, there is the methodology section that contains sampling, data collection process, and measures. Next comes the results and analysis part, in which the authors analyzed the data by applying different statistical tools to validate the hypotheses. Finally, there is a discussion and conclusion section in which the current survey results are discussed, and the authors have drawn conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

The present research study seeks support from attribution theory by Fritz [48] and norm of reciprocity [49] as the grounding theories. The attribution theory helps understand the reasons for individual behaviors for different events. There is a stream of researchers who used attribution theory in consumer behavior [50–52]. From the present research study's viewpoint, attribution helps consumers identify a brand or organization as socially responsible. Further, the process of attribution also helps consumers in brand evaluation. The norm of reciprocity by Gouldner [49] states that when individuals receive some sort of benefit from others, they likely want to reciprocate this benefit positively. In this regard, when consumers perceive an organization as a socially responsible organization, they feel optimistic about that organization and want to reciprocate positively.

This research study is in line with Carroll [53] in defining CSR, who believes "CSR is the economic, legal, ethical and volunteer responsibility of an enterprise to the stakeholders". Different scholars have recognized the concept of CSR as one of the most influential ones to achieve different business outcomes [20,21]. CSR's philosophy is surrounded by uplifting the society, the environment, consumers, workers, and other stakeholders [54]. The businesses operating under CSR's philosophy aim to effectively address community problems and contribute positively toward society [55]. With the rise of digital technology, consumers in recent times have access to a diverse set of information than ever before. This ease of information has increased their awareness and sensitivity towards society and the environment [56]. Perhaps this is why modern consumers in the current digital age expect organizations from all sectors to conduct their business operations in eco-friendly ways [57]. To meet such expectations from consumers, contemporary businesses are introducing different CSR activities in conjunction with their business operations. One of the major insights from the preceding studies is that consumers reward the businesses that participate in CSR actions. The CSR benefits can be divided into two classes, specifically transactional and relational. Transactional reward reflects consumers' greater purchase likelihood to obtain a business's products/services [58], and relational reward contributes to long-term consumer-company relationships [59]. A stream of researchers argues that consumers primarily see companies' CSR actions favorably, leading to positive purchase likelihood [39,60–62], or even argue that favorable CSR activities can improve product evaluation on the part of consumers [63–65]. However, CSR's effect on consumers' purchase intentions may be more complicated than its simple positive impact on a brand evaluation. Businesses are the fundamental economic components in almost every society. The basic purpose of any business is to create products and services that society demands with a fair profit margin [53]. Through different economic activities in a society, an organization not only produces products/services for the consumers but also provides other opportunities to the members of society, such as creating employment for individuals. Therefore, companies willingly take positive economic CSR actions to affect members of society [66]. The consumers as a member of a society set bonds and associations with an organization and hence, economic CSR activities positively influence the purchase likelihood of consumers. Different extant scholars have also established that economic CSR positively relates to consumer purchase intention [67–69]. Business's voluntary actions or programs that encourage society's wellbeing and goodwill, such as supporting the society in the field of education, helping the poor, and other community-related activities, are well appreciated by the consumers as members of society [70]. The greater the company's contribution to uplift the society, the more it enhances the standard of living and the company's image as a socially responsible entity [71]. The relationship of social CSR and consumer purchase intention is well-established in past research studies [69,72].

The emergence of social media is a game-changer in the field of organizational communication [73]. Many organizations use social media to communicate interactively with different stakeholders to build a good reputation [74]. Organizations also use social media for sustainability communication with their stakeholders, including consumers [75]. The organization's CSR-S communication with its consumers helps build an image of a "socially

responsible" brand, which is very important for inducing their purchase intentions and purchase decisions [39,76]. In line with attribution theory, the present research study argues that when consumers specify an organization as a "socially responsible" organization, they positively evaluate that organization. Likewise, through social media, an organization's CSR communication is expected to earn positive support from consumers as per the theory of norm reciprocity. Hence, it is logical to expect that CSR activities can induce the purchase intention of the consumers. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *CSR-S has a positive relationship with consumers' purchase intention.*

Recent studies established that CSR activities of an enterprise support it in building a solid brand image [77] to build a relationship with consumers [33] and to enhance brand reputation [78]. Additionally, CSR's relationship with consumers' admired feelings is also established in prior literature [17,79]. This sense of brand admiration leads the consumers to a higher level of loyalty [80]. Communicating with stakeholders through social media from CSR's perspective engages them with a brand and makes the brand visible on different social media forums [81]. Hence, the advancement in digital technology has brought a paradigm shift in the approach of modern business. Social media facilitate different groups of individuals to communicate with each other interactively. Social media platforms are also helpful to serve the purpose of quick information diffusion that enables social media users to express their opinions and interact with other social media peers [82]. Broadly speaking, social media can be categorized into two major categories. The first one is the expressive social media domain that includes different online blogs and websites like Facebook and Twitter. The second category is regarded as collaborative, which includes Wikipedia and Craigslist [83]. The role of the consumer changes with the rise of media technology [84].

The present research study proposes brand admiration as a potential mediator between CSR-S and purchase intentions. Furthermore, the authors are in line with Park, MacInnis and Eisingerich [80] and Trivedi and Sama [85] in defining brand admiration, who described it as "brand admiration is the way of engaging consumers with a brand through the expression of positive feelings, trust, love, and respect". The reason for thinking about brand admiration as a mediating variable in the above relationship is that when consumers notice an organization's CSR engagement on social media, they develop positive emotions and feel admired for a socially responsible enterprise. The emotional pull created by an organization through CSR activities on social media eventually enhance their purchase intentions. This argument receives support from different scholars, who mentioned that consumers' positive emotions increase their purchase intention [86–88]. CSR-S plays a key role in converting consumers into enthusiastic fans of a specific brand. Hence, the CSR communication of banks on social media urge consumers to stay connected with a brand for a long time. Further, the consumers feel admired for purchasing a socially responsible bank. In this context of the banking industry, different scholars have established that CSR-S of a bank creates a feeling of brand love on the part of consumers, and eventually, they develop a sense of brand admiration for their bank [17,89,90]. The consumers further pursue that their bank ethically seeks profit maximization and keeps the societal benefits at the forefront while making different business strategies for expansion and growth.

The relationship of CSR with consumers' emotions is also evident in existing banking literature [91,92]. It is also established in the existing literature that brand admiration is positively related to consumers' purchase intention [85,93]. In conclusion, when organizations use social media platforms to inform their consumers about their CSR activities, they maintain a sense of praise among consumers in organizations that participate in CSR initiatives. Hence, in line with the norm of reciprocity [49], an organization's CSR activities convert consumers into brand ambassadors. Hence, consumers develop positive emotions stemming from the CSR activities of an organization. All such process ultimately builds a higher level of purchasing intentions. Hence, the authors propose the following hypotheses along with the proposed research model (Figure 1).

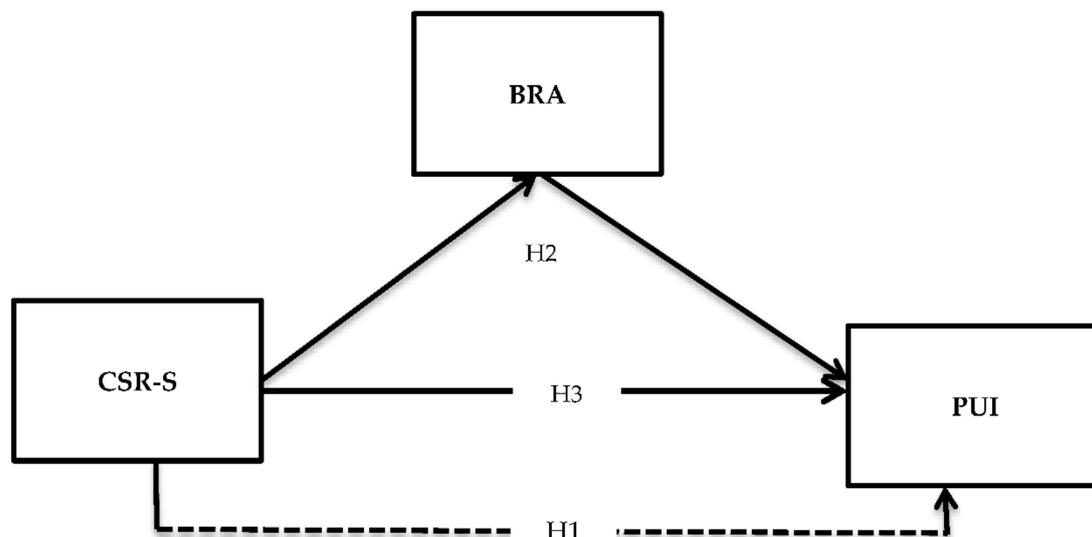


Figure 1. Proposed research model: This figure is based on the authors' conception that contains three variables. There is the independent variable, CSR-S at the extreme left side, and at the extreme right side of the figure, there is the dependent variable PUI. In the middle of the figure, there is the mediating variable BRA.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *CSR-S has a positive relationship with brand admiration.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Brand admiration mediates between CSR-S and purchase intention.*

3. Data Collection and Measures

3.1. Sampling Procedure and Collection of Data

The proposed model of the present research study was tested in the banking sector of Pakistan. To represent the banking sector, the authors selected four leading banks of Pakistan. These include Habib Bank Limited (HBL), Allied Bank Limited (ABL), United Bank Limited (UBL), and Meezan Bank. These banks were selected to represent Pakistan's banking sector because they are actively involved in different CSR activities. Moreover, the selected banks have their presence on social media as they have different social media pages where they have a large fan following. The present research study data were collected from three large Pakistan cities, including Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi. The selection of these cities to collect the banking consumer data seems logical because they have multiple branches in different locations in these cities. Further, these cities are among the largest cities where the majority of the population reside.

The authors approached different respondents while leaving a particular branch of one of these selected banks or were present within the ATM premises. This approach to reaching the respondents is also supported by extant researchers [41,94]. Before starting the actual phase of the data collection, the authors sought the respondents' informed consent to facilitate the process of data collection willingly. Those who responded positively were cross-checked for their suitability by asking two screening questions. The first screening question was intended to verify whether the potential respondent has a bank account in at least one of the above four banks. The second screening question was to assess either the respondent was an active social media user or not. Those who qualified in both screening questions were then asked to fill the survey instrument. The respondents were further assured that the secrecy of their shared information would be highly maintained. The authors distributed 800 questionnaires among different respondents and finally received 463 completed questionnaires included in the final dataset. Hence, the response rate for the present research study remained at 57.87%.

3.2. Measures and Handling of Social Desirability

This research study has used pre-existed scales to measure all variables. Therefore, the reliability and validity of these scales were already established by the previous researchers. The study adapted CSR-S items from van Asperen et al. [95] and Eisingerich et al. [96]. There were five items to measure CSR-S in this respect. The items of purchase intentions were adapted from Kang and Hustvedt [97], who used three items-scale to measure purchase intention. Moreover, a five-item scale for brand admiration was adapted from Sweetman et al. [98]. The study used a five-point Likert scale to record the study responses.

Next, the authors addressed the issue of social desirability. In this regard, the authors took several steps to mitigate the effect of social desirability. For example, the authors scattered all items in the questionnaire randomly. This strategy helps break any intended sequence on the part of the respondents in answering the questions. Further, this strategy helps address any liking or disliking of the respondent(s) for a variable. The use of this strategy to mitigate social desirability is also recommended by extant researchers [19,24,94]. Likewise, the instrument was cross-checked by the experts in the field to detect any ambiguity or complexity in questionnaire items. Lastly, the authors cleared the respondent about the importance of their actual response in generating the present research study results. Hence, through these steps, social desirability's potential issue was mitigated to the best possible limit. Table 1 contains the demographic-related information of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic profile.

| | Frequency | % |
|------------------|-----------|-------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 294 | 63.50 |
| Female | 169 | 36.50 |
| Age | | |
| 18–20 | 62 | 13.39 |
| 21–30 | 147 | 31.75 |
| 31–40 | 108 | 23.33 |
| 41–45 | 81 | 17.50 |
| Above 45 | 65 | 14.03 |
| Education | | |
| Intermediate | 67 | 14.47 |
| Graduate Degree | 143 | 30.88 |
| Master's Degree | 182 | 39.32 |
| Higher | 71 | 15.33 |
| Total | 463 | 100 |

4. Results and Data Analysis

4.1. Addressing Common Method Variance, Validity, and Reliability

In the data analysis phase, the authors, first of all, tested for common method variance (CMV). The authors were interested in checking the potential issue of CMV in the dataset of the present research study because they collected all information of the variables from the same respondent. Hence, there is the possibility that there may be the presence of CMV in the collected data. To know whether the issue of CMV exists, the authors performed a single factor analysis [99]. In this regard, the authors loaded all the survey items on a single factor using SPSS software. The rule of thumb here is that if the results of Harman's single-factor analysis indicate that there is the presence of a single factor that is dominant and explaining a total variance of more than 50%, then it is evident that the data are suffering from the issue of CMV. In the case of the present research study, the authors observed no such factor, which was explaining this much variance. In this connection, the largest variance shared by a single factor was 41.29%, which is less than the threshold

level of 50%. Hence, the authors established that there is the absence of the potential threat of CMV.

In the next level of data analysis, the authors carried out exploratory factor analysis to detect if there are some items with weak factor loadings. In doing so, the authors performed principal component analysis (PCA) along with varimax rotation in SPSS. The results produced satisfactory results as there was no item with cross-loading or weak loading, as all items were having factor loading greater than 0.5 [100]. Table 2 presents different results, including correlation analysis, validity and reliability analyses, normality test, and the factor loadings. According to Table 2, the values of correlation among all variables are positive and significant, which means that the present research study variables are directly related.

Table 2. The results of correlation, validity, and reliability analyses.

| Construct | Mean | SD | CSR-S | BRA | PUI | MSV | ASV |
|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| CSR-S | 4.09 | 0.62 | 0.755 | 0.291 ** | 0.368 ** | 0.173 | 0.159 |
| BRA | 3.91 | 0.55 | | 0.774 | 0.236 ** | 0.138 | 0.132 |
| PUI | 3.83 | 0.49 | | | 0.714 | 0.109 | 0.107 |
| | Items | Range * | AVE | α | CR | Skewness | Kurtosis |
| CSR-S | 5 | 0.68–0.79 | 0.57 | 0.78 | 0.80 | −0.63 | 0.72 |
| BRA | 5 | 0.71–0.84 | 0.60 | 0.80 | 0.81 | −0.39 | 0.26 |
| PUI | 3 | 0.76–0.88 | 0.51 | 0.68 | 0.70 | −0.41 | 0.38 |

$\chi^2/df = 4.51$, RMSEA = 0.053, NFI = 0.925, CFI = 0.931, GFI = 0.927

Notes: range *: factor loading range; AVE: average variance extracted; **: significant values of correlations; α : Cronbach’s α coefficient; CR: composite reliability; MSV: maximum shared variance; ASV: average shared variance; BRA, brand admiration; PUI, purchase intention.

In this context, the correlation between CSR-S and brand admiration (BRA) is 0.291 ** that is positive and significant. Furthermore, the standard deviation (SD) values for all three variables are less than 1, indicating less variability in the data. Hence, the data are close to its mean, which is a good indication of the data’s overall health. Likewise, the results of convergent and divergent validities are also reported in Table 2. The convergent validity was assessed with the values of the average variance extracted (AVE). If the AVE value for a specific variable is greater than 0.5, it is an indication that the items of that variable are converging on to it and hence the condition of convergent validity is satisfied. In this regard, all values of AVEs were greater than 0.5. Hence, the authors established that the condition of convergent validity is well met.

Next, the authors assessed the discriminant validity obtained through each AVE’s square root and then compared it with correlation values. For example, CSR’s square root is 0.714 **, which is beyond correlation values (0.236 **, 0.368 **). All these results revealed that the criterion of discriminant validity is well satisfied. The authors have also reported reliability in Table 2 (α values, CR values). Both types of reliability values were above the threshold level of 0.6, and hence, there is no issue of reliability. The authors have also checked for the normality of the data. For this purpose, the guidelines of Brown [101] were followed, who proposed that the data are normally distributed if Skewness and Kurtosis values are between ± 3 and ± 10 . Lastly, the result of confirmatory factor analysis also has been reported in Table 2. In this regard, the authors have assessed different model fit values to validate if there is a fit between the theory and data. All values of model fit indices were in acceptable ranges ($\chi^2/df = 4.51$, RMSEA = 0.053, NFI = 0.925, CFI = 0.931, GFI = 0.927).

4.2. Hypotheses Testing

The authors validated the hypotheses’ results through the structural equation modeling technique (SEM) in AMOS software. In this regard, the authors performed the analysis into two phases. In the first phase, the authors evaluated the path effect results for H1 and H2 without introducing any mediator in the structural model. The direct effect model

outputs revealed that both the hypotheses H1 and H2 are significant and accepted. The authors established these results based on the beta values, *p*-values, the values of ULCI (upper limit confidence interval), and the values of LLCI (lower limit confidence interval). In this vein, the results of H1 were significant and positive ($\beta = 0.233$ **, LLCI = 0.237, ULCI = 0.494, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, the results for H2 were also statistically significant ($\beta = 0.176$ **, LLCI = 0.392, ULCI = 0.471, $p < 0.05$). Hence, the first two hypotheses of the present research study are accepted.

In the second phase, the authors performed the mediation analysis by using the bootstrapping method in AMOS. The authors, in this regard, used a large bootstrapping sample of 2000 in AMOS. The bootstrapping results confirmed that brand admiration mediates between CSR and purchase intention. Further, this mediation was partial as the beta value was reduced from 0.233 ** to 0.079 ** but remained significant, confirming partial mediation. Hence, based on the statistical values ($\beta = 0.079$ **, LLCI = 0.210, ULCI = 0.369, $p < 0.05$), the third hypothesis H3 is also accepted. The detail of all these results is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Hypotheses testing.

| Path | Beta Value | S.E | LLCI | ULCI | Decision |
|---|------------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|
| Results of Hypotheses 1 and 2 | | | | | |
| CSR→PUI | 0.233 ** | 0.041 | 0.237 | 0.494 | Supported |
| CSR→BRA | 0.176 ** | 0.029 | 0.392 | 0.471 | Supported |
| ($\chi^2/df = 3.52$, RMSEA = 0.046, NFI = 0.943, CFI = 0.951, GFI = 0.956) *** ($R^2 = 0.31$ * for H1, $R^2 = 0.26$ * for H2) | | | | | |
| Results of Hypothesis 3 | | | | | |
| CSR→BRA→PUI | 0.079 ** | 0.022 | 0.210 | 0.369 | Supported |
| ($\chi^2/df = 3.23$, RMSEA = 0.038, NFI = 0.949, CFI = 0.957, GFI = 0.953) *** ($R^2 = 0.37$ * for H3) | | | | | |

Notes: CSR = corporate social responsibility; BRA = brand admiration; PUI = purchase intention S.E = standard error, LLCI = lower limit confidence interval, ULCI = upper limit confidence interval, ***, *, ** = significant values.

5. Discussion and Implications

The present research study’s first purpose was to validate a bank’s CSR-S impact on the banking consumers’ purchase intention in Pakistan. The findings validated that CSR-S is positively related to consumers’ purchase intention. The respondents from different banks verified that their bank’s CSR activities are helpful to enhance their purchase decision. They further established that when they are informed on social media that their bank contributes positively to society and the environment, they feel optimistic about their bank. This result can also be explained in the light of attribution theory. In this regard, their attribution process helps them evaluate and identify a brand as a socially responsible entity. Hence, this positive evaluation of a bank based on the process of attribution is also helpful to induce consumers’ purchase intention. The extant CSR researchers also support this finding of the present research study. The studies of Bianchi, Bruno and Sarabia-Sanchez [25], Chu and Chen [39], and Gupta and Wadera [27] are some recent examples in this regard.

Another important objective of this research study was to verify the mediating effect of brand admiration between CSR-S and purchase intention. In this connection, the empirical results confirmed that brand admiration mediates between CSR-S and purchase intention. The respondents in the survey validated that when they observe on social media that their bank is actively participating in uplifting society, the environment, and other stakeholders, they feel optimistic. They further confirmed that the bank’s emotional pull through CSR activities eventually is translated into a higher level of purchase intention, and they intend to buy more from that bank. In this context, the norm of reciprocity helps explain this phenomenon of emotional pull. Hence, CSR-S helps build positive emotions in consumers. One such form of positive emotion is brand admiration, due to which the consumers are

self-motivated to feel optimistic about that bank. Hence, all this process increases their purchase likelihood from a socially responsible bank. This finding of the present research study is also supported by extant researchers [79,85,102].

This research study has some important implications for theory and practice. In this regard, the first theoretical implication is that this research study adds to the existing literature on CSR from consumers' perspectives. Prior studies have explored mainly CSR in other contexts rather than the consumers. For example, the majority of the previous researchers focused on CSR to improve the financial performance of an organization [20,103], quality management [21] or organizational commitment [22], etc. Second, the current survey contributes to the existing literature as it enriches the previous CSR literature from the perspective of positive consumer emotions. It is important because consumers' emotional attachment with a brand is of utmost importance for every organization [104,105]. Lastly, brand admiration as a mediating variable is also an important contribution to the existing literature. This is important as it explains the relationship between CSR and consumers' purchase intention in a better way. Hence, in the presence of brand admiration, the proposed relationship of CSR on social media and consumer purchase intention is well-explained.

Like theoretical implications, this research study has some important practical implications. This research study's findings are of utmost importance for practitioners to realize that a bank's well-planned CSR communications through social media can produce multiple consumer-related outcomes. Further, it is also important for policymakers from the banking sector of Pakistan to understand that using CSR effectively can produce synergic benefits. For example, on one hand, a bank's CSR strategy enables it to meet social responsibilities and can be used as a solid base of competitive advantage on the other hand. This implication is very important, especially for the banking institutions, due to their homogenized character. The homogenized character of this sector makes product differentiation very difficult for all players. Hence, without product differentiation, it is challenging to increase the purchase likelihood of consumers. In this connection, communicating CSR on social media can serve as an unmatched source of competitive advantage, creating a win-win situation for a bank that follows CSR strategies. Finally, the majority of the banking institutions in Pakistan practice CSR from the perspective of philanthropy. The present research study's findings may be a new dawn in this regard because this research study argues that CSR can be framed beyond the philanthropic aspect to achieve other business objectives. CSR can significantly help achieve marketing-related objectives, such as an increase in the likelihood of consumer purchases.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present research study is not without limitations. The first limitation of the present research study lies in explaining consumer purchase intentions only from CSR's perspective. In reality, consumers' behavior is a complex phenomenon because it is affected by multiple sources. Although the proposed relationship in the present research study was statistically significant, it will be wise for future researchers to include more variables in upcoming studies for example, consumers' pro-environmental behavior, organizational environmental commitment and open innovation may be considered in future studies. Hence, the upcoming researchers are suggested to consider these variables along with other variables. Second, the data of this research study were cross-sectional that limits the ability of causal relationships. In this regard, future researchers are suggested to collect data by using a longitudinal data collection strategy. Lastly, the topic of brand equity is of high interest for researchers and policymakers in marketing. Hence, it will be of high interest for future researchers to investigate if the emotional pull created by organizations through CSR-S is helpful to induce brand equity? Further, what kind of brand equity (consumer-based or finance-based) is more affected by CSR will also be interesting for future researchers.

6. Conclusions

To conclude, the current study states that CSR-S of a bank positively influences the banking consumers to increase their purchase likelihood from their banks. The consumers feel that CSR's engagement of their bank benefits society and the environment at large. Hence as a part of society, they positively reciprocate their bank through their increased purchase intention. Moreover, they feel admired for being the consumers of a socially responsible bank. The banking sector of Pakistan can benefit from the findings of this research study to understand that CSR can also be considered to shape the consumers' positive behavior as currently, most of the banks in Pakistan consider CSR only for philanthropic orientation. Hence, this mindset needs to be changed in light of the findings of the current survey.

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