Impact of corporate social responsibility practices on consumer purchase intention of apparel products with mediating role of consumer-retailer love

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Abstract

Purpose – *Companies with corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices care about customers, society, the environment and workers. This study aims to examine the impact of CSR practices (i.e. economic CSR, environmental CSR and societal CSR) on consumers' purchase intention of apparel products, with the mediating role of consumer-retailer love on this relationship.*

Design/methodology/approach – *Data gathered using purposive sampling technique from 300 young online consumers using purposive sampling were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling via SmartPLS3.0.*

Findings – *The results reveal that CSR practices (i.e. environmental CSR and societal CSR) have a positive influence on purchase intention for apparel products. Moreover, consumer-retailer love mediates the relationship between CSR practices (i.e. economic CSR and environmental CSR) and consumers' purchase intention for apparel products.*

Practical implications – *Apparel retail marketers should focus on key determinants when designing CSR campaigns and communicating these CSR initiatives in social media and annual reports. They should also focus on their service quality to create a good perception (images) that helps measure the emotional response (love) between the retailer and consumers.*

Originality/value – *By applying the triple bottom line framework and the stimulus-organism-response model in a single framework, this study is unique and highlights the role of consumer-retailer love as an important mediator on the impact between CSR practices (i.e. economic CSR, environmental CSR, societal CSR) and consumers' purchase intention of apparel products. The findings represent a new contribution to the existing literature, as there has been very limited research on this relationship in a developing nation context.*

Keywords *Corporate social responsibility (CSR), PLS-SEM, Apparel industry, Sustainable marketing, Purchase intention, Consumer-retailer love*

Paper type *Research paper*

Introduction

Companies with corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices care about customers, society, the environment and workers (Hsu and Bui, 2022; Mahmood and Bashir, 2020; Narayanan and Singh, 2023; Quezado *et al.*, 2022b; Silva *et al.*, 2020). CSR practices are critical to a company's survival and sustainability as the company must meet the various interests and needs of a wide range of stakeholders in a competitive business environment (Castro-González *et al.*, 2021; Chen *et al.*, 2021; Pfajfar *et al.*, 2022; Quezado *et al.*, 2022b; Silva *et al.*, 2020; Žukauskas *et al.*, 2018). The sustainability of the textile and apparel industry has had a positive impact on environmental and socioeconomic dimensions

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(Warasthe *et al.*, 2022). According to Statista (2023), the apparel market will generate revenues of US$5.23bn in 2023, with a projected annual growth rate of 5.79% (CAGR 2023–2027). Women's apparel is the largest segment of the market, with a market volume of US$2.27bn in 2023 and nonluxury goods accounting for 92% of sales. However, the apparel industry faces challenges as it has been labeled an "unclean" industry due to its rapid production and overconsumption (Williams, 2022). The apparel industry is responsible for about 10% of carbon emissions (Dewanto and Belgiawan, 2020) and about 165 chemicals are considered hazardous and have negative environmental impacts (Liang and Mangharam, 2019).

CSR practices adopted by the company have changed customers' perceptions of the company, with consumers becoming more aware and knowledgeable (Hsu and Bui, 2022). Companies that engage in CSR practices attract consumers to buy brands with social responsibility (Hassan *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, Chan *et al.* (2023) and Ramany *et al.* (2022) avowed that environmental consciousness and purchase intention have a significant relationship, whereas Bhalla and Overton (2019) found opposite findings, which makes the findings inconsistent. The relationship between CSR activities and purchase intentions was investigated in various industries, for instance, the food and beverage industry (Chang *et al.*, 2019; Harun *et al.*, 2018), coffee retail store (Chan and Saad, 2019), the telecommunication industry (Lacap *et al.*, 2021) and organic apparel (Tong and Su, 2018). However, Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2020) and Vishwakarma *et al.* (2022) stressed that there is a dearth of research on CSR and consumer purchases in the apparel industry. Moreover, several studies conducted in the USA and developing countries found that CSR has a positive relationship with purchase intention (Chang *et al.*, 2019; Harun *et al.*, 2018); however, there is a limited study that looks into Malaysia setting, a developing country (Yeo *et al.*, 2018), hence justifying research in this context.

Besides that, as past studies mostly focused on brand love on examined the relationship between CSR and various outcomes (Amegbe *et al.*, 2021; Kim *et al.*, 2020; Quezado *et al.*, 2022a), this study contributes to advancing the knowledge by examining the consumer-retailer love (Ortiz and Harrison, 2015; Vlachos and Vrechopoulos, 2012). Indeed, Ho's (2017) study has highlighted the lack and urged more studies to consider this construct rather than brand love, where the study also justified that the consumer-retailer's love as a potential mediator for consumers to repeat the patronage and willingness to pay.

Consequently, this study provides an answer to the following research question:

RQ1. Do CSR practices (i.e. economic CSR, environmental CSR and societal CSR) impact consumers' purchase intention of apparel products, with the mediating role of consumer-retailer love on this relationship?

The integration of the triple bottom line (TBL) framework of Elkington (1998) and the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model of Mehrabian and Russell (1974) into a single framework is unique and advances extant research on the impact of CSR practices on young consumer purchase intention of apparel products, with the mediating role of consumer-retailer love on this relationship in a developing nation context. Previous studies have used Carroll's (1979) pyramid of the CSR model as their underpinning theory, which focused on economic, legal, ethical and philanthropy responsibilities (Al-Alawi *et al.*, 2023; Ijabadeniyi and Govender, 2019; Nurunnabi *et al.*, 2020). Besides, the empirical findings are vital to broadening the methodology used by the scholarly works of Tong and Su (2018) that focused on US college students.

The study contributes in a practical way by providing policymakers and marketers with empirical data regarding the impact of CSR practices (i.e. economic CSR, environmental CSR and societal CSR) on consumers' purchase intention of apparel products, with the mediating role of consumer-retailer love on this relationship in the context of Malaysia. Apparel retail marketers should focus on key determinants when designing CSR campaigns

and communicating these CSR initiatives in social media and annual reports. They should also focus on their service quality to create a good perception (images) that helps measure the emotional response (love) between the retailer and consumers.

The following section presents the literature review and the methodology used is explained in the third section. The results are presented in Section 4 and the findings are discussed in Section 5. In the concluding section, the contributions of the study are highlighted and directions for future research are furnished.

Literature review

Triple bottom line framework and stimulus-organism-response model

The TBL framework of Elkington (1998) and the S-O-R model of Mehrabian and Russell (1974) were used as underlying theories. The TBL model states that companies measure their success based on three domains: social, environmental and economic (Elkington, 1998). These domains contribute to sustainability but also enable sustainable development. The TBL framework can show companies that these areas of responsibility are relevant factors in their financial reports and that this can be beneficial to the company (Tashiba, 2014). The S-O-R model states that the environment acts as a stimulus (S), which contains a series of signals that cause an internal evaluation of someone (O), resulting in positive or negative responses (R). Liu and Zheng (2019) emphasize that the S-O-R model helps explain the relationship between environmental stimuli and consumers. The S-O-R model has been used by many researchers in the field of marketing to understand customer responses. Latif *et al.* (2020) used CSR as stimulus, service quality, satisfaction, image and reputation as organisms and customer loyalty (response). CSR marketing was used as a stimulus, resulting in attitude, values, personal norms, environmental self-identity (organism) and green adoption behavior (response) (Amaya Rivas *et al.*, 2022), further supporting Wu *et al.*'s (2022) view of perceived environmental CSR as a stimulus. Based on the above concept, this study considered CSR practices (i.e. economic CSR, environmental CSR and societal CSR) as a stimulus, love between customer and retailer as an organism and purchase intention as a response.

Corporate social responsibility practices and purchase intention

CSR initiatives such as economic, ethical, legal and philanthropic responsibility have a significant impact on consumers' conscious purchasing behavior (Yeo *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, Ali and Sohail (2018) highlighted that CSR initiatives (i.e. public awareness, social value creation, customer focus, green environment and philanthropy) influence customers' purchase intention. This also supports Camilleri's (2017) view that environmental CSR is mostly characterized by the goal of reducing the company's environmental impact throughout the product life cycle. Jha *et al.* (2022) found that perceptions of CSR have a positive influence on price fairness (economics) and purchase intention in the fast-food industry, confirming that the economics of CSR is significantly related to purchase intention.

In another study, Nosi *et al.* (2020) found that aspects of environmental well-being, political values and consumers' perceived CSR at the point of sale influenced consumers' willingness to purchase organic quinoa-based foods in Italy. They also found that CSR has a significant and positive influence on attitudes toward purchasing organic quinoa-based foods. In addition, Zarif Sagheb *et al.* (2020) found that legal CSR supports customers' intention to purchase foreign foods. The results suggest that Iranian consumers prefer legal brands (against smuggling) and environmentally friendly brands and pay more attention to companies that maintain friendly relations with their country and avoid hostility. In addition, Kim and Lee (2023) found that environmental awareness has a significant influence on consumers' purchase intention, which is consistent with the studies of Siyal *et al.* (2021) and Zhuang *et al.* (2021). The empirical study by Nguyen *et al.* (2021) also suggests that most

major fashion brands use environmental CSR activities to improve consumer purchase intention. This is also consistent with the study of Olšanová *et al.* (2022), in which they found that social/environmental CSR significantly influences the purchase intention of luxury brands, but economic CSR does not. Based on the above, this study hypothesizes the following:

H1. Economic CSR practices have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention of apparel products.

H2. Environmental CSR practices have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention of apparel products.

H3. Societal CSR practices have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention of apparel products.

Corporate social responsibility and consumer-retailer's love

A marketing concept uses the pull strategy to identify consumer needs and develop products accordingly in the age of digital advancement (Kotler *et al.*, 2023). The company tries to understand consumers before developing the strategy for a product, price, place, promotion, people, process and physical evidence. The concept of consumer-retailer love is based on the principle of marketing. The company's efforts to provide more value than price is appreciated by consumers, which creates consumer-retailer love relationship (Kotler *et al.*, 2023).

Economic CSR refers to the fairness of prices to consumers to achieve the company's business objectives (Hatane and Sharon, 2014). Existing literature discusses the company's economic efforts to make consumers love retailers. Liao *et al.* (2020) investigated the influence of perceived price fairness on consumer-retailer love. The results of the study show a significant influence of perceived price fairness on consumers' brand loyalty. Customers are more likely to choose products from socially responsible companies, which leads to higher sales and profits (Karlsson and Åkerhag, 2022; Mahmood and Bashir, 2020). As a result, customers develop greater customer love toward the company and are willing to pay a premium for its products or services.

Environmental CSR refers to the efforts of companies to reduce the impact of product life cycle processes on the environment, such as pollution and global warming (Sughra and Crowther, 2015). The world is facing many environmental challenges that require companies to take corrective actions. In this context, companies that care about the environment are better received by consumers. Existing literature discusses the environmental CSR efforts of companies that make them popular among consumers as retailers. The study by Lee *et al.* (2022) explains how service experience, environmental CSR, brand love and reuse intention are related. The study shows that there is a positive relationship between environmental CSR and consumer love for retailers. Consumers of the digital age are very aware of environmental issues and their impact on human life. Considering this scenario, companies have started to work to protect the environment and think about environmentally friendly products (Huang *et al.*, 2022).

Societal CSR refers to the company's efforts for the welfare of society, people and culture (Khurana and Ricchetti, 2016). The previous marketing concept was concerned with how the company provides benefits to the consumer and receives them in return. Fashion brands are facing intense competition, which has increased the demands on the social marketing concept (Kotler *et al.*, 2023). This concept requires societal CSR activities in addition to consumer and corporate benefits. In the context of retailing, the study by Vlachos and Vrechopoulos (2012) discussed that societal CSR contributes significantly to the consumer-retailer love. The study therefore hypothesized that:

H4. Economic CSR practices have a positive impact on consumer-retailer love toward apparel products.

H5. Environmental CSR practices have a positive impact on consumer-retailer love toward apparel products.

H6. Societal CSR practices have a positive impact on consumer-retailer love toward apparel products.

Mediating role of consumer-retailer's love

An investigation of the impact of consumers' love for the retailer (brand love) on repurchase intention by Çelik and Topuz (2021) found a significant relationship between consumers' love for the retailer and purchase intention. Similarly, the study by Kim *et al.* (2020), which examined the influence of brand love and involvement on the relationship between CSR (ethics and philanthropy) and brand resonance, found the mediating role of brand love and involvement in these relationships. Moreover, Javed and Khan (2023) found that brand love is able to mediate the relationship between CSR and word of mouth in the mobile industry. This is also supported by the study of Quezado *et al.* (2022a), which confirms that brand love is able to mediate between the perception of CSR and corporate ethics on brand loyalty. In addition, Ho's (2017) studies show that consumers' love for a retailer and attitude toward a retailer are the most important mediators of the relationship between CSR associations, environmental awareness and consumers' behavioral intentions. Based on the above discussion, there is little literature on the mediating role of brand love between the relationship of economic, social and environmental CSR and purchase intention. Based on this idea, the study hypothesized that:

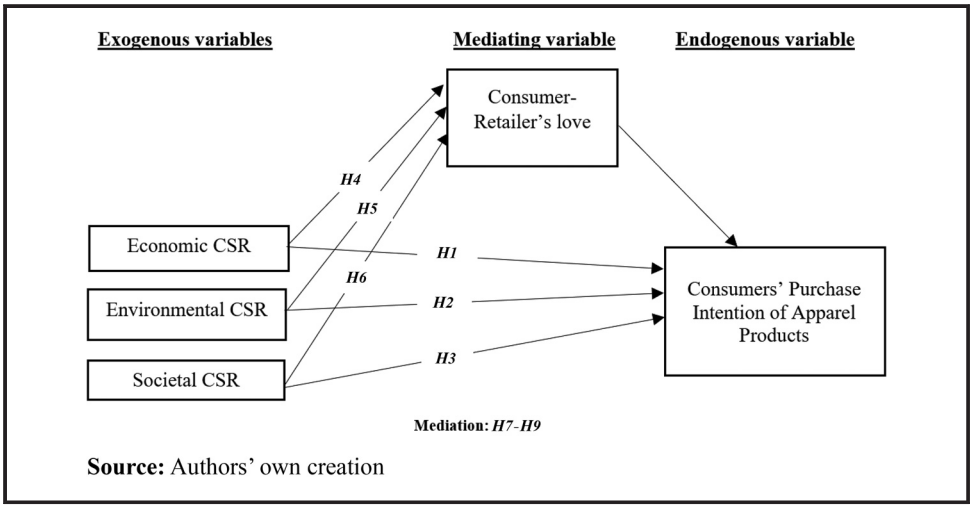
H7. Consumer-retailer love mediates the relationship between economic CSR practices and the purchase intention of apparel products.

H8. Consumer-retailer love mediates the relationship between environmental CSR practices and the purchase intention of apparel products.

H9. Consumer-retailer love mediates the relationship between societal CSR practices and the purchase intention of apparel products.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, Figure 1 displays the theoretical framework of the present study.

Figure 1 Proposed theoretical framework



Source: Authors' own creation

Methodology

Sampling procedures

This study used a quantitative research design based on the deductive paradigm associated with the positivist view, in which research begins with a theory about reality and hypotheses (assumptions) are developed based on previous studies and tested through empirical research (Gray, 2014; Johnson, 2012). Accordingly, a survey method was used because it allows the researcher to learn the respondents' thoughts about a specific topic from a specific group of people (Babbie, 2020). Three hundred self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the target respondents. Nonrandom sampling was used using a purposive sampling technique where samples were selected based on the characteristics of a population and the objectives of the study (Crossman, 2019). The researcher selects consumers in Klang Valley, Malaysia, who have experience purchasing Brand X apparel products and are aware of the company's CSR activities. This allows the researcher to get more accurate results by including a control question such as "Do you buy product X" in the questionnaire. Those respondents who answered "No" were excluded from the data set to ensure that actual customers of clothing company X were used for data analysis. Of these, 255 meaningful responses were used for data analysis. This sample size is consistent with Roscoe's (1975) recommendation that sample sizes between 30 and 500 are appropriate for social science studies.

Indeed, it exceeds the G-power analysis with (predictors: 7, effect size, 0.15; power: 0.95) (Maccallum *et al.*, 1996), the minimum sample size required for this study is 153. G-power analysis was used to determine the appropriate sample size for this study because the entire list of customers of clothing company X is not available.

Questionnaire development and instrument

The self-administered questionnaire is divided into four sections. Section A asks for answers about the respondent's demographic profile, such as gender, age, race, education and income. Section B contains questions on the three dimensions of CSR activities, namely, social, economic and environmental, adopted from Elkington (1998) and Gallardo-Vázquez *et al.* (2013). In Section C, the measures of purchase intentions were adopted from Kumar *et al.* (2009), and in Section D, the items on consumer-retailer love were adopted from Vlachos and Vrechopoulos (2012). Five-point Likert-type scale was used to measure these variables, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Appendix provides information on the measurement of instruments.

Common method variance

Harman's single-factor analysis was used as a statistical and procedural tool to assess the impact of common method variance (CMV) on research constructs (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The result of Harman's single-factor analysis is that the first factor of this study explained for 43.024% variance, which is below the recommended threshold of 50% (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Thus, it is confirmed that this study is free from CMV problems.

Findings

Table 1 details that of the 225 respondents, 38.4% were male and more than half were female (61.6%). However, the majority of respondents are domestic customers from the age group of 21–25 years old; 16.1% of respondents are between 26 and 30 years old, followed by 6.3% in the under-20 category. In terms of education level, more than half of the respondents have a bachelor's degree (68.6%). In addition, almost half of the respondents (42.0%) have an income of less than RM 1,000, whereas 5.1% have an income between RM 4,001 and RM 5,000.

Table 1 Profile of respondents ($n = 255$)

Variables	*Frequency*	*%*
Gender		
Male	98	38.4
Female	157	61.6
Age (years old)		
≤ 20	16	6.3
21–25	177	69.4
26–30	41	16.1
31–35	9	3.5
36–40	1	0.4
41–45	2	0.8
46–50	4	1.6
>50	5	2.0
Race		
Malay	49	19.2
Chinese	152	59.6
Indian	29	11.4
Others	25	9.8
Education		
STPM/HSC/Diploma	63	24.7
Bachelor degree	175	68.6
Master degree	15	5.9
PhD	2	0.8
Income		
≤RM1,000	107	42.0
RM 1,001–RM 2,000	42	16.5
RM 2,001–RM 3,000	45	17.6
RM 3,001–RM 4,000	25	9.8
RM 4,001–RM 5,000	13	5.1
RM 5,001 and above	23	9.0

Source: Authors' own creation

Measurement model

In the measurement model stage, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the construct measures were assessed. Convergent validity was ensured by factor loadings greater than 0.600, composite reliability (CR) greater than 0.700 and average variance extracted (AVE) greater than 0.500 (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Table 2 shows that the factor loadings were all greater than 0.600 after the Econ 1 and Soc 5 items were removed because they did not meet this requirement. In addition, CR and AVE were also above the cut-off values. Thus, the criteria for convergent validity were met.

Discriminant validity is established when all heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) values obtained are below the required threshold of HTMT.90, as suggested by Gold *et al.* (2001). Table 3 shows that all HTMT values are below HTMT.85, which means that discriminant validity is ascertained.

Structural model assessment

In the structural model stage, bootstrapping procedures with a resample of 5,000 were used to assess the relationships between the constructs and their corresponding beta coefficients, *t*-values and *p*-values (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Table 4 shows that environmental CSR ($\beta = 0.133$, *t*-value = 2.827, $p = 0.002$) and societal CSR ($\beta = 0.120$, *t*-value = 2.855, $p = 0.002$) are positively related to consumers' intention to purchase apparel products, whereas

Table 2 Convergent validity

Variables	*Items*	*Loadings*	*Items deleted*	*Cronbach's alpha*	*CR (>0.70)*	*AVE (>0.50)*
Economic (ECON)	Econ2	0.758	Econ1	0.750	0.840	0.569
	Econ3	0.790				
	Econ4	0.654				
	Econ5	0.806				
Environmental (ENV)	Env1	0.811		0.823	0.877	0.588
	Env2	0.676				
	Env3	0.834				
	Env4	0.741				
	Env5	0.763				
Societal (SOC)	Soc1	0.787	Soc5	0.873	0.873	0.633
	Soc2	0.846				
	Soc3	0.793				
	Soc4	0.755				
Consumer-retailer love (CRL)	CR1	0.919		0.882	0.927	0.809
	CR2	0.894				
	CR3	0.885				
Purchase intention (PI)	PI1	0.741		0.913	0.936	0.746
	PI2	0.902				
	PI3	0.919				
	PI4	0.908				
	PI5	0.836				

Notes: CR= composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted
Source: Authors' own creation

Table 3 Discriminant validity using HTMT ratio

Variable	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
(1) Consumer-retailer love					
(2) Economic CSR	0.741				
(3) Environmental CSR	0.637	0.678			
(4) Purchase intention	0.844	0.704	0.701		
(5) Societal CSR	0.559	0.706	0.769	0.640	

Source: Authors' own creation

Table 4 Direct effects

Relationship	*Std. Beta*	*Std. Error*	t-*value*	p-*value*	*LLCI (5%)*	*ULCI (95%)*	D	R^2
H1: ECON → PI	0.027	0.044	0.613	0.270	−0.050	0.096	NS	0.763
H2: ENV → PI	0.133	0.047	2.827**	0.002	0.056	0.210	S	
H3: SOC → PI	0.120	0.042	2.855**	0.002	0.052	0.190	S	
H4: ECON → CRL	0.429	0.062	6.942**	0.000	0.321	0.522	S	0.446
H5: ENV → CRL	0.268	0.072	3.716**	0.000	0.151	0.388	S	
H6: SOC → CRL	0.074	0.069	1.067	0.143	−0.039	0.189	NS	

Notes: ULCI = upper level confidence interval; LLCI = lower level confidence interval; 1-tailed test; CRL = consumer-retailer love; ECON = economic CSR; ENV = environmental CSR; PI = purchase intention; SOC = societal CSR; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$
Source: Authors' own creation

economic CSR ($\beta = 0.027$, t-value = 0.613, $p = 0.270$) has no significant relationship with consumers' intention to purchase apparel products. In addition, economic CSR ($\beta = 0.429$, t-value = 6.942, $p = 0.000$) and environmental CSR ($\beta = 0.268$, t-value = 3.716, $p = 0.000$) were found to have a positive significant relationship with consumer-retailer love for apparel products. However, societal CSR is not significantly related to consumer-retailer love for apparel products. This is in favor of *H2*, *H3*, *H4* and *H5*, whereas *H1* and *H6* were rejected.

An R^2-value of 0.763 indicates that 76.3% of the variation in consumers' intention to purchase apparel products was explained by the three CSR practices (i.e. economic CSR, environmental CSR and societal CSR). Moreover, these CSR practices could explain 44.6% of consumer-retailer love ($R^2 = 0.446$).

The collinearity issue was evaluated using the variance inflation factor (VIF) with a cut-off value of 3.3, as suggested by Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2006). The VIF values in Table 5 were all below 3.3, indicating that no collinearity problems were present. Cohen (1988) divided the effect size of f^2 into small (0.02), medium (0.15) and large (0.35). Specifically, economic CSR has a medium effect on consumers' retailer love ($f^2 = 0.209$), whereas environmental CSR and societal CSR have a small effect on consumer-retailer love. Therefore, these CSR practices have a small effect on purchase intention.

Preacher and Hayes (2008) bootstrapping method was used to test the indirect effect of economic, environmental and societal CSR through the mediating effect of love between consumers and retailers. As shown in Table 6, ECO→CRL→PI ($\beta = 0.302$, $p < 0.01$, LL = 0.207 and UL = 0.391), ENV→CRL→PI ($\beta = 0.188$, $p < 0.00$, LL = 0.087 and UL = 0.293) were significant. The confidence interval of these two relationships in Table 6 is not between a value of 0, suggesting that consumer-retailer love mediates the relationships between economic CSR and environmental CSR and purchase intention. Thus, *H7* and *H8* were supported. However, consumer love for retailers does not mediate between societal CSR and purchase intention, therefore *H9* is rejected.

PLSpredict was used to examine the predictive power of the model, where variables can be replaced during the course of the study and the researchers aimed to assess the out-of-sample predictive power (Hair, 2020). The results of the model partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in Table 7 were compared with the results of the values of LM. The comparison of predictive power (PLS-SEM-LM) is performed using the root mean square error (RMSE), which has high symmetrically distributed prediction errors (Shmueli *et al.*, 2019). When the RMSE values of the model PLS-SEM are compared with the naive values of LM, most indicators show that the RMSE values of PLS-SEM are lower than the RMSE values of the values of LM. Thus, it has high predictive power for consumer-retailer love, whereas it has medium predictive power for purchase intention.

Table 5 f^2 and VIF values

	f^2		VIF	
Variable	*CRL*	*PI*	*CRL*	*PI*
CRL		1.160		1.804
ECON	0.209	0.002	1.593	1.926
ENV	0.072	0.039	1.801	1.930
SOC	0.005	0.033	1.847	1.857

Notes: CRL = consumer-retailer love; ECON = economic CSR; ENV = environmental CSR; SOC = societal CSR
Source: Authors' own creation

Table 6 Results of mediation analysis

Relationship	*Std. beta*	*Std. error*	T *value*	P	*LL (2.5%)*	*UL (97.5%)*	*Decision*
H7: ECON → CRL → PI	0.302	0.047	6.480	0.000	0.207	0.391	S
H8: ENV → CRL → PI	0.188	0.052	3.648	0.000	0.087	0.293	S
H9: SOC → CRL → PI	0.052	0.049	1.070	0.285	−0.043	0.148	NS

Notes: UL = upper level, LL = lower level; 2-tailed test; S = supported; NS = not supported; CRL = consumer-retailer love; ECON = economic CSR; ENV = environmental CSR; PI = purchase intention; SOC = societal CSR; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$
Source: Authors' own creation

Table 7 PLS predict assessment

Items	Q^2*predict*	*PLS-SEM*	*LM*	*PLS-SEM-LM*	*Interpretation*
CR1	0.384	0.925	0.932	−0.007	
CR2	0.277	0.973	0.999	−0.026	High
CR3	0.363	0.825	0.842	−0.017	
PI1	0.330	0.876	0.871	0.005	
PI2	0.370	0.924	0.932	−0.008	
PI3	0.368	0.937	0.947	−0.010	Moderate
PI4	0.366	0.925	0.940	−0.015	
PI5	0.314	0.858	0.839	0.019	

Source: Authors' own creation

Discussion

This study examined the impact of CSR practices (i.e. economic CSR, environmental CSR, societal CSR) on consumers' purchase intention of apparel products, with the mediating role of consumer-retailer love on this relationship. The findings of the PLS-SEM approach confirm that CSR practices (i.e. societal CSR and environmental CSR) significantly influence consumers' purchase intention of apparel products. The findings have supported the study of Lee and Lee (2018), which found that CSR influences customer purchase intention at fashion companies. This also aligns with past studies (Camilleri, 2017; Nguyen *et al.*, 2021; Olšanová *et al.*, 2022). Further examination of the results shows that economic CSR was found to insignificantly impact consumers' purchase intention, which yielded different results as compared to the past studies (Karlsson and Åkerhag, 2022; Liao *et al.*, 2020; Mahmood and Bashir, 2020; Yeo *et al.*, 2018). The possible explanation for the insignificant results is that the demographic study of the respondents is mainly young adults, where they might be less perceived on the economic aspects. This is congruent with the study, which stated that among all the CSR practices, economics CSR was the least perceived (Al-Alawi *et al.*, 2023). The study by Nurunnabi *et al.* (2020), disagrees that Carroll's economic responsibility is the foundational building block of CSR. This was further clarified by Carroll (2021) in the latest development of CSR, where he argued that economic responsibility was not prominent or it is more important than other CSR domains (legal, ethical and philanthropy), as some have misconstrued.

Furthermore, environmental CSR and societal CSR are much more prominent and perceived by customers, which impacts their purchase intention of apparel products. Hence, by this result, the apparel company can enhance the ways to communicate their environmental and philanthropy CSR activities to the customers. These findings were also supported by Harun *et al.* (2018) and Nosi *et al.* (2020) that customer support companies that are involved in CSR, particularly environmental CSR influence purchase intention (Ali and Sohail, 2018). Hence, the apparel should construct better CSR activities, for example, to increase customer purchase intention, the apparel company should focus their attention on the environment and community by introducing initiatives such as using recycle bags, collecting second-hand clothes and manufacturing sustainable apparel based on the CSR initiatives, rather than as green-washing strategies to influence the consumer's purchase intention of apparel products.

This study further established the positive relationship between environmental CSR and consumer-retailer love. The findings concur with Lee *et al.* (2022) that explain service experience, environmental CSR, brand love and reuse intention are related. However, the present research found that societal CSR does not affect consumer-retailer love. This could be possibly explained by the current demographic, where the study is mainly made up of young adult consumers, where awareness and knowledge on social-related CSR might be low (Periyayya *et al.*, 2016). Besides, it has been argued by Chatzopoulou and de Kiewiet

(2021) that activities related to philanthropy (societal CSR) are not trusted by millennials as they believe that companies should be responsible for their domains of activity, which further explains the insignificant results. The consumer-retailer love was also found to mediate the relationship between economic CSR and environmental CSR and purchase intention which also supported love (emotional) act as a significant mediator (Attiq *et al.*, 2022) and could act as the organism (feelings) in the S-O-R model (Koay *et al.*, 2023; Kumar *et al.*, 2021).

Conclusion

In summary, this study discovered a significant relationship between different types of CSR practices (i.e. environmental CSR and societal CSR) and consumer purchase intention for apparel products, with consumer-retailer love playing a mediating role in this relationship. CSR practices in the apparel industry provide a great opportunity to communicate to customers that companies are committed to CSR and can help build good feelings and love that lead to higher purchase intentions. This study contributed to the body of knowledge in the field of CSR by using Elkington's (1998) TBL framework instead of Carroll's (1979) commonly used CSR pyramid. The present study found that environmental CSR and societal CSR are significant determinants. In addition, this study also contributed to the S-O-R model to explain the relationship between variables. This study contributed to customer relationship science by examining consumer-retailer love instead of brand love, which has not been sufficiently explored in the literature in a developing nation context.

As a contribution to practice, the marketing department of the apparel company should launch a CSR campaign to encourage customers to actively participate in programs such as community service for the benefit of society, charitable activities such as donating to children's homes or orphanages, issuing sustainable clothing and other initiatives. In addition, the apparel company should highlight the good deeds it does for society and the environment on social media and in its annual report to effectively communicate with customers as stakeholders. In addition, the management of the apparel company should focus on the quality of customer service by providing clothing at affordable and fair prices and ensuring that the staff treats customers well and handles customer inquiries knowledgeably, to build a good perception and image and strengthen the love between customers and retailers, because the love between customers and retailers is an important mediator and has a positive impact on marketing results.

This study is limited to the view of positivism through deductive reasoning. Therefore, there is an opportunity to extend the methodology and conduct a mixed-methods design to gain deeper insights as consumer attitudes and behaviors change over time depending on context. For future research, it is recommended that the quantitative approach be expanded by adding other moderators or mediators such as trust, CSR communication, CSR skepticism and demographic variables from a larger sample outside the Malaysian context to add more insight and robustness to the current framework/model and contribute to the science of environmental and consumer marketing.

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Appendix. Measurement of instruments

Economic CSR (adapted from Elkington, 1998; Gallardo-Vázquez *et al.*, 2013)

- X focus on survival in the marketplace. *(removed)*
- X is characterized to have the best relation price to quality.
- X offers customers accurate information about the products/services.
- The respect to consumer rights is a priority in X.
- X offering high-quality products/services to the customers.

Environmental CSR (adapted from Elkington, 1998; Gallardo-Vázquez *et al.*, 2013)

- X cares for the environmental related issues.
- X uses recyclable packing.
- X has positive initiative to produce ecological goods.
- X is in favor of waste products recycling (e.g. second hand clothes).
- X is in favor of carbon gas emission reductions.

Social CSR (adapted from Elkington, 1998; Gallardo-Vázquez *et al.*, 2013)

- X takes community social problems into account.

- X considers the social well-being of society as a whole.
- X actively promotes volunteerism activities within local communities.
- X engages in charitable activities.
- X is committed to provide job opportunities (regardless gender and ethnics). *(removed)*

Consumer-retailer love (adapted Vlachos and Vrechopoulos, 2012)

- X is my favorite retailer that I can count on.
- If I were describing myself, shopping at X would likely be something I would mention.
- I always enjoy shopping at X.

Purchase intention (adapted from Kumar *et al.*, 2009)

- I plan to buy X products for special occasions.
- I intend to buy X frequently.
- I plan to buy X often.
- I will purchase upcoming new products of X.
- I will purchase X good and services in the future.

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