

THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON BUILDING A POSITIVE BRAND IMAGE: (AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF A SAMPLE OF CUSTOMERS OF PRIVATE AND GOVERNMENT BANKS IN BABYLON)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on building a positive brand image, through an exploratory study of a sample of customers of government and private banks in Babylon, Iraq. The research adopted a descriptive-analytical approach, using a questionnaire distributed to a random sample of 130 customers of Al-Rashid Bank (government) and Baghdad Private Bank. The questionnaire consisted of two main axes: corporate social responsibility (covering social, environmental, economic, and ethical dimensions) and brand image (covering trust, reputation, and loyalty). The results showed that the level of CSR implementation was high (overall mean = 4.12), and the level of brand image was also high (overall mean = 4.17). The study confirmed a strong positive correlation between CSR and brand image, and that CSR has a significant direct impact on building a positive brand image. The most influential activities were those supporting humanitarian and environmental causes. The study recommends that companies genuinely and transparently adopt social responsibility as an integral part of their strategy to enhance brand image, credibility, and competitive advantage.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, brand image.

1. INTRODUCTION

Interest in the social aspect by organizations is considered one of the most important requirements of the present time. Organizations, regardless of their nature, are now required to adopt a clear and normative ethical system, where this system is translated into a set of responsible administrative strategies, standards, programs, and controls. It is no longer acceptable in the business world for organizations to practice their activities in isolation from ethical and social responsibility toward society, especially with the increasing awareness of customers and their perception of the challenges and risks facing the environment and the incorrect social and ethical values being disseminated.

Corporate social responsibility is one of the criteria for achieving sustainable competitiveness. Organizations work to integrate environmental and social concerns into their strategy to ensure continuity and improve the mental image of organizations. It relies on modern techniques for social responsibility embodying its dimensions (economic, social, legal, and environmental). The business environment has witnessed major transformations in recent years as a result of economic and technological development and increased competition among organizations, which has driven

organizations to seek new methods to enhance their market position and build strong relationships with society.

Among the most important of these methods is corporate social responsibility, which has become a central focus in modern corporate strategies. The role of organizations is no longer limited to achieving profits but has extended to include contribution to the social, economic, and environmental development of the society in which they operate. Social responsibility is one of the modern administrative concepts aimed at achieving balance between the economic goals of the organization and societal requirements. Companies implement a set of activities and programs that contribute to improving societal well-being, such as supporting education, health, environmental protection, and participating in charitable and developmental activities.

Companies' adoption of social responsibility practices enhances their reputation and improves their image among the public, which positively reflects on their marketing and competitive performance. At the same time, brand image has become one of the most important factors influencing company success and continuity, as it represents the mental impression formed by consumers toward the company and its products as a result of previous experiences and various marketing messages. The more positive and clear the mental image, the greater consumer trust in the brand and the higher the level of brand loyalty, which contributes to increasing the company's market share and achieving a sustainable competitive advantage.

From this standpoint, there is growing interest in studying the relationship between corporate social responsibility and brand image, as many studies indicate that companies committed to social responsibility practices enjoy a more positive mental image among the public compared to companies that neglect this aspect. The contemporary consumer has become more aware of social and environmental issues and tends to support companies that show genuine concern for society and the environment. Accordingly, this research aims to study the impact of corporate social responsibility on building a positive brand image by analyzing the relationship between social responsibility practices undertaken by companies and consumer perception of the brand image, given the great importance of this topic in enhancing the competitiveness of organizations and achieving sustainable development in society.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

First: Research Problem

In light of the continuous increase in consumer awareness of social and environmental issues, companies are required to adopt social responsibility practices as a means to enhance their reputation and build a positive image of their brand. However, many companies still view social responsibility as a secondary activity or merely a promotional tool without realizing its real impact on improving the mental image among consumers.

The research problem lies in attempting to answer the following main question:

What is the impact of corporate social responsibility on building a positive brand image?

Second: Research Importance

The importance of this research stems from both the scientific and practical aspects, which can be summarized as follows:

- The research highlights two important concepts in marketing and business administration: corporate social responsibility and brand image.

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- It contributes to enriching the scientific literature on the relationship between social responsibility and the mental image of the brand.
 - It provides a theoretical framework that can benefit future studies in this field.
 - It helps companies understand the role social responsibility plays in building a positive brand image.
 - It clarifies the importance of adopting social responsibility programs as part of companies' marketing strategies.
 - It contributes to providing practical recommendations for companies to enhance their reputation and improve their relationship with society.

Third: Research Objectives

This research aims to achieve a number of objectives, most notably:

1. Identify the concept of corporate social responsibility and its main dimensions.
2. Clarify the concept of brand image and the factors influencing it.
3. Analyze the relationship between social responsibility and brand image.
4. Measure the impact of corporate social responsibility on building a positive brand image.
5. Provide a set of recommendations to help companies enhance their mental image through social responsibility practices.

Fourth: Research Hypotheses

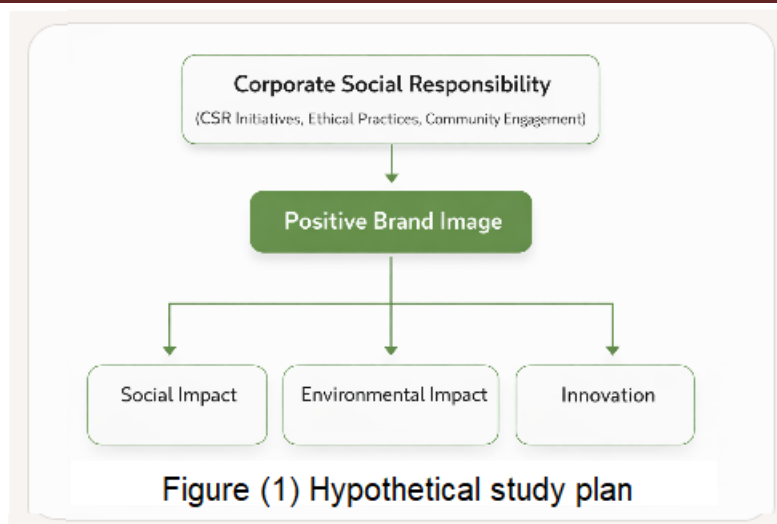
The research adopts the following main hypothesis:

There is a statistically significant relationship between corporate social responsibility and building a positive brand image.

The following sub-hypotheses branch from it:

1. There is a significant correlation between the social dimension of social responsibility and brand image.
2. There is a significant correlation between the environmental dimension of social responsibility and brand image.
3. There is a significant correlation between the economic dimension of social responsibility and brand image.
4. There is a significant correlation between the ethical dimension of social responsibility and brand image.
5. There is a significant effect relationship between corporate social responsibility and building a positive brand image.

Fifth: Research Variables (Conceptual Model)



2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Section One: Corporate Social Responsibility

Subsection 1: Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (Pages 8-9)

There are numerous definitions of the concept of corporate social responsibility, each reflecting a different perspective. The concept refers to organizations' commitment to bear responsibility toward all stakeholders, including shareholders, customers, employees, suppliers, workers, the environment, and society at large. This concept means companies are required not only to achieve legitimate profits and contribute to the national economy but also to extend their commitment to the environment, workers, their families, and other segments of society.

Among the most important and widely known definitions are those of the World Bank, the European Commission, and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

The World Bank defined corporate social responsibility as "the commitment of business organizations to contribute to sustainable development by working with their employees, their families, the local community, and society at large to improve their quality of life in ways that benefit business and development" (World Bank, 2005:1).

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development defined corporate social responsibility as "the collection of efforts that contribute to achieving a balance between economic, environmental, and social dimensions, ensuring the continuity of the organization." It also noted that social responsibility derives from voluntary initiatives of companies, not from binding legal obligations, and is achieved through persuasion and education.

The European Commission defined corporate social responsibility as "a concept whereby organizations integrate social and environmental considerations into their operations and interactions with stakeholders on a voluntary basis," emphasizing that social responsibility is a voluntary concept that requires compliance with laws and the provision of resources for companies to fulfill their responsibility toward society (Al-Sakarna, 2020:45).

The second element in definitions emphasizes the relationship with stakeholders and society at large (employees, customers, suppliers, and society as a whole). Organizations bear responsibility not only toward shareholders but also toward balancing the interests of all stakeholders who may affect or be affected by their operations. Social responsibility is embedded in the organization's

message, vision, culture, and values. It is also among the responsibilities of executive management as part of strategic planning for the corporation, as well as among the responsibilities of oversight, communication, education, and training for the corporation. It includes recognition of employee values, among other intangible assets (Mohamed Jawdat Nasser & Ali Al-Khidr:21).

Subsection 2: Importance of Social Responsibility for Organizations (Page 10)

From a linguistic perspective, social responsibility means that a person is responsible for an action they performed in the past, leaving specific effects, and they bear the consequences of those effects (Mohamed Hossam El-Din, 2003:7). In foreign dictionaries, social responsibility means either a specific duty an individual must perform or a person who must be responsible for it. Terminologically, it is the social standard that determines that the family or larger social group is responsible for the behavior of its members, and this group must be considered if a member or group commits any deviant behavior.

There are many diverse definitions of the concept of corporate social responsibility, differing according to researchers' perspectives on determining a precise and clear concept. Some see social responsibility as reminding and alerting the institution to its responsibilities and duties toward its society and local environment, while others see it as a voluntary process undertaken by organizations. Belarm indicated that reaching an integrated diagnosis of social responsibility in an institution is not an easy process but very complex, due to the large number of stakeholders with multiple and sometimes conflicting goals, and the gap between what society expects from these institutions and their perception of their capabilities. Drucker defined social responsibility as the institution's commitment to the society in which it operates (Mohamed Atef Ghaith, 2006:23).

Subsection 3: Dimensions of Social Responsibility (Page 11)

1. **Economic Responsibility:** The idea of economic responsibility primarily involves focusing on achieving profits for owners, management, employees, and shareholders. Drucker expressed this by saying that the social responsibility of an institution lies first in achieving economic profits that enable it to cover future costs (Mohamed:21). Social responsibility focuses on two dimensions (economic and social), and both are important and must be parallel for social responsibility to be achieved, in addition to achieving profit for other parties affected by the institution's decisions, such as providing products to consumers at appropriate prices and jobs with fair wages.
2. **Legal Responsibility:** Some view social responsibility as a legal obligation, meaning that institutions, when practicing their various activities and functions, must be consistent with the system of applicable laws and regulations, alongside seeking to achieve their profit goals.
3. **Ethical Responsibility:** Ethical responsibility lies in the necessity for institutions, when performing their functions and tasks, to adhere to foundations and rules consistent with the system of values, customs, traditions, and respect for basic and subcultures without causing any harm to society and its components.
4. **Social Responsibility:** The basic principle under many dimensions of social responsibility is the constant search for methods that help improve the quality of life for workers or individuals in society through voluntary contribution with money, time, or expertise to community or voluntary development programs. This contributes to ensuring the institution's survival: prosperity, development, and improving its image before society.

Through these dimensions, Carroll found them to be four integrated dimensions, where an institution should not focus on one dimension at the expense of others.

Section Two: Brand Image**Subsection 1: Concept of Brand Image (Page 12)**

Many studies in psychology confirm that individuals perceive through mental images, so individuals are required to influence what they have established in their memory through recalling those images. This has increased interest in the concept of image associated with organizations. The concept of brand image has gained great interest from researchers and scholars in marketing, business, economics, and management, which has led to multiple terminological definitions.

Brand image is defined as the collection of perceptions and impressions that consumers hold about a particular brand (Fateh Dlimi, 2009:62). It is also defined as "the mental and emotional perceptions that represent a value proposition for the brand, lying between real value and perceived value." Kapferer and Toening define brand image as "the collection of positive impressions as a result of cumulative experience with a symbolic brand, resulting from direct use of the product bearing the brand, what is heard about it, or what media and official communications of the institution have reported." It is therefore a combination of cognitive, emotional, and rational perceptions that link the individual to a particular brand.

Brand image is also defined as "a mental, cognitive, and emotional structure of positive feelings toward the brand, formed prior to experiencing the brand or while purchasing" (Maher Mohsen Al-Ghalbi & Mahdi Mohsen Al-Ameri, 2015:48). It can also be defined as the information the consumer receives about the product bearing the brand through experience, others' opinions, advertisements:romotions, service, and more.

Based on all the above definitions, we can define brand image as "the collection of perceptions, beliefs, impressions, feelings, and attitudes formed by an individual toward a particular symbolic brand as a result of direct use of that brand, based on what others convey about it, or what the organization owning that brand provides as opinions, impressions, emotions, and attitudes that are retrievable when a stimulus is present."

Subsection 2: Importance of Brand Image in Organizations (Page 13)

Brand image is one of the most important intangible assets owned by organizations in the modern business environment. It represents the mental impression formed by the public about the company, its products, or services as a result of continuous interaction with various marketing elements such as advertising:romotion, customer service, and previous consumer experiences.

The importance of brand image lies in its direct and indirect influence on consumer behavior and purchasing decisions, as well as in building a long-term relationship between the company and its target audience (Al-Rifai, 2017:84).

Among the most prominent aspects of brand image importance is enhancing trust and credibility among consumers. When the mental image is positive and reliable, consumer trust in the company and its products increases, encouraging them to prefer it over other competing brands. Therefore, companies strive to build a strong image of distinction and reliability, as consumers largely rely on mental image to evaluate products before purchasing (Abdul Hamid, 2016:132).

Brand image also plays a fundamental role in achieving competitive superiority in markets, especially amid intense competition and numerous options available to consumers. A positive brand image gives the company a competitive advantage difficult to imitate because it is linked to the mental and emotional impression of the consumer, not just the physical specifications of the product. For this reason, leading companies seek to invest in building a strong mental image that

enhances their standing in the market and increases their ability to attract and retain customers (Al-Alaq, 2018:211).

Another important aspect is that brand image increases customer loyalty, as the consumer becomes attached to a brand they trust and feel comfortable with. Over time, this loyalty turns into a continuous relationship between the consumer and the brand, reducing the likelihood of switching to competing brands even with simple price differences (Abu Fara, 2015:97).

Brand image also positively affects the market value of the company. Companies with a strong:ositive brand image often achieve higher levels of profit and growth compared to companies with a weak image. This is due to the strong brand's ability to attract investors and increase demand for the company's products, thereby enhancing its reputation in local and international markets (Al-Taie & Al-Alaq, 2019:156).

Moreover, brand image helps facilitate the marketing of new products. Companies with a good reputation brand achieve greater success when launching new products in the market because consumers are more willing to try them based on positive prior experience with the brand. Therefore, a positive mental image is an essential foundation for expanding the company's activities and increasing its market share (Al-Bakri, 2017:143).

Based on the above, brand image is a strategic, influential element in company success and continuity, affecting consumer perception of the company, its ability to compete, achieve profits, and build long-term relationships with customers. Modern companies must therefore carefully manage their mental image through integrated marketing strategies aimed at consolidating their position in consumer minds and enhancing their market value.

Subsection 3: Characteristics of Brand Image (Page 14)

Jacques Lendrevie and Denis Lindon (Mohamed Wahab:p66-67) identified four basic characteristics of brand image:

a) Mental Recall: Refers to the memory's retrieval of the image of a particular brand perceived at a previous time.

b) Personal and Subjective Nature: The perception and recall process is personal; each person perceives brands differently from others and recalls them differently even when exposed to the same stimulus.

c) Selective and Simple: This characteristic responds to the primary goal of recall: obtaining appropriate information for consumer needs. Despite the overwhelming abundance of brands an individual encounters, they select information related to brands they consider important and ignore the rest.

d) Relatively Stable: Brand image expresses consumer knowledge and tendencies at a specific time. Tendencies are relatively stable and change only when exposed to significant events.

Section Three: Relationship between Study Variables (Pages 15-16)

The relationship between corporate social responsibility and brand image is a fundamental topic that has received wide attention in contemporary administrative and marketing literature due to its vital role in enhancing companies' competitive position and building trust with various stakeholders. Social responsibility has become not a secondary or charitable activity but an essential strategic approach adopted by companies to build a positive and sustainable image of their brand.

Social responsibility practices contribute to enhancing brand image by showing the company's commitment to ethical and social values, which reflects positively on consumer perception as a

responsible and trustworthy company. Companies committed to respecting workers' rights, environmental protection, and community participation usually gain wider social acceptance compared to companies focused solely on profit.

The relationship between social responsibility and brand image also strengthens through the direct impact of social responsibility on building corporate reputation. The positive reputation resulting from responsible social practices contributes to enhancing the brand's mental image, making it more deeply rooted in consumer minds, which increases brand trust and loyalty (Mohamed Ali Al-Rawabdeh & Raed Ismail Ababneh, 2010:123).

From another perspective, the dimensions of social responsibility play varying roles in influencing brand image. Commitment to the economic dimension reflects the company's ability to achieve efficiency and continuity, while the legal dimension enhances its credibility and respect for regulations. The ethical dimension builds consumer trust through commitment to integrity and justice, while the human dimension creates emotional attachment between the consumer and the brand, consolidating its positive image.

Many studies confirm that consumers have become more aware of the role of companies in society and tend to deal with brands that adopt socially responsible practices. These practices influence purchasing decisions and increase the likelihood of continuing to deal with the brand even when competitive alternatives exist.

Social responsibility also helps reduce the negative effects of crises that companies may face. The positive image accumulated among the public constitutes a moral reserve that helps the company overcome crises and maintain consumer trust. In this context, social responsibility is a therapeutic tool for reputation management and brand protection from potential risks.

Based on the above, the relationship between corporate social responsibility and brand image is a reciprocal interactive relationship. Responsible social practices improve the brand image, while a positive image enhances social responsibility acceptance by society (Thamer Yasser Al-Bakri, 2001:52). Therefore, building integrated and balanced strategies to manage social responsibility is a fundamental factor in building a positive and sustainable brand image and achieving long-term competitive advantage in local and global markets.

Chapter Three: Applied Framework (Research Methodology and Procedures)

First: Research Methodology

The research adopted the descriptive-analytical approach for its suitability in studying the impact of social responsibility of banks (government and private) on building a positive brand image among customers.

Second: Research Population and Sample

A. Research Population: The research population consists of customers of private and government banks (Al-Rashid Bank, Baghdad Private Bank) who have actual dealings with the banks.

B. Overview of Al-Rashid Bank: An Iraqi government commercial bank, founded in Baghdad in 1988. It has 162 branches inside Iraq. Al-Rashid Bank was established under Law No. 52 of 1988 and became a public company under Public Companies Law No. 22 of 1997. On April 12, 2002, the bank's capital became two billion Iraqi dinars. Al-Rashid Bank aims to contribute to supporting the national economy through the functions it performs.

C. Overview of Baghdad Private Bank: Baghdad Private Bank (BNKB) was established in 1992 as a private shareholding company. It is considered one of the most prominent commercial banks

in Iraq providing comprehensive banking services to individuals and companies. The bank has received awards as the best commercial bank due to its distinguished performance. It has a wide branch network and provides innovative financial services, including international Visa cards.

D. Research Sample: A random sample of (130) bank customers was selected to ensure higher accuracy in results.

Third: Sample Distribution

By Bank Type:

Bank Type	Frequency	Percentage
Government Banks	70	53.8%
Private Banks	60	46.2%

By Gender:

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	72	61.5%
Female	58	38.5%

By Age Group:

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	35	26.9%
26-35	50	38.5%
36-45	30	23.1%
46 and above	15	11.5%

Fourth: Research Tool (Questionnaire)

A special questionnaire was designed to measure two main variables:

First Axis: Corporate Social Responsibility in Banks (including: supporting community projects, commitment to transparency, environmental protection, responsibility toward customers)

Second Axis: Bank Brand Image (including: trust in the bank, reputation, loyalty)

Fifth: Analysis of First Axis Results (Social Responsibility) (Page 20)

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Evaluation
Companies that support society receive greater respect	4.25	0.78	High

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Evaluation
Company concern for the environment increases my trust in it	4.18	0.82	High
Company contribution to charity reflects its ethical commitment	4.30	0.75	High
I prefer dealing with a socially responsible company even if its price is higher	3.95	0.90	High
Social responsibility programs influence my purchasing decision	4.10	0.85	High
I see that some companies use social responsibility only as publicity	3.60	1.55	Medium
Transparency in social responsibility activities is important to me	4.22	0.80	High
Company support for humanitarian causes enhances its image for me	4.35	0.72	High
Overall Mean	4.12	0.83	High

The table shows that the overall mean was (4.12), a high level, indicating that respondents have a high awareness of the importance of corporate social responsibility. The standard deviation (0.83) indicates convergence of opinions, reflecting a degree of agreement among respondents.

Sixth: Analysis of Second Axis Results (Brand Image) (Page 21)

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Evaluation
I have a positive impression of companies that practice social responsibility	4.28	0.77	High
Social responsibility makes the brand more distinctive than competitors	4.20	0.80	High
I feel loyal to brands that care about society	4.05	0.88	High

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Evaluation
The company's image improves when it participates in environmental or social activities	4.15	0.83	High
Advertising about social responsibility affects my view of the brand	4.00	0.90	High
I recommend socially responsible companies to others	4.18	0.82	High
A socially responsible brand appears more credible	4.30	0.76	High
Overall Mean	4.17	0.82	High

The results indicate that the overall mean was (4.17), a high level, showing that respondents have a positive perception of brands that practice social responsibility. The low standard deviation indicates homogeneity in respondents' opinions.

Seventh: Analysis of the Relationship between Variables (Page 22)

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Evaluation
There is a direct relationship between social responsibility and brand image	4.32	0.74	High
The more social responsibility activities increase, the more the company's image improves	4.28	0.78	High
Social responsibility is an essential element in building the company's reputation	4.35	0.72	High
Neglecting social responsibility weakens the brand image	4.10	0.85	High
Social responsibility affects customer trust in the company	4.25	0.80	High
Overall Mean	4.26	0.78	High

The results show that the overall mean was (4.26), a high level, confirming that respondents perceive a strong relationship between social responsibility and brand image. This indicates that

improving companies' performance in social responsibility positively reflects on their image among the public.

Chapter Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

First: Conclusions (Page 23)

1. The research results showed that the level of corporate social responsibility implementation was high, indicating clear awareness of the importance of companies' social and environmental role.
2. It was found that there is high awareness among respondents regarding the concept of social responsibility and its implications for company behavior and image before society.
3. The results proved a strong:ositive correlation between social responsibility and brand image, meaning that improving company performance in this field leads to improved mental image among the public.
4. Regression analysis results showed that social responsibility has a significant and direct impact on building a positive brand image, supporting the main research hypothesis.
5. It became clear that activities related to supporting humanitarian and environmental causes are the most influential in enhancing brand image compared to other activities.
6. The results indicated that customers prefer to deal with companies that adopt social responsibility even if their product prices are relatively higher, reflecting the importance of ethical values in purchasing decisions.
7. There is a degree of doubt among some respondents regarding the credibility of some companies, as they see that social responsibility may sometimes be used merely as a promotional tool.
8. The results showed convergence in respondents' opinions (low standard deviation), indicating general agreement on the importance of social responsibility.

Second: Recommendations

The need to enhance companies' commitment to implementing social responsibility effectively, not just formally, to ensure building genuine trust with customers.

1. Focus on activities with direct impact on society, such as supporting humanitarian and environmental causes, as they play a major role in improving brand image.
2. Increase transparency in presenting social responsibility activities to reduce public doubts and enhance credibility.
3. Integrate social responsibility into the company's overall strategy, not treat it as a secondary or temporary activity.
4. Activate media campaigns that honestly and thoughtfully demonstrate the company's efforts in social responsibility.
5. Encourage companies to adopt long-term sustainable initiatives instead of temporary activities.
6. Pay attention to customer opinions and feedback to develop social responsibility programs in line with their expectations.

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