Corporate Social Responsibility: Consumer Perception for the UK Apparel Companies

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ABSTRACT

This study uses face-to-face administered questionnaires to examine consumer behaviour in relation to the corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices of 21 popular apparel companies in the UK. The results show that consumers' awareness of CSR practices and the impact of CSR factors on their purchasing decisions are low, which are key obstacles for companies to reap strategic rewards for their CSR efforts. CSR factors have less influence on consumers' purchasing decisions than other product attributes; however, consumers have high expectations of companies' CSR practices. Consumers expect companies to engage in CSR initiatives that benefit local communities, employees, and workers in suppliers' factories.

This paper provides key insights for UK apparel companies to engage their customers and gain competitive advantage for their CSR efforts. With these insights, companies are better informed on consumers' perceptions and expectations of CSR to benchmark against competitors, and to improve their CSR practices. This research has important implications for UK apparel marketers and policy makers.

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1. Introduction

The practice of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is gaining momentum among corporations. As a result of increasing demand for ethical clothing, it has been standard practice for UK apparel companies to develop CSR policies which affected the partnerships with their suppliers (Goworek, 2011). The concept of CSR went through a progressive rationalization evolving the level of analysis and the theoretical orientation (Lee, 2008). There has been a shift from the discussion of macro-social effects of CSR (e.g. Carroll, 1991; Donaldson & Preston, 1995) to organizational-level analysis of CSR's effect on profit (e.g. Pava & Krausz, 1996). Companies began to realize that if done the right way, CSR benefits not only society, but also leads to long-term sustainability for companies.

The apparel industry is characterized by high labour intensity and an international supply chain. With the increasing globalization the operations of apparel industry are now often spread across different countries. The UK apparel industry is very competitive and is experiencing shifts in market share (Pretious & Love, 2006). Since the mid-1990s some well-known global clothing apparel companies, such as Nike and Gap, have been criticized by the press for not fulfilling their societal obligations (Mujtaba, 2005). These criticisms were associated with the use of child labour and poor working conditions in the apparel companies' supplier factories located in developing countries. The global retailers received a lot of pressure regarding the CSR issues and began to pay attention to the impact their businesses have on society (Bartley, 2007). This has resulted in significant financial costs; causing Nike to drastically improve its CSR policies (Werther & Chandler, 2011). Nike's culture has changed and it operates with an openness and transparency. There has been growing consumer interest in CSR and fair trade. Perceived ethical behaviour by companies has a positive effect on a firm's image and reputation (Carter, 2000). Many UK apparel retailers such as Marks and Spencer (M&S), and Next have developed codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility reports.

In April 2013, the Rana Plaza building in Savar in Bangladesh collapsed, killing 1,129 people. The building contained several factories that manufactured garments for about 28 brands. Primark has now paid out over $14m in compensation. Primark handled the disaster with responsibility and care, and at a great financial cost. This case shows that taking safety measures before the risks occur is not a choice, but a duty. This cannot be taken lightly. CSR initiatives should be proactive, not reactive.

Researchers examined the CSR issues of the apparel industry from a company perspective (e.g. Pretious & Love, 2006; Perry & Towers, 2009) and a stakeholder perspective (e.g. Mohr et al., 2001). Pretious and Love (2006) examine the sourcing ethics and development of codes of conduct to guide retail purchasing professionals for the UK retail clothing sector, and Mohr et al. (2001) examine the impact of CSR on buying behaviour of consumers and reveal a typology of consumers whose purchasing behaviour ranges from unresponsive to highly responsive to CSR. Contributing to this debate, this is the first study that examines consumers' perception and buying preferences relating to CSR practices of 21 UK apparel companies. This study offers advice so that UK apparel companies will be better informed on consumers' perceptions and expectations on CSR, and how to improve CSR practices.

A significant contribution of this study is the insights it provides for UK apparel companies to engage their customers to reap strategic rewards for their CSR efforts. Companies should communicate effective CSR practices to the stakeholders and consumer awareness may increase when companies engage customers in their CSR practices. This would lead to a gradual improvement in the companies' strategic CSR. UK apparel companies shall have CSR strategies that are consistent with the ethical beliefs of their clients, and be aware that the risk of boycott varies with different clientele. Companies with consistent commitments to and connections with stakeholders, such as consumers, will achieve long-term legitimacy. This study contributes to the understanding of consumer behaviour and CSR literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1. CSR Theories

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined in a multiplicity of terms such as 'Corporate Responsibility', 'Corporate Sustainability', 'Corporate Citizenship', and 'Corporate Philanthropy'. An early example according to Carroll (1979:500) is that the social responsibility of business 'encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time'.

 More empirical studies, new definitions and maturing theories developed in 1980s such as the Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995), Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1998) and Business Ethics theory (Carroll, 1999). Freeman's (1984) defined the term "stakeholder" as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the

achievement of the organization's objectives" (p. 46). Modern business owes a responsibility to the shareholders and other stakeholders (Freeman, 1998). Dahlsrud (2008) analyses 37 definitions of CSR and categorizes them into five dimensions: environmental; social; economic; stakeholder, and voluntariness. Carroll's CSR pyramid (Carroll, 1991) suggests that corporations have four responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Corporate responsibility has evolved into three pillars or dimensions which are economic responsibility, social responsibility and ecological responsibility (Schuz, 2012).

While it is inconclusive that CSR's benefit exceeds its cost, many researchers begin to discover that strategic CSR may lead to the long-term sustainability of companies. Nowadays CSR has evolved into a strategy which requires companies to integrate them into their business in the right way. Porter and Kramer (2006) are strong advocates of the link between CSR and competitive advantage. CSR initiatives can strengthen the companies' competitive advantage through enhancing their relationships with the customers and developing reputation (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Engagement in CSR, can lead to increased profits, a sustained solid reputation and strong brand (Sarkis & Daou, 2013).

Stakeholder engagement, another aspect of stakeholder theory has received more attention in recent years. Belgin (2009) indicates that engaging in mutual communications with customers would help to win customers' support of ethical brands. Stakeholders' awareness of a company's CSR policies and practices have a positive effect on corporate identity and consumers' purchase intention (David et al., 2005). Individuals respond well to companies that engage in CSR, but stakeholders, for example consumers, are largely unaware of CSR issues (Sen et al., 2006). A low consumer awareness would have a negative influence for companies to reap the benefits of their CSR efforts.

2.2. CSR Paradoxes

There is an unresolved paradox concerning the role of CSR in consumer behaviour (Öberseder Schlegelmilch & Gruber, 2011). This is known as CSR-consumption paradox. Previous research indicates that customers value and demand altruistic corporate behaviours, and some passionate CSR supporters will pay a price premium for products that are produced by ethical organisations (Trudel & Cotte, 2009). On the contrary, Abraham-Murali et al. (1995) find that CSR factors are far less important to consumers' apparel decisions than product attributes such as price, quality and aesthetics. Öberseder et al. (2011) and Moraes et

al. (2012) reveal a gap between consumers' interest in CSR and limited role of CSR in purchase behaviour. Bray et al. (2011) show that CSR is not "at the top of many consumers' lists". Whether the CSR efforts will receive favourable responses depends on a number of factors including consumer characteristics and the features of CSR initiatives (Becker-Olse et al., 2006). Johnstone & Tan (2015) identified several barriers to ethical consumption behaviour: the perception that it is too hard to be green, and some consumers' unfavourable perceptions of green messages. Öberseder et al. (2011) argue that the evaluation of CSR initiatives from consumers is a complex process.

Vilanova et al. (2009) indicate the existence of a CSR paradox at the organizational level: organizational paradoxes which arise from opposing CSR and business goals (Handy, 2002). Corporations often consider economic motives to be more central than engaging in CSR activities (Aguilera et al., 2007). Therefore, companies need to manage inherent organizational CSR paradoxes in order to implement CSR effectively (Calton & Payne, 2003; Vilanova et al., 2009).

As the CSR paradoxes exist at the organizational level as well as on the consumer side, this study tries to shed light on these paradoxes. It is important to understand consumers' perceptions of companies' motives for CSR, and to establish whether consumers are more aware of companies' CSR scandals than positive CSR activities. If consumers doubt the companies' motives for CSR, this may negatively affect consumers' purchasing decisions. To investigate these paradoxes, this study interrogates understanding of consumer behavior and CSR literature. The next sections describe the research methodology and present data analysis results.

3. Method

The study seeks to understand the consumer awareness, perception and buying preferences relating to CSR for UK apparel companies. We identify 21 apparel companies that have a market presence in the UK. The list of sample apparel companies is selected from the 2012 Global RepTrak 100 (Reputation Institute, 2012) and Look Fashion Magazine (Look, 2013). The 2012 Global RepTrak 100 lists the World's Most Reputable Companies which includes a range of other industries. All six companies in the clothing industry were selected. This selection covers the most reputable companies, in terms of CSR, in the apparel industry in the UK. The remaining 15 companies were selected randomly from Look Fashion Magazine

(Look, 2013). The 15 companies include well-known luxury fashion brands and high street fast-fashion brands. This selection helps to reveal the general state of CSR-consumption paradox related to popular UK apparel companies, and the results are more generalisable.

The study aims to identify how CSR may influence consumers' preferences in their purchasing decisions. We use questionnaires to let the customers inform us of the factors that would influence their purchasing decisions. We collected three types of variables (demographic, attitudes and behaviours) from the questionnaire using both open-ended and closed-ended questions. For open-ended questions, the analysis employs the interpretive technique of 'coding' similar phrases and interpreting them based on theories made by previous researchers (Saladana, 2012).

The questionnaire includes four parts: Part one is about participants' demographic information. Part two relates to participants' shopping experiences and their awareness of the companies' CSR commitments and scandals. Part three examines the extent to which customers' purchasing decisions are affected by the CSR. Respondents were asked to rank their preference on a Likert scale: a list of factors for their choice of brand such as price, quality, brand, trend, style, comfort and CSR. Respondents were also required to choose their answers based on Likert scales to three questions regarding their socially responsible purchase behaviour, namely, to pay more, boycott, and try a new product for CSR reasons. These questions are adapted from Webb et al. (2008). For example, respondents were questioned on their tendency to pay a premium or avoid a brand due to social or environmental reasons based on the five-point Likert scale of 'never', 'rarely', 'half of the time', 'often' and 'all the time'. The last part relates to consumers' perceptions to CSR, such as their perception of the motives of corporations for engaging in CSR and the level of CSR customers expects from a clothing company.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Consumers' awareness on CSR

Questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of shoppers in Birmingham, the second largest city in the UK. Five questionnaires were rejected due to incomplete data submission. 124 valid questionnaires were employed for analysis. Regarding the demographic characteristics of the sample, the sample is gender-balanced. The age groups range from

teenagers to elderly. Their annual incomes vary and the education ranges from secondary education to doctoral.

When asked of their understanding of corporate social responsibility, out of 124 respondents, 71 (57%) showed an understanding by stating at least one of the key words relating to CSR. This suggests that about 60% of the people surveyed have a basic understanding of the term 'corporate social responsibility'. The key words (stakeholder, society, community, public, worker, employee, consumer, environment, responsibility, ethics/ethical, economic, legal, fair,) are derived from the definitions of CSR by Carroll (1991), and a few other commonly cited definitions. The keywords that were mentioned more than 15 times are responsibility (25 times), environment (22 times), society, ethics and community.

Respondents were asked to highlight the brands they have shopped for in the past and whether they are aware of the CSR initiatives or scandals committed by companies. Table 1 shows that M&S, Primark and Next have the highest number of shoppers (100, 99 and 97 respondents respectively), followed by H&M (83 respondents). These four brands are UK's largest clothing retailers by market value (Bloomberg, 2012) and this indicates that the sample respondents are representative of the population in UK. M&S has the highest number of respondents who are aware of its CSR initiatives (22 respondents), followed by Primark (16 respondents), Gap, Next and H&M (9, 8 and 8 respondents respectively). This suggests that the marketing outreach of M&S in the area of CSR is more effective than other brands. M&S has the CSR strategy to engage their customers in their sustainability initiatives (Marks & Spencer, 2012). It provided incentives for customers to send their second-hand M&S clothes to Oxfam. The customer awareness and goodwill may increase when companies involve customers in their CSR initiatives. CSR activities nurture consumers' trust and bring about consumers' positive perceptions of the firm (Park et al., 2014).

Table 1: Analysis of consumers' awareness on CSR

No.	Apparel Company	Respondents who have shopped for a brand	Respondents' awareness of a brand's CSR commitments	Respondents' awareness of a brand's CSR scandals	Basic CSR rating (from CSRHub)
1	Associated British Foods Plc (Primark)	99	16	51	54
2	Adidas Group	61	7	5	60
3	Abercrombie & Fitch Co.	18	1	6	45
4	Arcadia Group	71	4	8	
5	Asos Plc.	23	2	1	
6	Burberry Group Plc.	11	2	4	57
7	GAP Incorporated	60	9	6	64
8	H&M Hennes & Mauritz AB	83	8	5	56
9	The John David Group Plc. (JD)	67	2	4	
10	Levi Strauss & Co	32	2	2	61
11	LVMH Fashion Group (Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessy)	19	3	2	
12	Mango MNG Holding	23	1	4	
13	Marks & Spencer Group Plc	100	22	10	67
14	New Look Retail Group Limited	72	2	5	
15	Next Group Plc	97	8	5	62
16	Nike Inc.	70	5	17	61
17	Phillips-Van Heusen Corporation	34	2	3	57
18	Inditex Group	48	4	2	
19	The TJX Companies Incorporated	78	3	2	
20	VF (Vanity Fair) Corporation	27	1	3	
21	Pinault-Printemps-Redoute (PPR) Group	39	4	2	
Total			108	147	

CSRHub provides access to corporate social responsibility and sustainability ratings and information on thousands of companies from 135 industries in 93 countries. The information can be used to benchmark company performance and learn how stakeholders evaluate company CSR practices. CSRHub rates 12 indicators of environment, employee, community and governance performance and also provides an overall CSR rating. The last column of Table 1 presents CSR ratings from CSRHub for a few UK apparel companies, those with no rating mean the information is not disclosed. M&S has the highest rating (67) followed by Gap (64) and a high proportion of respondents are aware of the two companies' CSR commitments. Primark's CSR rating (54) is fairly low compared to other apparel companies,

yet a high number of respondents are aware of Primark's CSR commitments. Enactment of a CSR initiative is not the same as consumer awareness of the CSR activity (Sen *et al.*, 2006). Lack of awareness is likely to be a major inhibitor of consumer responsiveness to CSR (Mohr *et al.*, 2001). This study shows that Primark must be doing a good job to communicate their CSR initiatives to the consumers and various stakeholders.

The public awareness of the CSR commitments of the clothing companies is still relatively weak as most respondents are not aware of any of the CSR commitments made by the 21 clothing brands. This is consistent with previous research that stakeholders, such as consumers, are largely unaware of CSR issues (Sen *et al.*, 2006; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009). Consumers' awareness of companies' CSR activities is low as the stakeholders including customers are unlikely to possess the extensive information about companies' CSR activities. Kozar & Connell (2013) show that consumers exhibit low involvement in ethical consumption behaviour, yet, knowledge and attitudes of social and environmental issues affect ethical consumption behaviour positively. This suggests that companies may need to educate consumers, and engage in consistent CSR initiatives that reflect the companies' values and ethics (Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009). Proper communications of CSR can inculcate positive corporate associations and purchase intentions (Groza *et al.,* 2011) and reap the benefits of CSR (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001. In this study, other apparel brands which have low consumer awareness shall communicate their CSR practices to stakeholds, particularly the consumers. It is essential for socially responsible companies to develop consumer trust and engage in strategic CSR programmes which are meaningful to their customers (Mohr *et al.*, 2001).

Table 1 shows that 124 consumers are aware of 108 instances of 21 companies' CSR commitments and 147 instances of perceived scandals. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) indicate that consumers are more sensitive to negative CSR information than to positive CSR information. Consumers' awareness of companies' CSR scandals is higher due to media coverage and exposure, so consumers may underestimate companies' CSR efforts and this awareness may be easily overwhelmed by companies' scandals. Primark has the highest numbers of respondents who are aware of its CSR scandals (51), followed by Nike (17) and Adidas (15). Despite the fact that Primark ranks lowest in terms of poor CSR reputation, it still holds the highest market share. This suggests that the awareness did not prevent consumers from purchasing from the apparel company. It implies that consumers may be

affected by factors other than CSR when making their purchase decisions. In the next section, the social responsibility aspects relative to other considerations in customers' purchasing decisions are analysed in further depth.

4.2. Consumers' purchasing decisions and perceptions relating to CSR

Table 2: The consumers' purchasing decisions relating to CSR

Panel A	The consumers' purchasing decisions relating to CSR						
Priority	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
The factors that make you choose a brand	Quality (44) Price (40)	Quality (45)	Price (28)	Comfort (29) Brand (25) Style (25)	Trend (25) Brand (24)	Trend (41)	CSR (80)
Respondent's tendency to pay more for socially responsible product/brand *(Pay more)*	Never (30%)	Rarely (38%)	Half of the time (26%)	Often (5%)	All the time (1%)		
Respondent's tendency to avoid a product for CSR reasons *(Boybott)*	Never (35.5%)	Rarely (35.5%)	Half of the time (9%)	Often (18%)	All the time (2%)		
Respondent's willingness to try a new brand for a good cause	No (11%)		Sometimes (37%)		Yes (52%)		

Note: The respondents answer questions based on 7, 5 or 3-point Likert scales. Those numbers in brackets are the number of responses received from respondents.

Table 2 presents the consumers' purchasing decisions and perceptions relating to CSR. When consumers choose a garment, they will consider a few factors such as quality, price, brand, style, comfort, trend and CSR. Respondents were asked to rank their priority in these factors. The highest number of respondents ranked 'quality' as the first and second priority when choosing a brand (44 and 45 respondents respectively). 40 and 28 respondents choose 'price' as the 1st and 3rd priority respectively. For the 4th priority, 29 people choose 'comfort' and 25 people choose 'brand' and 'style' each. 'Trend' is the favourite choice as the 5th and 6th priority. The factor 'CSR' is ranked as the lowest priority in a majority of the respondents' purchasing considerations (80 respondents). None of the respondents in the sample population selected 'CSR' factor in their first or second priority when they make purchasing decisions.

Literature show that even though consumers are concerned about social responsibility issues, factors other than these concerns – such as quality, price and fashion – have a greater influence on purchase decisions (Auger *et al*., 2003; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Joergens, 2006). Ufort and Etim (2018) show that product quality and brand value have a significant relationship with consumer's attitude towards Nigeria textile products. Norouzi and Taghipourian (2018) indicate that CSR does not affect consumer's price sensitivity.

To further clarify our findings, we asked respondents about their tendency to pay more for a garment because the company supports a social or environmental cause. Table 2 indicates that 38% of respondents have 'rarely' paid more for a socially responsible product or brand. 30% of respondents stated 'never' paid more. Only 5% of respondents selected 'often' and 1% selected 'all the time'. This indicates that most consumers are unwilling to sacrifice financially for social products or brands.

Table 2 shows that 35.5% of respondents chose 'rarely' to stop purchases in a garment for environmental or social reasons, followed by 'never' indicated by 35.5% respondents. These results are different to the findings from Trudel and June (2009) who show that a majority of consumers are willing to avoid retailers with bad corporate practices. This is known as boycotting when a consumer chooses to avoid buying from a company. The tendency to boycott depends on other factors such as the perceived likelihood of boycott success and the costs associated with boycotting (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Li and Tippinen (2011) indicate that companies maintain corporate legitimacy by avoiding moral and regulatory sanctions and consumer boycotts. Corporations have responsibility for "avoiding bad" as well as "doing good" (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013). The risk of boycotts should not be overlooked by companies in the apparel industry.

Respondents were asked on the reasons for boycotting a product or company. Most quoted CSR-related scandals such as sweatshops, child labour and unethical environmental records while minority quoted quality issues or customer service. When asked whether the respondents would be influenced to try a new brand because the clothing company supports a good cause, 52% of the respondents indicate their willingness to try the brand.

We then examine the consumers' perceptions to CSR and the results are presented in Table 3. One question was asked about the consumers' desired level of corporate focus on CSR. Consumers perceive that corporations' focus on social responsibility should be moderate

(29%), moderately high (42.8%) and high (23.4%). So consumers have high expectation of companies' CSR practices, though the purchasing behaviour based on CSR factors are low.

Table 3: The consumers' perceptions relating to CSR

Consumers' desired level of corporate focus on CSR	Very low 3 (2.4%)	Moderately low 3 (2.4%)	Moderate 36 (29%)	Moderately high 53 (42.8%)	Very high 29 (23.4%)	
Responsibilities of a clothing company (consumers' perception)	Quality products and services to customers (98%) Abide by the law (88%) Fairly paid employment (85%) Safe and pleasant work atmosphere (85%) Minimize risk to environment (78%)			Do no harm in conducting business (72%) Set and abide by corporations values (65%) Operate with transparency (66%) Service to local community (54%) Investment in local community (53%)		
Motives for CSR (consumers' perception)	PR, brand, reputation (49)	Financial, revenue, profit (43)	Customer (27)	Legal, social (17)	Employee (11)	Environment (8)
How companies may improve contributions towards the society	Employ local people, Support/invest local community (18)	Good working conditions, responsible sourcing, monitor supplier (17)	Fair paid employment, education and welfare (17)	Support charity (11)	Good product, low price (8)	Protect environment (6), better customer service (6)	More publicity (5)

Note: In the first row, the respondents answer questions based on 5-point Likert scale. The numbers in brackets are the number/percentage of responses received from respondents.

The respondents' answers about their perceptions of companies' motives for CSR activities were sorted into similar phrase groups. From the answers 49 phrases mentioned 'public relations, brand or reputation'. 43 phrases mentioned 'financial, revenue or profit' as the motives and 27 phrases mention 'customers'. These indicate that consumers mostly perceive that companies conduct CSR activities for their own economic benefits. The customers are the source of revenue and shall not be treated lightly. Other phrases mention 'legal or social factors', 'employees' and 'environment'. The responses indicate that consumers have doubt of the companies' genuine motives for their CSR activities. Garay and Font (2012) survey of 400 enterprises in the UK and reveal that the main reason for enterprises to act responsibly is altruistic, although competitiveness reasons are also important. This study shows that the altruistic motives of UK apparel companies are not well received by UK consumers. This explains the CSR paradox that consumers have higher expectations of companies' CSR practice, yet their purchasing decisions in relation to CSR are low. Due to the conflicting CSR and business goals, some consumers doubt the authenticity of companies' motives and this deters their purchasing decisions. Companies that communicate and engage with stakeholders will narrow the perception gap.

Regarding respondents' personal perception of what constitutes a clothing company's responsibility, 98% of respondents perceive a clothing company's responsibility is to provide quality products and services to customers, followed by more than three quarters saying companies should abide by the law, provide fairly paid employment, safe and pleasant work atmosphere and minimize risk to environment. Only 54% of respondents perceive that clothing companies owe a responsibility to the community. This means that consumers perceive companies' responsibility to consumers and employees to be more important than their responsibility to the community. It implies that CSR strategies should put higher emphasis on customers' and employees' participation to provide an effective impact on the company. This is consistent with Ramasamy and Yeung (2009) and shows that for UK consumers, the apparel companies' economic responsibilities are more important than philanthropic responsibilities.

However, this does not suggest that service to the community should be disregarded as the question refers to the consumers' perception of responsibilities of the company, not social responsibilities. For example, companies such as Next, Mango, Gap, Inditex and Levi Strauss, who invest in education relating to fashion in the community would secure a higher supply of skilled labour in the long run.

Respondents were asked for suggestions on how clothing companies may improve their contributions to society. Suggestions were offered by 75 respondents and the top three suggestions refer to CSR initiatives related to local communities, employees and supplier factories. 18 phrases mentioned local related initiatives, which included phrases of 'employ local people' and 'support/invest in the local community'. Investing in the local community will lead to more local employment. Consumers react more strongly to CSR initiatives that impact them or the society around them. Therefore, companies need to understand the local needs of the communities. CSR should be decentralized to different subsidiaries in different demographic locations; as these subsidiaries would be better informed on the needs and cultural sensitivities of their local communities. Torres *et al*. (2012) study 57 global brands in 10 countries and find that global brands that follow local social responsibility policies in communities enhance the positive effects of CSR toward other stakeholders, particularly customers.

There are 17 phrases that mention 'good working conditions',' responsible sourcing' and 'monitor suppliers'. Consumers perceive that it's important that clothing companies provide

good working conditions and monitor working conditions in suppliers' factories. There are 17 responses that mention employee related initiatives, including phrases of 'provide fair paid employment', and 'provide education and welfare to employees'. From consumers' perspectives, companies can improve their contribution to the society if they invest more in local and employee related initiatives and monitor the working conditions of supplier factories. These CSR initiatives would have positive effects on the companies' image and brand, and can lead to more consumer awareness and employee loyalty.

Other responses include 'support charity', 'good quality product with low price', 'protect environment', 'better customer service', and 'more publicity or advertisement'. One customer mentioned 'Have a label on their clothes that will indicate their level of CSR so consumers can have more informed buying'. The above responses indicate that consumers expect companies to communicate the CSR practices with them. Meehan *et al.* (2006) advocated the 3C-SR model to connect with ethically aware consumers to achieve economic and social objectives.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study uses questionnaires to examine consumers' perceptions of CSR and how CSR factors influence purchasing behaviour for apparel companies in the UK. The results show that consumers' awareness of CSR activities and the impact of CSR factors on their purchasing behaviour are low, which are key obstacles for companies to reap strategic rewards for their CSR efforts. CSR factors have less influence on respondents' purchasing decisions than product attributes such as price and quality. Consumers mostly perceive that companies conduct CSR activities for their own economic benefits and companies' economic and legal responsibilities are more important than social responsibilities. Due to the conflicting CSR and business goals at the organizational level, some consumers doubt the authenticity of companies' motives and this deters their purchasing decisions. This partially explains the CSR consumption paradox. Nevertheless, consumers have high expectations of companies' CSR practices. In terms of social responsibility, consumers expect companies to engage in CSR initiatives that benefit local communities, employees, and workers in suppliers' factories. Higher consumer awareness can be obtained by engaging and providing incentives for customers participating in their CSR initiatives. Companies are recommended to undertake a decentralized approach in CSR as subsidiaries in different geographical areas are better informed of the needs of their local communities.

This paper provides key insight for UK apparel companies so they are better informed on consumers' perceptions and expectations on CSR. This would lead to a gradual improvement in the companies' strategic CSR. UK apparel companies are recommended to have CSR strategies that are consistent with the ethical beliefs of their clients. Companies with consistent commitments to and connections with stakeholders such as consumers will achieve long-term legitimacy and develop a competitive advantage.

One of the limitations of this research is the sample size. In addition, further research on other stakeholders such as the retail and manufacturing employees, as well as non-government organizations' perceptions would further understanding the effectiveness of CSR in this industry.

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Appendix: Questionnaire
Study on Customers' Perception of Corporate Social Responsibility in the Clothing Industry

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. This study is aimed at identifying the relationship between consumers' perceptions regarding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and purchasing behaviour. Your participation is important and will lend credibility to the research. All data received from the questionnaire will be kept confidential and anonymous.

First we'd like to ask a few questions about you. Please indicate your answer by selecting a suitable option.

Age Group: ☐18 to 20 ☐21 to 30 ☐31 to 40 ☐41 to 50 ☐51 to 60 ☐61+

Gender: ☐Male ☐Female

Highest education level: ☐ None ☐ Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Tertiary ☐ Bachelor or equivalent ☐Master or equivalent ☐Doctoral or equivalent

Occupation: _____

Average annual income (£): ☐≤ 10,000 ☐10,000 to 30,000 ☐30,001 to 50,000 ☐≥ 50,001

Marital status: ☐Single ☐Married / civil union ☐Cohabiting ☐Divorced ☐Widowed

Children: ☐Yes ☐No

_____

Questions 1 to 3: These questions examine the customer's awareness of individual brands and their social responsibilities.

1) What do you understand about Corporate Social Responsibility?

2) Please tick (√) if you have shopped in these apparel brands (in the table below) in the past.

3) In addition, please tick (√) if you are aware of their CSR commitments or scandals.

		Have you shopped for this brand in the past?		Are you aware of their CSR commitments?		Are you aware of their CSR related scandals?	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
i	Primark						
ii	Adidas						
iii	Abercrombie & Fitch						
iv	Topshop / Topman						
v	Asos						
vi	Burberry						
vii	Gap						
viii	H&M						
ix	JD Sport						
x	Levi Strauss						
xi	Louis Vuitton						
xii	Mango						
xiii	Marks & Spencer						
xiv	New Look						
xv	Next						
xvi	Nike						
xvii	Calvin Klein or Tommy Hilfiger						
xviii	Gucci or Puma						
xix	Timberland						
xx	T.K. Maxx						
xxi	Zara						

Questions 4 to 8: These questions examine the extent that customers' purchasing decisions are affected by a corporation's social responsibility.

4) What are the factors that make you choose a brand? Please rank in order of preference. (1 = highest priority; 7=lowest priority)

☐ Price

☐ Quality

☐ Brand reputation

☐ Trend

☐ Design/ Style

☐Comfort

☐ Company's CSR initiatives and goodwill

☐ Other factors, please state _____

5) What does it take for you to boycott a company's products or services?

6) How often have you chosen to pay more for a garment because the company supports a social or environmental cause?

☐Never   ☐Rarely   ☐Half of the time   ☐Often   ☐All the time

7) How often have you chosen not to buy a garment because of social or environmental reasons?

☐Never   ☐Rarely   ☐Half of the time   ☐Often   ☐All the time

8) Would you be influenced to try a new brand because the clothing company supports a good cause?

☐No   ☐Sometimes   ☐Yes

Question 9: This question examines the customers' perception of the motives of corporations for engaging in CSR.

9) What do you think is a clothing company's motive for being socially responsible?

Questions 10 to12: These questions examine the level of CSR the customer expects to see in a clothing company.

10) In your opinion, what level of focus should a clothing company place on social responsibility?

☐Very low ☐ Moderately low ☐Moderate ☐Moderately high ☐Very High

11) From the list below, what is considered the responsibilities of a clothing company? (Please tick (√) all that applies)

☐   Provide quality products and services to customers
☐   Provide fairly paid employment
☐   Provide safe, pleasant work atmosphere
☐   Do no harm in conducting business
☐   Minimise risks to environment
☐   Service to local community
☐   Investment to local community
☐   Abide by the law
☐   Operate with transparency
☐   Set, monitor and abide by corporations values

12) Kindly suggest initiative(s) that the clothing companies may adopt to improve their contributions towards the society.