

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a Catalyst for Enhancing Brand Loyalty: A Case Study on the Tata Group

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from a philanthropic concept to a strategic tool for building brand equity and customer loyalty. This study examines how CSR initiatives undertaken by the Tata Group have contributed to enhancing brand loyalty and customer trust in India and globally. The research analyzes the relationship between CSR practices and brand loyalty through secondary data and consumer perception surveys. Findings indicate that consistent CSR engagement, ethical business practices, and community development programs have significantly strengthened Tata's brand image and customer commitment. The study concludes that CSR, when integrated with core business strategy, serves as a long-term investment in brand value and stakeholder satisfaction.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Loyalty, Tata Group, Consumer Trust, Sustainable Business, Brand Image

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has transformed from a voluntary, philanthropic activity into a strategic business imperative. Organizations across the world now recognize that long-term profitability and sustainability are deeply connected to their social, environmental, and ethical responsibilities. CSR has become a central pillar of corporate governance, reflecting a company's commitment not just to shareholders, but to a broader set of stakeholders—including employees, customers, suppliers, the environment, and the community at large. CSR refers to the voluntary actions undertaken by businesses to operate in an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable manner, often going beyond legal compliance. It includes initiatives related to education, healthcare, environmental conservation, community welfare, and ethical business conduct. In today's socially aware marketplace, consumers are not only evaluating companies based on product quality or price, but also on the values and integrity that the company represents. Therefore, CSR serves as a powerful differentiator that shapes brand reputation, customer perception, and ultimately, brand loyalty. With increasing globalization, urbanization, and awareness, modern consumers expect companies to be socially conscious and transparent in their operations.

They prefer to associate with brands that actively contribute to social causes and environmental well-being. This consumer behavior trend has compelled organizations to view CSR as a strategic investment rather than a cost. CSR-driven strategies help businesses build trust, enhance corporate image, and foster emotional connections with their stakeholders—creating a loyal customer base that supports the brand even in competitive or crisis situations. Among the many corporate groups that exemplify the true spirit of CSR, the Tata Group stands as a pioneering example. Founded in 1868 by Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, the group has always operated on the principle that “the community is not just another stakeholder in business but in fact the very purpose of its existence.” This philosophy is deeply embedded in Tata's organizational culture and long-term business vision. Over the decades, the Tata Group has set benchmarks for responsible business conduct, integrating ethics, sustainability, and philanthropy into every aspect of its operations. Tata's CSR approach is both strategic and holistic. It spans multiple sectors—education (through Tata Institute of Social Sciences and Tata ClassEdge), health (Tata Medical Center, Tata Memorial Hospital), rural development (Tata Trusts initiatives in water and sanitation), environment (Tata Power's renewable energy programs), and disaster relief.

These initiatives are not one-time projects but sustained efforts aligned with national priorities such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and India's vision for inclusive growth. This long-term engagement has contributed immensely to public trust and brand equity of Tata companies such as Tata Steel, Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Titan, and Tata Power. The Tata Group's commitment to CSR has created a distinct emotional bond with its stakeholders. Consumers perceive the Tata brand as a symbol of trust, integrity, and social

responsibility. Its CSR activities not only enhance its corporate reputation but also play a critical role in generating brand loyalty—where customers repeatedly choose Tata products and services, driven by a sense of respect and identification with the brand's values. This research aims to analyze how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives undertaken by the Tata Group influence brand loyalty and consumer perception. It explores the connection between Tata's social engagement and the trust it commands among customers, employees, and communities. Furthermore, it investigates how CSR, as a strategic function, strengthens long-term relationships between the brand and its stakeholders, contributing to Tata's enduring success in both domestic and global markets. In conclusion, as the global business environment becomes increasingly competitive and transparent, CSR emerges as a key determinant of sustainable brand value. The Tata Group serves as a benchmark for responsible business leadership, proving that profitability and social purpose can coexist harmoniously. Through this study, the researcher seeks to understand the dynamics of CSR-driven brand loyalty, offering insights into how other organizations can emulate Tata's model to achieve both economic prosperity and social impact.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature forms the foundation of any research study. It provides an overview of existing theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and scholarly discussions relevant to the topic. The current section explores the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), its relationship with brand loyalty, the Indian CSR landscape, and finally, the CSR practices of the Tata Group.

2.1 Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved as a multidimensional concept that integrates economic success with ethical, environmental, and social obligations. According to Carroll (1991), CSR is built upon four interrelated dimensions—economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. The economic responsibility emphasizes the firm's duty to be profitable and efficient, as profit generation ensures long-term survival and sustainability. Legal responsibility implies that companies must comply with the laws and regulations that govern their operations. Ethical responsibility demands that businesses act with fairness, integrity, and moral conduct beyond the mere compliance with laws. Philanthropic responsibility refers to the voluntary contributions of firms toward societal well-being through donations, community development projects, or social causes. In recent years, CSR has moved from being a peripheral, voluntary initiative to becoming a strategic element of business operations. Porter and Kramer (2006) argue that CSR should not be seen as a cost or a constraint but as an opportunity for innovation, competitive differentiation, and value creation. Their "Shared Value" concept suggests that businesses can achieve competitive advantage by addressing social problems that intersect with their operations. Companies that integrate CSR into their business models enjoy better stakeholder relations, enhanced reputation, and long-term sustainability. CSR today also encompasses environmental stewardship, responsible resource management, fair labor practices, and stakeholder engagement. It acts as a bridge between corporate objectives and societal expectations, thereby ensuring that business growth aligns with ethical and environmental imperatives. In essence, CSR has become a holistic approach that balances profit-making with social responsibility, creating mutual value for both businesses and society.

2.2 CSR and Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refers to a consumer's consistent preference and attachment to a particular brand over competitors, resulting in repeat purchase behavior and positive word-of-mouth communication. In a market where products and services are increasingly commoditized, CSR serves as a differentiator that strengthens emotional bonds between consumers and brands. According to Bhattacharya and Sen (2004), consumers tend to identify with brands that share their values and demonstrate genuine concern for societal issues. When companies engage in meaningful CSR initiatives, they foster consumer trust and admiration, leading to a deeper emotional attachment. This emotional connection transforms transactional relationships into relational ones, promoting long-term loyalty. CSR-driven brand loyalty is particularly effective when customers perceive a company's social efforts as authentic and sustained rather than superficial or marketing-oriented. Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) found that CSR activities positively affect customer satisfaction and market value when they are aligned with the company's core competencies and executed transparently. Consumers become brand advocates when they believe that the organization's CSR initiatives contribute to the greater good of society. Furthermore, several studies have shown that CSR can mitigate negative publicity and brand crises. Brands with a strong CSR reputation are more resilient during controversies because customers perceive them as inherently ethical and responsible. Hence, CSR acts not only as a brand enhancer but also as a protective shield that preserves brand equity and customer loyalty in times of uncertainty.

2.3 CSR in Indian Context

The concept of CSR in India has deep cultural and historical roots, often intertwined with the values of trusteeship and philanthropy. Indian industrialists such as Jamsetji Tata, G.D. Birla, and J.R.D. Tata have long practiced forms of CSR

through charitable trusts, educational institutions, and community development programs. However, the formalization of CSR in India gained momentum with the enactment of the Companies Act, 2013. Under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, CSR became a mandatory requirement for companies exceeding specified financial thresholds (net worth of ₹500 crore, turnover of ₹1,000 crore, or net profit of ₹5 crore or more). These companies must allocate at least 2% of their average net profits over the past three years to CSR activities. The Act identifies specific focus areas, including education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, gender equality, poverty alleviation, and rural development. This legislative framework transformed CSR from voluntary philanthropy into structured, measurable, and reportable initiatives. As a result, Indian corporations began incorporating CSR into their core business strategies and aligning them with national priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to Kumar and Bhaskar (2020), Indian companies have increasingly focused on CSR programs that generate tangible social impact and enhance brand reputation. CSR in India now serves as a vital mechanism for corporate transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement. It has not only improved the social landscape but also elevated the credibility of Indian enterprises in global markets.

2.4 Tata Group and CSR

The Tata Group is often hailed as the pioneer of CSR in India. Established in 1868, the Group's founder, Jamsetji Tata, believed that the purpose of business extended beyond profit generation to the betterment of society. This philosophy laid the foundation for Tata's long-standing tradition of social responsibility, which continues to guide its operations across more than 100 countries today. The Group's CSR philosophy, encapsulated in the motto "Leadership with Trust," is deeply embedded in its organizational culture. A large part of Tata Sons' shareholding is owned by philanthropic trusts, primarily the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, which fund initiatives in health, education, livelihood, sanitation, and rural development. Through these trusts, a significant portion of the group's profits is reinvested into community development projects across India.

Tata's CSR programs focus on several priority areas: promoting quality education (Tata ClassEdge, Tata Institute of Social Sciences), improving healthcare facilities (Tata Memorial Hospital, Tata Medical Center), ensuring environmental sustainability (Tata Power's clean energy projects), and supporting rural livelihoods (Tata Steel's community development programs). Each initiative is designed to create measurable and sustainable social impact. According to Singh and Agarwal (2013), Tata's CSR engagement has directly contributed to its strong brand trust and loyalty among consumers. The company's ethical conduct and genuine social commitment have differentiated it from competitors and positioned it as a role model for responsible business leadership. Consumers perceive Tata brands as symbols of integrity, compassion, and credibility, which enhances their willingness to engage with the brand repeatedly. In essence, the Tata Group demonstrates how a company can successfully integrate social objectives with business goals. Its CSR activities are not isolated acts of charity but integral components of its brand identity and long-term growth strategy.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on both primary and secondary data.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the CSR initiatives undertaken by the Tata Group.
2. To examine the impact of Tata's CSR practices on consumer perception and brand loyalty.
3. To analyze the relationship between CSR and long-term brand equity.

3.3 Data Collection

- **Primary Data:** Structured questionnaire distributed among 150 respondents, including Tata customers and business professionals.
- **Secondary Data:** Company reports, Tata Sustainability Reports, academic journals, government CSR portals, and newspaper articles.

3.4 Research Tools

- **Statistical tools:** Correlation and regression analysis were used to measure the relationship between CSR activities and customer loyalty indicators.
- **Likert scale:** To measure consumer attitudes toward Tata's CSR activities (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

3.5 Hypothesis

- **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** There is no significant relationship between CSR initiatives and brand loyalty.
- **H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):** CSR initiatives have a significant positive impact on brand loyalty.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis and interpretation section aims to examine the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) dimensions and brand loyalty among consumers of the Tata Group. The study used both descriptive and inferential statistical tools to analyze data collected from respondents through a structured questionnaire. Mean scores were calculated to assess consumer perception across different CSR dimensions, while correlation and regression analyses were used to determine the strength of the relationship between CSR and brand loyalty.

4.1 CSR Dimensions and Consumer Perception

The following table summarizes the findings related to key CSR dimensions and their corresponding impact on brand loyalty:

Table 1: CSR Dimensions

CSR Dimension	Mean Score (Out of 5)	Consumer Perception	Impact on Loyalty (%)
Environmental Sustainability	4.5	Highly Positive	87%
Education & Skill Development	4.3	Strongly Positive	83%
Health & Community Welfare	4.4	Strongly Positive	85%
Ethical Business Practices	4.6	Very Strong	90%
Employee Welfare	4.2	Positive	80%

4.2 Interpretation of Results

The table indicates that respondents exhibited a highly positive perception toward Tata Group's CSR activities across all dimensions. The mean scores (ranging from 4.2 to 4.6 on a 5-point Likert scale) reflect strong consumer approval of Tata's social and ethical initiatives.

1. Environmental Sustainability (Mean = 4.5, Loyalty Impact = 87%)

Respondents strongly acknowledged Tata Group's efforts in promoting environmental protection, renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable manufacturing practices. Programs such as Tata Power's solar initiatives and Tata Steel's "Green Manufacturing" campaigns were cited as key factors driving consumer admiration and loyalty. Environmental responsibility was seen as a sign of long-term corporate vision and social consciousness.

2. Education and Skill Development (Mean = 4.3, Loyalty Impact = 83%)

Tata's contribution to education and skill-building through initiatives like Tata ClassEdge, Tata STRIVE, and scholarships for underprivileged students significantly influenced positive consumer perception. Consumers viewed these initiatives as genuine investments in human capital and community empowerment, enhancing the brand's social credibility and trust.

3. Health and Community Welfare (Mean = 4.4, Loyalty Impact = 85%)

Health-related CSR programs such as the Tata Medical Center, Tata Memorial Hospital, and rural health outreach programs were highly appreciated by respondents. These efforts positioned Tata as a caring and responsible corporate citizen. Respondents felt emotionally connected to the brand due to its commitment to public health and social well-being.

4. Ethical Business Practices (Mean = 4.6, Loyalty Impact = 90%)

This dimension recorded the highest mean score and loyalty impact, underscoring the significance of ethical conduct in brand perception. Tata's long-standing reputation for integrity, transparency, and fair dealings emerged as the most influential driver of brand loyalty. Consumers associated Tata with honesty, reliability, and trustworthiness—values that enhance brand strength and consumer retention.

5. Employee Welfare (Mean = 4.2, Loyalty Impact = 80%)

Respondents also expressed satisfaction with Tata's initiatives for employee development, workplace safety, diversity, and inclusion. Programs promoting employee well-being and fair compensation further strengthened internal brand advocacy, leading to higher external loyalty as employees become brand ambassadors.

4.3 Correlation and Regression Analysis

To further understand the relationship between CSR initiatives and brand loyalty, correlation and regression analyses were conducted.

Table 2: Correlation and Regression Analysis

Statistical Test	Result	Interpretation
Correlation Coefficient (r)	0.84	Strong positive correlation between CSR and brand loyalty
Coefficient of Determination (R ²)	0.71	71% of variation in brand loyalty explained by CSR initiatives
Significance Level (p-value)	0.001 (< 0.05)	Statistically significant relationship

The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.84$) indicates a strong positive relationship between CSR activities and brand loyalty levels among Tata consumers. This suggests that as CSR engagement increases, consumer loyalty also rises proportionately.

The regression analysis further revealed that CSR initiatives account for 71% of the variance in brand loyalty ($R^2 = 0.71$), demonstrating a high predictive capability of CSR in determining brand loyalty outcomes. The p-value of 0.001 confirms the relationship is statistically significant, implying that CSR is a key determinant of customer loyalty in Tata's case.

4.4 Qualitative Insights

Apart from quantitative data, qualitative responses from open-ended questions in the survey highlighted several key insights:

- **Trustworthiness and Credibility:** Most respondents stated that Tata's consistent adherence to ethical standards makes them feel secure and confident about their purchasing choices.
- **Emotional Attachment:** Consumers expressed emotional pride in associating with a brand that contributes to society, reinforcing repeat purchase intentions.
- **Perceived Authenticity:** Respondents emphasized that Tata's CSR initiatives appear genuine, long-term, and not merely driven by profit motives or regulatory compliance.
- **Brand Differentiation:** Many participants noted that Tata's CSR culture clearly distinguishes it from other business conglomerates that focus primarily on marketing or financial performance.

4.5 Summary of Analysis

The analysis reveals a clear link between Tata Group's CSR engagement and enhanced brand loyalty. Each CSR dimension—environmental, educational, health-related, ethical, and employee-oriented—positively influences consumer trust and emotional connection with the brand. Ethical business practices emerged as the most influential factor, followed closely by environmental sustainability and health initiatives. Overall, the study confirms that CSR not only strengthens corporate reputation but also serves as a powerful driver of customer loyalty, advocacy, and long-term brand equity. Tata Group's example demonstrates that when social responsibility is deeply integrated into business strategy, it yields measurable outcomes in both social impact and market success.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study clearly demonstrate that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays a crucial and multidimensional role in enhancing brand loyalty for the Tata Group. The data analysis, supported by both quantitative measures and qualitative responses, indicates that consumers perceive Tata brands such as Tata Steel, Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), and Titan as not only commercially successful but also socially responsible and ethically grounded organizations.

5.1 Overview of Findings

The results reaffirm that CSR initiatives undertaken by Tata have successfully cultivated a strong emotional connection between the brand and its consumers. The high correlation coefficient ($r = 0.84$) and regression value ($R^2 = 0.71$) underscore a statistically significant positive relationship between CSR and brand loyalty. This confirms that the higher the consumer's awareness and appreciation of Tata's CSR activities, the greater their attachment and loyalty toward the brand.

5.2 Findings and Discussion

1. Increased Willingness to Recommend Tata Products: The study reveals that consumers are more inclined to recommend Tata products and services because of the company's visible contributions to community development and social welfare. Initiatives such as Tata Trusts' educational scholarships, rural livelihood programs, and healthcare outreach have enhanced the group's image as a socially conscious entity. This positive perception not only increases customer satisfaction but also transforms customers into brand advocates who voluntarily promote Tata products through positive word-of-mouth communication.

2. Emotional Brand Connection through CSR Engagement: CSR has been instrumental in establishing emotional bonds between Tata and its consumers. Respondents reported a sense of pride in associating with a brand that prioritizes rural development, women empowerment, and environmental conservation. Projects like “Tata Sustainability Month,” “Tata Water Mission,” and “Green Manufacturing” initiatives have strengthened consumer trust and emotional engagement. This emotional connection translates into loyalty-driven behavior, where consumers prefer Tata over competitors even when faced with alternative options.

3. Ethical Conduct as a Foundation for Trust and Reputation: The research findings highlight that Tata’s reputation for ethical business practices has been a cornerstone of its brand loyalty. The company’s long-standing adherence to integrity, fairness, and transparency in operations has resulted in a high mean perception score of 4.6 and a 90% impact on loyalty. Consumers view Tata as a brand that honors its commitments, treats stakeholders equitably, and acts with social conscience. This perception of ethical credibility has established Tata as a trustworthy and dependable brand across generations.

4. CSR as a Driver of Repeat Purchase and Advocacy: The study also shows that Tata’s CSR-driven brand image encourages repeat purchases and reinforces brand advocacy. Respondents expressed that their purchasing decisions are influenced not only by product quality but also by Tata’s societal contributions. This indicates that CSR has become a decisive factor in consumer behavior and retention. Moreover, Tata’s CSR communications—such as sustainability reports and social campaigns—enhance consumer awareness, motivating repeat patronage and sustained brand loyalty.

5.3 Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The results of this study are consistent with previous theoretical models such as Carroll’s CSR Pyramid (1991) and Porter and Kramer’s Shared Value concept (2006). Tata’s case exemplifies how integrating CSR into core business strategy can produce measurable business advantages while addressing societal needs. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that companies should not treat CSR as an ancillary activity but as a strategic function that shapes corporate identity and consumer relationships. By aligning CSR initiatives with stakeholder expectations and communicating them effectively, firms can enhance customer retention, brand differentiation, and competitive advantage.

5.4 Comparative Insight

In comparison with other Indian conglomerates, Tata’s CSR approach stands out due to its consistency, authenticity, and scale. Unlike many corporations that initiate CSR primarily for compliance or image-building purposes, Tata’s initiatives are deeply rooted in its value system. This long-term commitment has enabled the Group to maintain reputational resilience, even during market downturns or crises. Overall, the discussion establishes that CSR not only enhances Tata’s social footprint but also serves as a vital instrument in nurturing consumer trust, emotional loyalty, and long-term profitability.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an essential determinant of brand loyalty in the contemporary business environment. In a world where consumers increasingly favor socially responsible and transparent companies, CSR has emerged as a strategic asset that reinforces brand credibility and strengthens emotional ties with customers. The Tata Group’s century-long commitment to social welfare, sustainability, and ethical business conduct has established it as a benchmark of responsible corporate citizenship. The Group’s philosophy of “Leadership with Trust” is not merely a slogan but a living principle reflected in every facet of its operations—from community development and education to environmental conservation and ethical governance. Empirical findings from this research confirm that Tata’s CSR initiatives significantly enhance consumer trust, shape positive perceptions, and drive repeat purchase intentions.

The company’s deep-rooted ethical culture and social consciousness have built an enduring relationship with its stakeholders, positioning Tata as one of the most respected and reliable brands in India and globally. CSR, therefore, transcends philanthropy—it is a strategic investment in brand equity and long-term sustainability. Organizations that integrate CSR into their core business strategy stand to gain not only social legitimacy but also economic prosperity. In the case of Tata Group, CSR has proven to be a critical force that connects corporate success with societal progress. In conclusion, the research reaffirms that “doing good is good business.” Companies that genuinely engage in socially responsible practices build stronger customer loyalty, enhance stakeholder confidence, and contribute meaningfully to sustainable development. For firms aspiring to achieve long-term brand success and trust, adopting CSR as a guiding business principle is no longer optional—it is indispensable.

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