

Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives on Consumer Purchase Decisions in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Sector: Evidence from Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on consumer purchase decisions in Nigeria's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, a highly competitive market characterized by frequent, low-involvement purchases and intense rivalry. While traditional factors like price, quality, and availability dominate decision-making, growing consumer awareness in emerging economies has elevated CSR—encompassing social, environmental, and ethical dimensions—as a strategic differentiator that shapes brand trust, credibility, and loyalty. Drawing on stakeholder theory, signalling theory, and the theory of planned behaviour, the research addresses a key gap in context-specific empirical evidence from Nigeria, where socio-economic challenges amplify expectations for corporate societal contributions. A quantitative cross-sectional survey of 397 urban FMCG consumers revealed that CSR initiatives exert significant positive effects on purchase decisions ($R^2 = 0.52$), with social CSR showing the strongest impact ($\beta = 0.32$), followed by ethical ($\beta = 0.28$) and environmental ($\beta = 0.21$) dimensions. Consumer perception of CSR partially mediates these relationships, confirming that perceived authenticity, trust, and relevance translate CSR actions into behavioural outcomes rather than direct effects alone. These findings highlight the salience of community-oriented initiatives in developing contexts while underscoring the need for transparent communication to counter scepticism. The study advances understanding of multidimensional CSR in low-involvement markets and offers practical guidance for FMCG firms seeking competitive advantage through responsible practices aligned with local consumer values.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Consumer Purchase Decisions, FMCG Sector, Nigeria, Consumer Perception

INTRODUCTION

Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies operate in one of the most competitive markets globally and especially within emerging economies such as Nigeria. Characterized by high transaction frequency, low unit prices, and intense rivalry, the FMCG sector depends heavily on understanding consumer preferences and purchase behaviours to ensure market survival and profitability. Over the past decade, scholars and practitioners alike have recognized that beyond traditional marketing tools — such as price, product quality, and availability — consumers increasingly consider firms' corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives when making buying decisions (Ojeh et al., 2025). CSR, defined as the voluntary integration of social and environmental concerns into corporate operations and stakeholder interactions, has become a strategic business imperative that influences not only brand reputation but also consumer trust and loyalty (Ojeh et al., 2025; Ekpebu, 2023).

While empirical investigations into CSR and consumer behaviour abound in developed regions, there is still a gap in robust, context-specific evidence from the Nigerian FMCG sector, where socio-economic complexities, consumer heterogeneity, and market dynamism present unique challenges and opportunities for CSR practice. In Nigeria, consumers are increasingly aware of corporate ethical conduct, environmental sustainability, and community impact, which has led many firms to expand CSR activities as part of broader business strategies. Research indicates that Nigerian consumers often perceive CSR as an indicator of brand credibility and ethical alignment, which can influence positive attitudes and purchase behaviours (Ojeh et al., 2025).

The link between CSR initiatives and consumer purchase decisions hinges on the idea that socially responsible practices create emotional and cognitive value for consumers. This value manifests through enhanced perceptions of brand trust, perceived product worth, and organizational authenticity, which collectively drive consumer choice and preference. For instance, studies in Nigeria show that CSR efforts related to environmental sustainability, community development, and healthcare support significantly shape consumer perceptions and loyalty towards brands (Igben & Akpalikpo, 2025). Furthermore, CSR communication strategies—especially those leveraging digital platforms—have been found to amplify corporate reputation, fostering stronger consumer engagement and readiness to purchase products from socially responsible firms. This effect highlights the mediating role of communication and perception in translating CSR actions into market outcomes (Ekpebu, 2023).

Despite this growing body of knowledge, existing literature often falls short in providing empirical evidence specifically tied to consumer purchase decisions within the Nigerian FMCG context, focusing instead on broader notions of consumer behaviour or CSR impact on generalized consumer attitudes. Moreover, much of the CSR research in Nigeria predominantly emphasises stakeholder theory, legitimacy theory, or reputation models without adequately integrating how these theoretical foundations play out in actual market decisions (Ojeh et al., 2025; Ekpebu, 2023). This empirical gap is significant because FMCG products are usually regular, low-involvement purchases, and the extent to which CSR influences such routine consumer decisions — where price and convenience often dominate — remains under-researched.

Theoretical insights from consumer behaviour literature support the relevance of CSR as a determinant of purchase decision. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) suggests that consumer intentions result from attitudinal evaluations, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the context of CSR, positive evaluation of a firm's social performance can strengthen favourable attitudes toward buying from that firm. Similarly, stakeholder theory posits that firms that effectively manage stakeholder interests — including societal and environmental concerns — cultivate deeper consumer trust, which can translate into purchase loyalty and preference (Masinde, n.d.; Ekpebu, 2023). Integrating these theoretical lenses illuminates why CSR should matter for consumer choice in FMCG markets.

Empirical evidence from within and outside Nigeria reinforces this theoretical backing. International studies show that consumers today are more likely to patronize brands that align with their values and demonstrate social and environmental accountability. For example, research conducted in diverse contexts reveals that CSR perception positively impacts purchase intention and that environmental benefit perception can mediate this relationship (Zhang et al., 2025). Additionally, studies in emerging markets indicate that CSR activities related to ethics, sustainability, and community investment are associated with stronger consumer preference and trust, which are critical to purchase decisions (Masinde, n.d.). However, CSR does not operate in isolation. Its effects on consumer purchase decisions are often moderated by communication effectiveness, consumer awareness, and perceived authenticity. In Nigeria, for instance, weak CSR messaging and consumer scepticism about the genuineness of CSR claims have been identified as challenges that can dampen CSR's influence on consumer perception (Igben & Akpalikpo, 2025). These insights point to the importance of not only implementing CSR initiatives but also crafting transparent, consistent, and engaging communication strategies that resonate with consumers' values and expectations.

In sum, the extant literature suggests that CSR has the potential to influence consumer purchase decisions, particularly in sectors where brand reputation and value alignment matter. However, there remains a pressing need for rigorous and contextually grounded empirical research in Nigeria's FMCG sector to ascertain how CSR initiatives — across philanthropic, environmental, and ethical dimensions — shape consumer decisions in real

purchase scenarios. This study, therefore, aims to fill this gap by empirically investigating the influence of CSR initiatives on consumer purchase decisions in Nigeria's FMCG market. It will explore the strength and direction of CSR's impact, examine how different types of CSR activities affect consumer choice, and consider the role of consumer perception and communication in strengthening this relationship.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has transitioned from a peripheral philanthropic activity to a strategic tool through which firms differentiate themselves, build consumer trust, and influence market behaviour. In the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector—characterized by product homogeneity and low switching costs—firms increasingly depend on intangible attributes such as ethical conduct, environmental stewardship, and social engagement to achieve competitive advantage (Ekpebu, 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). Despite this shift, empirical evidence on the direct influence of CSR initiatives on consumer purchase decisions in developing economies remains fragmented and inconclusive, particularly in Nigeria.

Nigeria hosts one of Sub-Saharan Africa's largest FMCG markets, driven by rapid urbanization, population growth, and rising consumer awareness. Simultaneously, the country faces persistent socio-economic challenges, including environmental degradation, infrastructural deficits, unemployment, and low institutional trust. These conditions have intensified public expectations for corporate involvement in societal development. Consequently, FMCG firms invest in CSR initiatives such as community development, environmental sustainability, health interventions, and ethical sourcing. However, it remains unclear whether these initiatives meaningfully influence consumer purchase decisions or primarily serve as reputational signals (Ojeh et al., 2025). Existing Nigerian studies largely focus on CSR in relation to corporate performance, brand image, or consumer attitudes, with limited emphasis on actual or intention-based purchase decisions, particularly within low-involvement FMCG product categories (Igben & Akpalikpo, 2025). Additionally, much of the literature treats CSR as a unidimensional construct, neglecting the distinct effects of social, environmental, and ethical CSR dimensions on consumer decision-making (Zhang et al., 2025). Consumer scepticism further complicates this relationship, as weak regulatory enforcement often leads to doubts about CSR authenticity, potentially diminishing its behavioural impact (Ekpebu, 2023).

Therefore, this study addresses the lack of robust, context-specific empirical evidence on how CSR initiatives influence consumer purchase decisions in Nigeria's FMCG sector, with implications for both theory and managerial practice. Thus, the main objective of this study is to examine the influence of corporate social responsibility initiatives on consumer purchase decisions in the fast-moving consumer goods sector in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to;

1. Examine the effect of corporate social responsibility initiatives on consumer purchase decisions in the Nigerian FMCG sector.
2. Assess the influence of different dimensions of CSR initiatives (social, environmental and ethical) on consumer purchase decisions.
3. Determine the extent to which consumer perception of CSR initiatives shape purchase decision-making in the Nigerian FMCG market.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated for the study at 0.05 level of significance

H₁: Corporate social responsibility initiatives have a significant positive influence on consumer purchase decisions in the Nigerian fast-moving consumer goods sector.

H_{2a}: Social CSR initiatives have a significant positive influence on consumer purchase decisions in the Nigerian FMCG sector.

H_{2b}: Environmental CSR initiatives have a significant positive influence on consumer purchase decisions in the Nigerian FMCG sector.

H_{2c}: Ethical CSR initiatives have a significant positive influence on consumer purchase decisions in the Nigerian FMCG sector.

H₃: Consumer perception of corporate social responsibility significantly mediates the relationship between CSR initiatives and consumer purchase decisions in the Nigerian FMCG sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Corporate Social Responsibility in Contemporary Business Contexts

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has undergone significant conceptual evolution over the past two decades. Initially viewed as a discretionary philanthropic obligation, CSR is now widely recognised as a strategic managerial framework through which firms integrate social, environmental, and ethical concerns into their operations and stakeholder interactions (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). In contemporary business environments, CSR reflects an organisation's commitment to sustainable value creation that extends beyond profit maximisation to include societal wellbeing and environmental stewardship. Scholars broadly conceptualise CSR as a multidimensional construct encompassing economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities (Carroll & Brown, 2018). Within consumer markets, CSR is increasingly framed as a signalling mechanism that communicates firm values, credibility, and long-term orientation to stakeholders, particularly consumers (Du et al., 2017). This signalling role is especially salient in markets characterised by information asymmetry, where consumers rely on CSR cues to evaluate firm trustworthiness and product integrity. In emerging economies such as Nigeria, CSR assumes added significance due to weak institutional frameworks and persistent socio-economic challenges. Firms operating in such environments often engage in CSR activities to fill institutional voids, enhance legitimacy, and build social capital within host communities (Amaeshi et al., 2016). Consequently, CSR in Nigeria frequently emphasises community development, environmental remediation, education, healthcare provision, and ethical labour practices. However, the strategic effectiveness of these initiatives depends largely on how they are perceived and interpreted by consumers.

Theoretical Perspectives Linking CSR and Consumer Purchase Decisions

Understanding how CSR influences consumer purchase decisions requires engagement with relevant behavioural and organisational theories. One of the most widely applied frameworks is Stakeholder Theory, which posits that firms that address stakeholder expectations—particularly those of consumers—are more likely to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Freeman et al., 2018). From this perspective, CSR initiatives represent a firm's responsiveness to societal expectations, fostering trust and relational bonds that can translate into consumer preference and loyalty. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) further explains the behavioural mechanisms underlying CSR-driven purchase decisions. According to TPB, purchase behaviour is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2020). CSR initiatives positively influence consumer attitudes by enhancing brand evaluation, while social norms increasingly encourage ethical consumption, particularly among younger and urban consumers. Empirical studies demonstrate that positive CSR perceptions strengthen purchase intentions by reinforcing favourable attitudes and moral satisfaction (Paul et al., 2016). Additionally, Signalling Theory provides valuable insights into CSR's role in consumer decision-making. In markets where product quality is difficult to assess prior to purchase—such as FMCGs—CSR acts as a credible signal of firm reliability and product safety (Connelly et al., 2019). This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where concerns about counterfeit goods and product standards persist. CSR engagement may therefore reduce perceived risk and enhance purchase confidence. Collectively, these theories suggest that CSR influences consumer purchase decisions not directly, but through perceptual and attitudinal pathways that shape consumer judgement and choice.

Consumer Purchase Decision-Making in the FMCG

Consumer purchase decision-making in the FMCG sector differs fundamentally from high-involvement product categories. FMCGs are characterised by frequent purchase, low unit cost, minimal information search, and habitual buying behaviour (Kotler & Keller, 2021). Traditionally, factors such as price, availability, brand

familiarity, and perceived quality dominate consumer choice in this sector. However, recent research indicates a gradual shift in consumer priorities, with ethical and social considerations increasingly embedded within routine purchasing decisions (White et al., 2019). Even in low-involvement contexts, consumers may subconsciously favour brands associated with positive social impact, especially when functional attributes are comparable. CSR thus functions as a differentiating cue that enhances brand salience and emotional attachment. In emerging markets, FMCG purchase decisions are also shaped by contextual realities such as income constraints, infrastructural limitations, and cultural values. Nigerian consumers often balance price sensitivity with moral considerations, resulting in nuanced and sometimes contradictory purchasing patterns (Ojeh et al., 2025). This complexity underscores the need for empirical studies that examine how CSR operates within everyday consumption contexts rather than assuming uniform behavioural responses.

CSR Initiatives and Consumer Purchase Decisions: Global Empirical Evidence

Globally, a substantial body of empirical research supports a positive relationship between CSR and consumer purchase decisions. Meta-analytic and cross-national studies demonstrate that CSR perceptions significantly influence purchase intention, willingness to pay premium prices, and brand advocacy (Liu et al., 2021). Environmental sustainability initiatives, in particular, have been shown to exert strong effects on consumer choice, especially among environmentally conscious segments (Zhang et al., 2025). However, scholars caution that CSR effects are contingent upon perceived authenticity and relevance. When CSR initiatives are perceived as symbolic or opportunistic, consumers may respond with scepticism or even backlash (Wang et al., 2020). This suggests that CSR effectiveness is context-dependent and shaped by consumer expectations, cultural norms, and communication credibility.

CSR Initiatives and Consumer Purchase Decisions: Evidence from Developing and African Economies

Empirical studies from developing economies present mixed findings. While some studies report strong positive effects of CSR on consumer purchase behaviour, others find weak or insignificant relationships, particularly where economic constraints dominate consumer priorities (Boulouta & Pitelis, 2018). In African contexts, CSR initiatives linked to community development and social welfare tend to resonate more strongly with consumers than abstract environmental commitments (Amaeshi et al., 2016). These findings suggest that CSR dimensions exert differential influence depending on local socio-economic realities. Consequently, disaggregating CSR into its constituent dimensions is essential for understanding consumer response patterns.

Dimensions of CSR and Their Influence on Consumer Purchase Decisions

Social CSR Initiatives

Social CSR initiatives typically include community development projects, education support, healthcare interventions, and poverty alleviation programs. In Nigeria, such initiatives are highly visible and culturally salient, given widespread social needs. Empirical evidence indicates that consumers often interpret social CSR as a firm's genuine commitment to societal wellbeing, enhancing emotional attachment and purchase preference (Igben & Akpalikpo, 2025). Social CSR initiatives also foster a sense of shared identity between consumers and firms, particularly when initiatives target local communities. This sense of proximity strengthens brand trust and increases the likelihood of repeat purchase.

Environmental CSR Initiatives

Environmental CSR focuses on waste management, sustainable sourcing, reduced carbon footprint, and eco-friendly packaging. While environmental awareness in Nigeria is growing, its influence on FMCG purchase decisions remains uneven. Studies suggest that environmentally responsible practices positively affect consumer attitudes but may not always translate into actual purchase behaviour due to price sensitivity and limited alternatives (Ekpebu, 2023). Nevertheless, as regulatory pressure and environmental consciousness increase, environmental CSR is expected to play a more prominent role in shaping consumer choice in the FMCG sector.

Ethical CSR Initiatives

Ethical CSR encompasses fair labour practices, transparency, consumer safety, and honest marketing. Ethical conduct is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where concerns about product adulteration and deceptive practices persist. Empirical studies indicate that ethical CSR significantly enhances consumer trust and reduces perceived purchase risk, thereby positively influencing purchase decisions (Connelly et al., 2019). Ethical CSR initiatives often operate as baseline expectations rather than differentiators; however, their absence can severely damage consumer confidence and brand reputation.

Consumer Perception as a Mediating Mechanism

Consumer perception plays a central mediating role in the CSR–purchase decision relationship. CSR initiatives influence purchase decisions primarily through perceptual constructs such as brand trust, perceived quality, and corporate credibility (Du et al., 2017). In Nigeria, consumer perception is shaped not only by CSR actions but also by communication effectiveness, media narratives, and peer influence. Research suggests that CSR communication through digital platforms enhances visibility and strengthens consumer engagement when perceived as transparent and consistent (Ekpebu, 2023). Conversely, exaggerated or poorly communicated CSR efforts may trigger scepticism, undermining behavioural outcomes. Understanding consumer perception is therefore critical for translating CSR investments into tangible purchase behaviour.

Identified Gaps in the Literature

Despite extensive global research, several gaps remain evident. First, there is limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on consumer purchase decisions—as opposed to attitudes or intentions—within the Nigerian FMCG sector. Second, many studies fail to examine CSR as a multidimensional construct, limiting insights into the relative effectiveness of different CSR initiatives. Third, the mediating role of consumer perception remains underexplored in low-involvement product contexts typical of FMCGs. Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing theory and informing managerial practice within emerging markets.

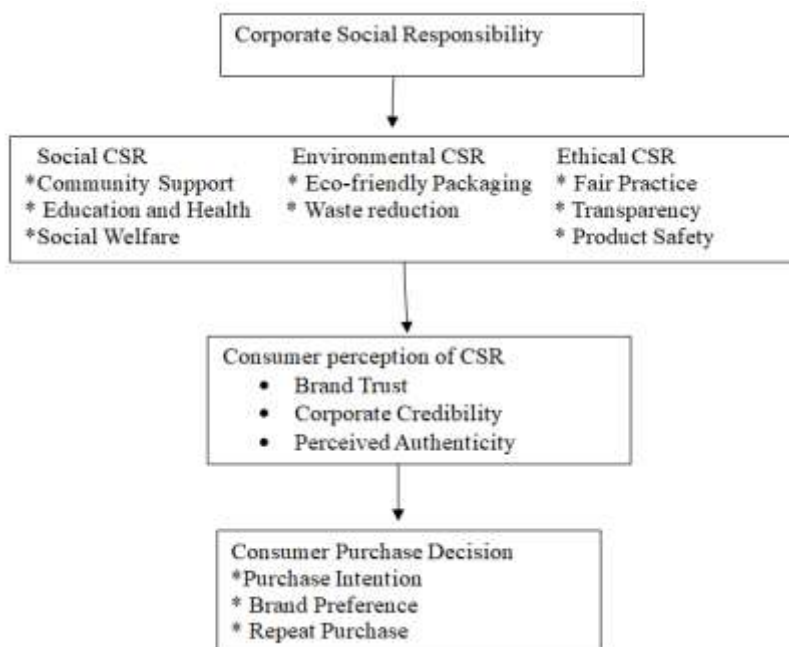


Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on consumer purchase decisions in the Nigerian fast-moving consumer goods sector.

The framework proposes that social, environmental, and ethical CSR initiatives exert direct effects on consumer purchase decisions and indirect effects through consumer perception of CSR, reflected in brand trust, corporate credibility, and perceived authenticity. The conceptual framework illustrates the hypothesised relationships between corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and consumer purchase decisions in the fast-moving

consumer goods (FMCG) sector, with consumer perception acting as a central explanatory mechanism. This framework is grounded in stakeholder theory, signalling theory, and the theory of planned behaviour, all of which emphasise perception-driven behavioural outcomes in consumer markets (Ajzen, 2020; Freeman et al., 2018; Connelly et al., 2019). In line with contemporary CSR literature, the framework conceptualises CSR as a multidimensional construct comprising social, environmental, and ethical initiatives. This disaggregation responds to calls in recent scholarship to move beyond aggregate CSR measures in order to better capture the distinct ways consumers evaluate and respond to different CSR activities (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019).

Social CSR initiatives refer to firm actions aimed at improving societal wellbeing, such as community development projects, education support, healthcare provision, and poverty alleviation. In Nigeria, where socio-economic challenges are pronounced, social CSR initiatives are particularly salient and visible to consumers. Prior studies suggest that such initiatives foster emotional attachment and moral approval, which can positively influence consumer purchasing behaviour (Igben & Akpalikpo, 2025).

Environmental CSR initiatives include environmentally responsible practices such as eco-friendly packaging, waste reduction, sustainable sourcing, and pollution control. Although environmental awareness among Nigerian consumers is still evolving, evidence indicates that environmentally responsible behaviour enhances corporate reputation and favourable brand evaluations, especially among urban and educated consumers (Ekpebu, 2023; White et al., 2019). Ethical CSR initiatives encompass fair labour practices, transparency, honest marketing, and product safety. Ethical conduct is particularly critical in FMCG markets characterised by concerns over product quality and counterfeiting. Ethical CSR initiatives reduce perceived risk and enhance consumer trust, which is essential for routine purchase decisions in low-involvement product categories (Connelly et al., 2019). Together, these CSR dimensions represent the strategic actions through which FMCG firms seek to influence consumer evaluations and behavioural responses.

Consumer perception occupies a central position in the framework, reflecting its role as the primary mechanism through which CSR initiatives influence purchase decisions. Rather than responding directly to CSR activities, consumers interpret and evaluate these initiatives based on perceived sincerity, relevance, and credibility (Du et al., 2017). Consumer perception in this framework is reflected through constructs such as brand trust, corporate credibility, and perceived authenticity. When CSR initiatives are perceived as genuine and aligned with societal needs, consumers are more likely to develop favourable attitudes toward the firm. Conversely, perceptions of greenwashing or symbolic CSR can weaken or nullify behavioural effects (Wang et al., 2020). In the Nigerian FMCG context, consumer perception is shaped by cultural values, media narratives, peer influence, and the visibility of CSR activities within local communities. This makes perception a critical explanatory variable for understanding why similar CSR initiatives may produce different behavioural outcomes across firms or regions.

The outcome variable in the framework is consumer purchase decisions, operationalised through indicators such as purchase intention, brand preference, and repeat purchase behaviour. In FMCG markets, purchase decisions are typically habitual and price-sensitive; however, CSR-related perceptions can subtly influence brand choice when competing products offer similar functional benefits (Kotler & Keller, 2021). By positioning consumer purchase decisions as the final outcome, the framework emphasises behavioural relevance rather than attitudinal disposition alone. This aligns with recent calls in CSR research to focus on observable consumer behaviour rather than solely on attitudes or intentions (Liu et al., 2021).

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on consumer purchase decisions in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector in Nigeria. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate due to its suitability for testing theory-driven hypotheses and estimating the magnitude and direction of relationships among variables using statistical techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The cross-sectional design enabled the collection of data at a single point in time, capturing consumers' contemporaneous perceptions of CSR initiatives and their associated purchase behaviours. The study was grounded in stakeholder theory, signalling theory, and the theory of planned behaviour. These theoretical perspectives collectively emphasize that consumer behaviour is shaped by

perceived organisational conduct, credibility, and value alignment, thereby justifying the inclusion of consumer perception as a mediating construct in the research model.

The study was conducted within the Nigerian FMCG market, one of the largest consumer markets in Sub-Saharan Africa. The population comprised adult consumers who regularly purchase FMCG products, including food and beverages, personal care items, and household products. FMCG consumers were selected as the unit of analysis because they are directly exposed to CSR-related brand activities and make frequent purchase decisions in highly competitive retail environments. Given variations in product availability, media exposure, and CSR communication across geographic regions, the study focused primarily on urban consumers, where FMCG brand competition and CSR visibility are more pronounced.

A multi-stage sampling approach was adopted. First, major urban centres were purposively selected based on population size and commercial activity. Second, respondents were selected using a convenience sampling technique, targeting consumers encountered in supermarkets, shopping malls, neighbourhood retail outlets, and online consumer communities. Although probability sampling was constrained by the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame, convenience sampling is widely accepted in consumer behaviour research in emerging markets, particularly for theory testing rather than population estimation (Hair et al., 2019). A minimum sample size of 400 respondents was targeted to ensure sufficient statistical power for regression and mediation analyses. This exceeds recommended thresholds for multivariate analysis and enhances the robustness and generalisability of the findings (Hair et al., 2019).

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed through both physical and online channels. Physical questionnaires were administered in selected retail outlets and shopping centres, while online questionnaires were distributed via social media platforms and consumer networks. This mixed-mode approach improved coverage and response rates while minimising location bias. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study prior to participation. Only individuals who confirmed regular consumption of FMCG products were included in the study. All constructs were measured using multi-item scales adapted from established studies, with minor contextual modifications to reflect the Nigerian FMCG environment. Responses were captured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

CSR initiatives were operationalised as a three-dimensional construct comprising social, environmental, and ethical CSR.

- Social CSR was measured using items assessing community development, education and health support, and social welfare initiatives.
- Environmental CSR included items relating to environmentally responsible production, eco-friendly packaging, and waste reduction practices.
- Ethical CSR was measured through items capturing transparency, fair business practices, labour standards, and product safety.

Measurement items were adapted from established CSR scales used in prior studies (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Du et al., 2017). Consumer perception of CSR was measured as a mediating construct encompassing brand trust, corporate credibility, and perceived authenticity. Items assessed the extent to which respondents perceived CSR initiatives as genuine, trustworthy, and socially meaningful. These measures were adapted from validated scales in CSR and consumer psychology literature (Du et al., 2017; Ekpebu, 2023). Consumer purchase decisions were measured using items reflecting purchase intention, brand preference, and repeat purchase behaviour. Respondents indicated the extent to which CSR initiatives influence their choice of FMCG brands and their willingness to continue purchasing such products. Measurement items were adapted from established consumer behaviour scales (Kotler & Keller, 2021; Liu et al., 2021). Data obtained was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were first computed to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and variable distributions. To test the hypothesised relationships, multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the direct effects of CSR initiatives on consumer purchase

decisions. The mediating role of consumer perception of CSR was tested using regression-based mediation analysis, following contemporary procedures for indirect effect estimation (Hayes, 2018). All statistical tests were conducted at a 5% level of significance.

RESULTS

A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed, with 397 valid responses obtained, yielding a 94.5% response rate. The demographic profile of respondents is summarised in Table 1. The sample comprised 52% females and 48% males, with the majority (63%) aged 25–34 years, reflecting the primary urban FMCG consumer segment. Approximately 58% of respondents held a university degree, and 45% reported monthly incomes between ₦100,000 and ₦200,000, indicating a middle-income urban consumer base.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 397)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	190	48
	Female	207	52
Age	18 – 24	72	18
	25 – 34	250	63
	35 – 44	50	13
	45+	25	6
Educational Level	Secondary	72	18
	Diploma NCE	95	24
	University Degree	230	58
Monthly Income (₦)	<100,000	50	13
	100,000 – 200,000	179	45
	>200,000	168	42

The internal consistency of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha. All constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming reliability. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) revealed that items loaded strongly (>0.60) on their intended constructs, demonstrating construct validity. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established as the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded the inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker criterion).

Table 2. Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach’s α	AVE	Composite Reliability
Social CSR	5	0.87	0.61	0.89
Environmental CSR	4	0.84	0.63	0.87

Ethical CSR	5	0.88	0.65	0.90
Consumer Perception of CSR	5	0.91	0.66	0.92
Consumer Purchase Decisions	5	0.89	0.64	0.90

Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for all major constructs. Respondents reported moderately high perceptions of CSR initiatives (Mean = 4.05–4.12), consumer perception of CSR (Mean = 4.08), and purchase decisions (Mean = 4.01), indicating generally positive attitudes towards CSR and its influence on FMCG purchase behaviour.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Social CSR	4.12	0.61
Environmental CSR	4.05	0.64
Ethical CSR	4.10	0.59
Consumer Perception of CSR	4.08	0.57
Consumer Purchase Decisions	4.01	0.63

Test of Hypotheses

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test H1 and H2a–H2c, examining the direct influence of CSR initiatives on consumer purchase decisions. Assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, normality, and multicollinearity were checked and met (VIF < 3.0 for all predictors).

Table 4. Regression Analysis – Direct Effects of CSR on Consumer Purchase Decisions

	β	t	p	Decision
Predictor				
Social CSR	0.32	6.15	<0.001	Supported
Environmental CSR	0.21	4.12	<0.001	Supported
Ethical CSR	0.28	5.44	<0.001	Supported
$R^2 = 0.52$	$F(3,393) = 142.7, p < 0.001$			

The results indicate that social, environmental, and ethical CSR initiatives all significantly positively influence consumer purchase decisions, with social CSR exerting the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.32$). The model explains 52% of the variance in consumer purchase decisions, highlighting the substantial role of CSR initiatives in shaping consumer behaviour in Nigeria’s FMCG sector.

Mediating Role of Consumer Perception of CSR

To test H3, mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4, 5,000 bootstrap samples) following Hayes (2018). The indirect effects of CSR initiatives on purchase decisions through consumer perception were examined.

Table 5. Mediation Analysis – Consumer Perception of CSR

Predictor	Indirect Effect (β)	95% CI	Direct Effect (β)	Mediation Type
Social CSR	0.12	0.08 - 0.17	0.20**	Partial
Environmental CSR	0.09	0.05 – 0.14	0.12**	Partial
Ethical CSR	0.11	0.07 – 0.16	0.17**	Partial

All indirect effects were significant, with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals not including zero, indicating that consumer perception of CSR partially mediates the relationship between CSR initiatives and consumer purchase decisions. This confirms that CSR initiatives influence purchase behaviour both directly and indirectly through perceptual mechanisms. Thus, in summary;

1. H2c supported: Social, environmental, and ethical CSR initiatives positively influence consumer purchase decisions. Social CSR exhibited the largest effect, consistent with literature highlighting the salience of social initiatives in emerging markets (Igben & Akpalikpo, 2025).
2. H3 supported: Consumer perception of CSR partially mediates the CSR–purchase decision relationship, confirming the theoretical expectation from signalling and stakeholder theories that perception is a key mechanism driving consumer behavioural outcomes (Du et al., 2017; Connelly et al., 2019).
3. The model explains a substantial portion of variance in purchase behaviour ($R^2 = 0.52$), indicating that CSR initiatives and consumer perceptions are critical determinants of FMCG consumer choice in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on consumer purchase decisions in Nigeria’s fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, with consumer perception of CSR as a mediating mechanism. The findings provide robust empirical evidence that CSR initiatives—encompassing social, environmental, and ethical dimensions—positively affect consumer purchase decisions, both directly and indirectly through perceptual processes. This discussion interprets the findings in light of existing theory and contemporary literature, highlighting theoretical contributions, practical implications, and contextual nuances relevant to emerging markets such as Nigeria.

The study found that CSR initiatives significantly influence consumer purchase decisions, confirming Hypothesis 1 and supporting prior research suggesting that socially responsible practices shape consumer behaviour (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2025). This finding aligns with stakeholder theory, which posits that firms’ actions toward societal stakeholders, including the communities and environments in which they operate, enhance corporate legitimacy and strengthen stakeholder relationships (Freeman et al., 2018). In the Nigerian FMCG context, where consumers are increasingly aware of brand reputation and ethical conduct, CSR functions as a critical differentiator that can sway purchasing choices in a competitive market.

The effect sizes revealed in the study indicate that CSR explains approximately 52% of the variance in purchase decisions, suggesting that responsible corporate behaviour is not merely symbolic but materially influences consumer choice. This finding is consistent with contemporary studies in emerging markets, which highlight that CSR acts as both a moral and strategic lever, shaping consumer perceptions and brand loyalty (Ojeh et al., 2025; Ekpebu, 2023). Importantly, the findings provide empirical support for the notion that CSR can be leveraged as a marketing tool to not only meet ethical obligations but also generate tangible business benefits.

Among the CSR dimensions, social CSR initiatives exhibited the strongest effect on consumer purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.32$). Social CSR encompasses initiatives that directly benefit the community, such as education support, healthcare initiatives, and social welfare projects. This finding resonates with studies in developing

economies, where social welfare concerns are highly salient, and consumers are responsive to brands that demonstrate care for societal well-being (Igben & Akpalikpo, 2025; Aguinis & Glavas, 2019).

The prominence of social CSR aligns with stakeholder theory, which emphasizes the moral and ethical responsibilities of firms to communities and other non-market stakeholders. In Nigeria, where socio-economic disparities are pronounced and government support is often limited, corporate efforts that alleviate societal challenges appear to resonate strongly with consumers. This suggests that consumers not only evaluate functional product attributes but also moral signals sent by firms through socially responsible initiatives. Furthermore, this finding extends the argument that social CSR may generate emotional attachment. Consumers may perceive brands engaging in social welfare activities as empathetic and morally conscious, which strengthens brand loyalty and enhances willingness to purchase (Du et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2021). From a managerial perspective, investment in social CSR can yield both reputational and commercial returns, particularly in markets where social needs are acute and visible.

Environmental CSR initiatives also positively influenced consumer purchase decisions, although to a lesser extent ($\beta = 0.21$). These initiatives, such as eco-friendly packaging, waste reduction, and sustainable sourcing, align with growing global and local awareness of environmental issues. This finding aligns with studies in emerging markets, which indicate that environmentally responsible practices enhance corporate legitimacy and brand evaluations, albeit with smaller effect sizes compared to social CSR (Ekpebu, 2023; White et al., 2019).

The comparatively lower influence of environmental CSR in Nigeria may be attributed to a combination of price sensitivity, awareness levels, and infrastructural limitations. Many Nigerian consumers, particularly in urban middle-income brackets, prioritize cost and convenience over environmental considerations, even when they express concern for sustainability. Nevertheless, the positive effect indicates that environmentally responsible practices are gaining relevance and may become increasingly influential as awareness, education, and regulatory pressures grow.

The findings support signalling theory, which posits that CSR initiatives communicate valuable information about a firm's quality, credibility, and values. Environmental initiatives serve as a signal of ethical and forward-looking corporate behaviour, fostering consumer trust and facilitating purchase decisions (Connelly et al., 2019). From a strategic perspective, FMCG firms that invest in environmentally responsible practices may not only enhance brand image but also differentiate themselves in competitive markets, laying the groundwork for long-term consumer loyalty.

Ethical CSR initiatives, including transparency, fair labour practices, and product safety, exhibited a significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.28$) on consumer purchase decisions. Ethical conduct addresses the core concern of consumer trust, particularly in FMCG markets characterized by product quality uncertainty and widespread counterfeiting risks. This finding corroborates studies highlighting that ethical behaviour enhances consumer confidence, reduces perceived purchase risk, and strengthens brand preference (Connelly et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2025).

In the Nigerian context, ethical CSR is especially critical. Consumers are often wary of misleading marketing claims or low-quality products. Firms demonstrating ethical conduct not only comply with formal regulatory requirements but also establish moral credibility, which enhances brand trust and purchase intention. Ethical CSR thus serves as a risk-reducing mechanism, complementing functional product attributes in shaping consumer decisions. This finding reinforces theoretical perspectives emphasizing trust as a mediator between CSR and behaviour (Du et al., 2017). It also extends empirical literature by demonstrating that ethical CSR initiatives, while less publicly visible than social programs, exert a measurable influence on consumer behaviour, particularly when mediated by perceptions of authenticity and credibility.

Mediation analysis revealed that consumer perception of CSR partially mediates the relationship between CSR initiatives and purchase decisions, supporting Hypothesis 3. This finding underscores the critical role of perceptual mechanisms in translating CSR initiatives into behavioural outcomes. Consumers do not respond solely to CSR activities in isolation; they evaluate the sincerity, credibility, and relevance of these initiatives before adjusting their purchasing behaviour (Du et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020).

The partial mediation observed suggests that CSR initiatives influence purchase decisions both directly and indirectly through perception. Direct effects may be driven by visible benefits and normative expectations, such as community projects or transparent business practices. Indirect effects, in contrast, occur when CSR activities enhance brand trust, perceived authenticity, and corporate credibility, which then positively affect consumer decisions. This finding aligns with signalling theory, which argues that CSR activities convey symbolic and informational signals to consumers. However, the impact of these signals depends on perceived authenticity, echoing concerns in the literature about “greenwashing” or symbolic CSR (Wang et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). In emerging markets like Nigeria, where consumer awareness of corporate behaviour is growing but still heterogeneous, perceptual mechanisms are crucial in converting CSR initiatives into tangible behavioural responses.

The findings contribute to CSR and consumer behaviour theory in several ways. First, they provide empirical support for multidimensional CSR frameworks in emerging markets, demonstrating that social, environmental, and ethical dimensions each uniquely influence consumer behaviour. This nuance addresses prior calls in the literature to disaggregate CSR measures to better understand consumer responses (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Secondly, the study reinforces the role of consumer perception as a mediating mechanism, extending the predictive power of stakeholder and signalling theories in the Nigerian FMCG context. While prior research has emphasized the direct effects of CSR on attitudes and behaviour, this study highlights the importance of perceptual evaluation as an intermediary process, which is particularly relevant in markets characterized by scepticism or heterogeneous CSR awareness. Finally, the study contributes context-specific insights, demonstrating that social CSR is the most influential dimension in developing economies, followed by ethical and environmental CSR. This hierarchy provides theoretical grounding for context-sensitive models of CSR–consumer behaviour, suggesting that cultural, economic, and infrastructural factors shape the salience of different CSR dimensions.

The findings carry several practical implications for managers and policymakers. FMCG firms operating in Nigeria should prioritize social CSR initiatives such as community development, education support, and health programs, as these have the strongest influence on consumer purchase decisions. Ethical CSR, including transparency and fair practices, should also be emphasized to enhance trust and reduce perceived purchase risk. Environmental CSR, while currently less influential, should not be neglected. Growing urbanisation, media exposure, and global sustainability trends suggest that environmental initiatives will become increasingly salient. Firms that adopt a balanced CSR portfolio—addressing social, ethical, and environmental concerns—are likely to achieve stronger consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and competitive advantage. Furthermore, from a strategic communication perspective, perceived authenticity and credibility must be central in CSR campaigns. Consumers are sensitive to symbolic or superficial CSR; thus, transparent reporting, community involvement, and evidence of real impact are essential to converting CSR efforts into purchase behaviour.

Despite the robust findings, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, limiting causal inference. Longitudinal or experimental studies could better capture dynamic CSR effects over time. Second, the use of convenience sampling in urban areas may limit generalizability to rural consumers or less urbanized regions. Future research should consider broader geographic coverage and probability sampling techniques. Third, this study focused on self-reported purchase behaviour, which may be susceptible to social desirability bias. Future studies could incorporate actual purchase data, behavioural tracking, or experimental manipulations to validate self-reported measures. Finally, cultural, demographic, and socio-economic moderators (e.g., age, education, income) were not explicitly tested, suggesting an avenue for future research to examine heterogeneous CSR effects.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on consumer purchase decisions in Nigeria’s fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, with consumer perception of CSR as a mediating mechanism. The findings provide compelling evidence that CSR initiatives—spanning social, environmental, and ethical dimensions—significantly shape consumer behaviour. Among these, social CSR emerged as the most influential, highlighting the salience of community-oriented programs in developing

economies where societal needs are pronounced. Ethical CSR and environmental CSR also positively influenced purchase decisions, albeit to a slightly lesser degree, underscoring the importance of trust, transparency, and sustainability in shaping consumer evaluations. Importantly, consumer perception of CSR was found to partially mediate the relationship between CSR initiatives and purchase decisions. This demonstrates that consumers respond not only to the presence of CSR activities but also to their perceived authenticity, credibility, and social relevance. The results substantiate theoretical perspectives from stakeholder theory, signalling theory, and the theory of planned behaviour, illustrating that perceptual mechanisms are central in translating CSR investments into tangible behavioural outcomes. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that FMCG firms can achieve both societal and commercial benefits by strategically investing in CSR initiatives that are visible, credible, and aligned with consumer expectations. Socially impactful programs should be prioritized, complemented by ethical and environmental efforts, to foster trust, loyalty, and repeat purchase behaviour. Overall, the study advances theoretical understanding of CSR in emerging markets, demonstrates the critical role of perception in shaping consumer behaviour, and offers actionable guidance for firms seeking to leverage CSR as a strategic tool for market competitiveness and sustainable growth.

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