

The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility Activities On Brand Equity And Customer Satisfaction During Disaster Periods

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Abstract

Enterprises, as integral components of the societies in which they operate, extend their organizational framework beyond consumer needs alone. They exhibit sensitivity to societal advancements towards the elements of social marketing. In line with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, businesses contribute to society in a planned manner. These well-orchestrated endeavors invariably exert a discernible influence on consumer perceptions. Furthermore, enterprises assume significant roles during disaster periods such as earthquakes and floods, alongside their planned CSR activities. Following the devastating Kahramanmaraş earthquake, which was dubbed a calamity of the century, businesses, alongside the government and citizens, mobilized their resources to address the substantial damages across ten provinces. In this study, the effects of CSR activities on brand equity and customer satisfaction during the disaster period were examined. Data collected online from 429 participants were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling. Analysis results show that CSR has a positive effect on brand equity. Moreover, brand equity exhibited a positive and meaningful influence on customer satisfaction. The established model demonstrated that CSR not only directly affects customer satisfaction but also serves as a mediator between CSR and brand equity, ultimately affecting customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Disaster Periods, Brand Equity, Customer Satisfaction, Structural Equation Modeling

Öz

İşletmeler, faaliyet gösterdikleri toplumun birer parçası olarak, sadece tüketicinin ihtiyaçları ekseninde örgütlenmekle kalmayıp, sosyal pazarlama anlayışı doğrultusunda toplumda yaşanan gelişmelere de duyarlı davranmaktadır. Kurumsal sosyal sorumluluk (KSS) faaliyetlerinin kollarından biri olan hayırseverlik boyutu doğrultusunda işletmeler planlı olarak topluma katkı sunmaktadır. Bu planlı çalışmalar, tüketici algılarını etkilemektedir. Planlı KSS faaliyetlerinin yanı sıra, deprem, sel gibi afet dönemlerinde de işletmeler büyük rol üstlenmektedir. Yüzyılın felaketi olarak adlandırılan Kahramanmaraş depreminde 10 ilde büyük yıkımlar sonrasında, devletin yanı sıra, vatandaş ve işletmeler de olanaklarını seferber etmiştir. Bu çalışmada afet döneminde KSS çalışmalarının marka denkliği ve müşteri tatmini üzerine etkileri incelenmiştir. Araştırmada 429 katılımcıdan online olarak toplanan veriler, Yapısal Eşitlik Modeli ile analiz edilmiştir. Analiz ile, KSS'nin marka denkliği üzerinde pozitif anlamlı bir etkisi olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bunun yanı sıra, marka denkliğinin de müşteri tatmini üzerinde pozitif ve anlamlı bir etkisi olduğu doğrulanmıştır. Araştırma, aynı zamanda, KSS değişkeninin müşteri tatmini üzerinde doğrudan anlamlı bir etkisi olduğu sonucuna işaret etmektedir. Son olarak, KSS müşteri tatmini ilişkisinde marka denkliğinin tam aracı etkisi olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kurumsal Sosyal Sorumluluk, Afet Dönemi, Marka Denkliği, Müşteri Tatmini, Yapısal Eşitlik Modeli

Introduction

In the intensely competitive landscape of business, differentiation among enterprises is crucial for them to stand out. Emotional elements such as brand promise provide a path for this differentiation. Having a strong brand shapes the future of businesses in competitive markets. (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000). Brand equity stands as a key element for an enterprise to gain an advantage over its competitors (Kim & Kim, 2004). In today's society, consumers expect more from a brand than just low-priced, high-quality products. For this reason, CSR is accepted as a valuable strategic marketing tool that allows a brand to position itself uniquely among competitors (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020). Additionally, it is recognized that CSR activities have the power to influence consumers' intent to purchase a brand (Wang et al., 2021). As brands that engage in CSR activities are preferred by consumers (Porter & Kramer, 2006,a), it is asserted that CSR affects consumer behavior (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020). In addition, it is well-established that CSR activities have the power to influence consumers' intent to purchase a brand (Wang et al., 2021). It is stated that CSR affects consumer behavior depending on the preference of brands (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020) that carry out CSR activities by consumers (Porter & Kramer, 2006, a).

Activities on CSR contribute to enhancing the reputation of businesses in the eyes of consumers (Brickley, Smith & Zimmerman, 2002). CSR impacts various individual terms such as brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty, collectively shaping brand equity. CSR, having a positive perception among consumers also influences their purchasing behavior, contributing to increased revenue for businesses (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Du et al., 2007).

CSR activities are projects aimed at advancing the comfort of the community in which a business operates, encompassing environmental conservation and support for societal development. These projects are planned, budgeted activities integrated into a business's marketing plans (Wood, 1991). However, because the timing of natural disasters is unpredictable, businesses also demonstrate their commitment to

the community during these times, showing that they are an integral part of the same society, sharing the same hardships. Individual-contributing customers expect businesses to actively participate in addressing diverse needs during times of disaster.

The 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, which were felt across the entire country and caused significant devastation in 10 provinces, deeply affected the nation. While the loss of lives is irreparable, it is essential to meet the basic needs of those who survived and lost their homes. In addition to government agencies, individual citizens and businesses at the corporate level have rallied to address these needs. The events during this period have left a lasting impact on consumers' collective memory. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of CSR activities during disaster periods on brand equity and customer satisfaction. The research focuses on understanding the relationship between CSR, brand equity, and customer satisfaction. Data were collected through online surveys to explore this relationship. Quantitative research methods were employed to analyze the surveys. Hypotheses were tested within the framework of the connection between CSR, brand equity, and customer satisfaction using Structural Equation Modeling.

In the opening part of the article, the concepts of CSR activities, brand equity, customer satisfaction will be explained theoretically. The second section will offer information about the theoretical framework on which the research hypotheses are based. Following the explanation of the research methodology, the findings will be interpreted. Following the conclusion part, the factors limiting the research are mentioned. In line with the results of the research, directions that can be made to the managers related to this field will be included.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The development of the CSR concept dates back to the 1950s. Businesses shape all their activities around their customers. Herein, CSR is explained as the responsibility of enterprises as an institution to their target audiences, which have a wider scope

than their customers (McWilliams et al., 2006). The assumed responsibility as an institution goes beyond economic and legal issues to encompass responsibilities that consider the interests of society as a whole (Özyürek, 2020: 4).

Kotler and Lee underline that CSR is voluntary on the part of businesses, expressing that businesses aim to improve the welfare levels of society. It is emphasized that through CSR activities, businesses should parallel society's interests (Kotler & Lee, 2017: 2-3).

The concept of CSR is closely associated with stakeholder theory (Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2017). Elements in the internal and external environments of businesses are affected by business operations. In this context, businesses focus on activities that benefit stakeholder groups related to the organization. It should be noted that these beneficial social activities are based on voluntariness (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). As a result, stakeholder theory includes plans and applications related to solving societal issues beyond the operations of businesses (O'riordan & Fairbrass, 2008)

It is well-known that businesses are customer-focused to gain a competitive advantage. However, according to stakeholder theory, CSR activities are not solely customer-oriented. Businesses undertake actions that benefit other stakeholders, such as shareholders, investors, employees, and the community as well. Contributing to the improvement of the community and society is considered a responsibility of the business (Chen, 2011; Galbreath, 2010; Moir, 2001). Stakeholders evaluate the outcomes of business activities. Businesses interact with their environments to carry out their activities. The success of businesses is shaped by their relationships with stakeholders. Each of these stakeholders has different interests, so their expectations from the business vary. However, a common expectation for each stakeholder is for the organization to have a high reputation (Fadun, 2014). Therefore, as CSR activities are a common expectation of all stakeholders, all stakeholders acknowledge that CSR activities contribute to societal welfare.

With the widespread use of the internet, communication knows no boundaries, and

information is shared rapidly, making the public aware of every development. Consequently, businesses, knowing that they are constantly in the public eye, are more sensitive to consumer demands (Sun et al., 2010: 3736). It is possible to access CSR practices determined within short-term and long-term strategic marketing plans on business websites (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009; Smith & Alexander, 2013). However, even during times of unpredictability, such as natural disasters, businesses actively participate as part of society.

Brand Equity

Hoeffler and Keller (2002) state that CSR assists in constructing brand equity for an organization by creating brand awareness and enhancing brand image.

Brand equity is defined as "a set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers" (Aaker, 2007). Strong brand equity distinguishes the brand from competitors and signifies a positive relationship between the brand and its customers and other stakeholders.

Consumers shape the brand's place and value in their own minds by comparing a brand with other brands. (Burmman et al., 2009). Brand equity is defined by Burnman et al. (2009) for "current and afterwards [assessment](#)". Aaker (2007) explains "brand equity as what consumers associate with a brand's name, logo, or symbol."

Among numerous proposals for classifying and dimensioning brand equity, the most famous one was presented by Aaker (2007). Aaker (2007) categorizes brand equity into five dimensions from a consumer capital perspective: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other assets related to the company. Typically, in consumer-based brand equity analysis, the first four dimensions are considered, so this study will be organized around these initial four dimensions.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a situation that indicates a customer's likelihood of sticking with a brand even

when changes are made to the brand, especially in terms of price or other aspects of the product (Esmailpour & Barjoei, 2016: 58). When competing products align with customer expectations and remain at lower price levels, yet the customer still doesn't change their brand preference, it's said that the customer is loyal to that brand. This indicates that the brand's equity value is high.

Brand loyalty is an indication that the customer has a sympathy for a brand or its product. This positive outlook suggests that the consumer will engage in repeat purchase behavior (Kim et al., 2003). Because loyal customers represent future sales, brand loyalty emerges as perhaps the most crucial element within the concept of brand equity (Aaker, 2007: 58). Loyal customers ensure the continuity of the business's profitability because they represent a long-term revenue stream.

Brand loyalty is significantly influenced by other dimensions of brand equity. It is influenced by elements such as brand awareness, associations, and perceived quality, which are also part of brand equity. However, it's not always possible to establish a direct relationship with these concepts. For instance, due to being perceived as an unhealthy food option, McDonald's has a low level of perceived quality. Despite this, the number of loyal customers to the McDonald's brand in the fast-food category is quite high. Conversely, Japanese cars can be perceived as having high quality, yet they may not always be preferred (Aaker, 2007).

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality represents an abstract, general feeling about a brand. However, it is often the product's performance that is associated with the brand.

To evaluate perceived quality, it's necessary to identify the factors that influence it. In terms of product quality, elements like "performance, features, conformance to specifications, reliability, durability, serviceability, and the perceived quality of materials impact perceived quality". Each of these elements has sub-dimensions, which can vary depending on the product category. For instance, in evaluating the performance of an

automobile, factors like acceleration, handling, cruising speed, and comfort are considered, but these criteria would not be applicable when assessing the performance of a dishwasher (Aaker, 2009). However, the third factor, conformance to specifications, has a general perspective. Reducing the percentage of defects is relevant for every product. Factors like reliability and durability, similar to conformance to specifications, apply to other products as well. Reliability is defined as the consistency of operability over time, and durability is related to the economic life of the product.

In services, perceived quality is assessed differently than in tangible goods. Tangible elements, reliability, competence, responsiveness, and empathy are the key factors that come to the forefront when evaluating perceived quality in services.

In addition to all these factors, price level also has an influence on perceived quality for each product. Consumers tend to perceive higher quality in higher-priced products. However, when it comes to relying on price as a signal of quality, consumers differ. Those without the knowledge and experience to evaluate product features may use price as a guide (Aaker, 2009).

Brand Awareness

Aaker (2009) defines "brand awareness as a consumer's ability to recognize and recall a specific brand in a particular product category".

This concept is measured by the question of which brand comes to mind first for a particular product category. This helps determine whether consumers are aware of the brand and to what extent it is stored in their memory.

There are three main factors mentioned regarding how brand awareness influences consumer purchasing behavior. First of all, it is important to be the first brand that comes to consumers' minds for a particular product category. Increasing brand visibility enhances the likelihood of the brand being considered for purchase among the brands in that product category (Nedungadi, 1990). Secondly, being aware of any brand among alternative brands, especially when there are no other brand associations, can influence purchase behavior.

Finally, brand awareness influences consumer decision making by influencing the design and power of brand associations. There are four distinct categories that differentiate levels of brand awareness: brand unawareness, brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind brand awareness. These four groups also signify the level of brand equity (Aaker, 2009).

To establish brand awareness, brands should follow steps that help them remain in consumers' minds. Being distinctive, using slogans or jingles, and creating brand symbols are some initial activities. In addition, brand visibility in the media should be achieved through promotional activities like advertising. Brands should engage in sponsorship activities, as many of them aim to create brand awareness. Lastly, to maintain a high level of brand awareness, repetition should be employed.

Brand Associations

"A brand association is any symbol, character, emotion, product feature, lifestyle, consumer segment, or activity associated with the brand in the consumer's mind" (Aaker, 2009). For example, Harley Davidson is associated with a unique, independent, and freedom-loving lifestyle, McDonald's is linked to pre or post-movie activities, and Nike is associated with athletes and consumers engaged in sports. Some brands have associations with all of these factors, while others have fewer connections. As the number of factors associated with the brand increases, the strength of brand association also increases.

Brand associations are guided by brand identity. Therefore, developing and implementing a brand identity is crucial to creating powerful brands. (Aaker, 2009).

Customer Satisfaction

Despite the large number of studies in which customer satisfaction is associated with different concepts, no consensus has been reached in terms of definition (Giese and Cote, 2000). The primary source of inconsistency in these definitions appears to stem from the relationship between satisfaction and either the resultant outcome or the

preceding process. In essence, some studies characterize customer satisfaction as an occurrence during the utilization of a product, whereas others posit it as a phenomenon manifesting itself subsequent to product usage.

Customer satisfaction is intrinsically linked with the fulfillment of customer expectations. Customers engage in the purchase of goods or services with specific expectations in mind. Customers buy a good or service with certain expectations. Customer satisfaction can be expressed as "the general gladness level resulting in the ability of the goods and services to meet the wants, needs and expectations of the customers during or after the use of goods and services" (Hellier et al., 2003).

The perception of a customer that their expectations are met, whether during or following the utilization of a product, serves as a hallmark of their satisfaction with the product. When the desires, needs, and expectations of a customer are unmet, the customer is deemed dissatisfied. Conversely, if a product surpasses the customer's desires, needs, and expectations, it is indicative of a heightened level of satisfaction. It is imperative to recognize that customer satisfaction is intricately linked with the potential for repeat purchasing behavior.

Research Model and Hypotheses

Disaster Period and CSR

Earthquakes, floodings, and similar disasters cause devastating loss in Turkey. The 1999 Gölcük Earthquake and the 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquake were major disasters characterized by substantial casualties and extensive destruction. Apart from the efforts of the government, individuals, private sector enterprises, non-governmental organizations and other countries contributed significantly to search and rescue operations, immediate relief efforts, and the subsequent recovery process. Given that Turkey is situated within an earthquake-prone region, it frequently faces major disasters. The assistance provided by local, multinational, and global businesses operating in Turkey during times of disaster can be considered a form of CSR activity.

In the literature, there are studies related to CSR activities associated with disasters. Following the Izmir earthquake on October 30, 2020, Enser and Demirağ (2021) conducted research comparing the websites of two different businesses through content analysis. Gerdan (2019) focused on disaster education as a CSR activity.

An article analyzing the content shared on the Twitter accounts of universities during the one-month period following the Kahramanmaraş Earthquake has concluded that universities made contributions to society during this period (Özdemir, 2023). In another study, the interaction of content produced by Turkey's top 30 brands on social media was examined using qualitative research methods (Akcan et al., 2023).

There are studies investigating the antecedents and enablers of using CSR as an effective tool in demonstrating a strong attitude against disasters. (Kanji & Agrawal, 2020). Another study analyzed how the public responds to mobile CSR activities during natural disasters (Cheng et al., 2018). In a study that examined the content of CSR reports of Fortune 100 companies through content analysis, it was found that many companies engage in activities during local and international natural disasters for both instrumental and ethical reasons (Johnson et al., 2011).

As briefly mentioned earlier, analyses related to CSR activities during disaster periods, particularly those involving content analysis, are primarily qualitative studies aimed at examining corporate activities. The absence of any study in the literature on how consumers evaluate CSR activities during disasters points to a new research topic. For this reason, in this article, it is aimed to apply a questionnaire to consumers about CSR activities in the disaster period and to analyze the obtained data with quantitative research methods.

In the literature, there are various definitions of CSR. Carroll (1979) categorized CSR into four dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Carroll suggested "that economic responsibility should be the highest priority for businesses, with legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities following. Economic responsibilities pertain to the company's obligation to generate profits. Legal responsibilities involve conducting economic

responsibilities within a fair legal framework." Philanthropic responsibilities concern activities undertaken by a business to enhance societal well-being by committing itself to a specific cause (Dawood, 2019: 36). This research will focus on the philanthropic dimension of CSR.

CSR and Brand Equity

In today's competitive business environment, CSR is among the most imperative business strategies. (Alrubaiee et al., 2017; Flammer & Luo, 2017; Baumgartner, 2014).

For both local and international brands within their respective countries and on a regional and global scale, CSR activities have become one of the most powerful promotional activities that set businesses apart from their competitors (Du et al., 2007; Maignan et al., 2005). Globally recognized leading brands use CSR activities to demonstrate their sensitivity to societal issues.

Esmailpour and Barjeou (2016), in their study to measure the effect of CSR and brand image on brand equity, found that CSR has a significant positive contribution to brand image and brand equity.

In their study, Kang and Nam-Kung tried to determine the effects of customers' perceptions of the 4 dimensions of CSR activities on brand equity in the restaurant industry, through the example of Starbucks in Korea. They found that the ethical, legal, and economic aspects of CSR have a significant influence on consumers' perceptions of brand equity, but the philanthropic dimension of CSR does not have a significant impact on brand equity perceptions.

Abid et al. (2020) suggest that brands can promote consumer commitment by conveying values that they can identify through their environmental and philanthropic activities. The study emphasizes the significant contribution of the philanthropic dimension of CSR to brand equity.

Many articles have been found that examine the relationship between CSR and brand equity and conclude that there is a significant relationship between them (Lin & Chung, 2019; Lai v.d., 2010; Torres, v.d. 2012, Guzmán & Davis, 2017, Cowan & Guzman 2020, Kim & Manoli, 2020, Zhao v.d.

(2021). Businesses that meet consumer expectations tend to have higher brand equity (Liu & Lu, 2019). Studies analyzing the effects of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic dimensions of CSR on brand equity have also been identified. (Araújo et al., 2023; Lai et al., 2010). However, two different studies have been encountered above, which interpret the connection between the philanthropic dimension of CSR and brand equity in opposite ways. In the study of Kang and Nam-Kung (2018), it was concluded that the philanthropy dimension of CSR did not have a significant effect on perceptions of brand equity, while Abid et al. (2020) found the opposite.

In light of these findings, this article's purpose is to investigate the effect of the philanthropic dimension of CSR on brand equity during a disaster period:

H₁: During a disaster period, the philanthropic dimension of CSR significantly and positively contributes to brand equity.

CSR and Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a concept of interest to researchers as it is the key to profitability. Since customer satisfaction is associated with long-term profitability, most research on customer satisfaction examines the link between customer satisfaction and customer retention (Reicheld & Sasser, 1990; Hennig-Turau & Klee, 1997; Bloemer & Kasper, 1995; Gustafsson, Johnson & Roos, 2005; Guo et al., 2009). Accordingly, customer satisfaction and purchasing behavior linkage is investigated by authors.

There are studies indicating that a satisfied customer repeats their purchasing behavior (Selnes, 1998; Bolton, 1998; Bloemer & Ruyter, 1998). Repeated purchasing behavior entails a process leading to customer loyalty. In other words, the concept of customer retention is directly related to brand loyalty. Loyal customers continue their relationships with the brand they are loyal to without considering other brands.

Businesses allocate marketing expenditures for their customers. Marketing expenses aimed at acquiring new customers are often higher than those aimed at retaining existing customers. Therefore, loyal customers are valuable assets for

businesses as they facilitate the achievement of profitability goals. Customer loyalty, being gained through customer satisfaction, is another important area of research for businesses (Bloemer & Kasper, 1994; Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000; Awan & Rehman, 2014; Nam et al., 2011).

Apart from customer satisfaction, there are many factors that influence brand loyalty. Businesses, particularly, focus on their customers' interests among stakeholders (Maignan, Ferrell & Ferrell, 2005). Customers no longer evaluate only the products and services they purchase; they also shape their decisions based on the value businesses provide to society. Therefore, when businesses engage in CSR activities, customers tend to show loyalty to these businesses (He et al., 2011; He & Lai, 2014).

He et al. (2011) and Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) indicate in their articles that CSR activities have an impact on customer satisfaction. In their study, Islam et al. (2020) examined the effects of CSR on brand loyalty and intermediary factors such as corporate reputation, customer satisfaction, and customer trust, concluding that CSR has significant and positive effects on all these factors.

When customers believe that the businesses from which they purchase products are engaged in initiatives that provide societal benefits using a portion of the profit they derive from customers, it leads to the perception that customers also contribute indirectly to these initiatives. In short, customers, with the awareness of their indirect contributions to CSR initiatives by businesses, find meaning in them and experience a sense of satisfaction. The charitable dimension of CSR has been proven to have an impact on consumer demand as customer satisfaction increases (Galbreath, 2010; Hassan et al., 2013). The positive effects of CSR, especially charitable initiatives, are listed as opening the door to customer satisfaction, positive brand purchase intention, and a positive impact on the organization's brand image (Sen et al., 2006). Given that a positive reputation is seen as a good sign in the eyes of consumers, it can be argued that CSR affects customer satisfaction (Irshad et al., 2017: 65).

Based on the preceding theoretical discussions, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H₂: During a disaster period, the charitable dimension of CSR significantly and positively contributes to customer satisfaction.

The Mediating Effect of Brand Equity on CSR and Customer Satisfaction

For businesses to develop a successful CSR strategy that provides a competitive advantage, it depends on their attention to intermediary variables (Carroll & Sabana, 2010: 94). Due to the possibility that the dimensions of CSR may not directly impact customer satisfaction because of certain indirect factors, businesses should also incorporate the factors influencing customer satisfaction into this equation (Mohammed & Rashid, 2018). In summary, there may be some intermediary factors in the impact of CSR dimensions on customer satisfaction. Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) stated in their study that the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction is not direct.

H₃: Brand equity mediates the relationship between CSR's philanthropic dimension and customer satisfaction.

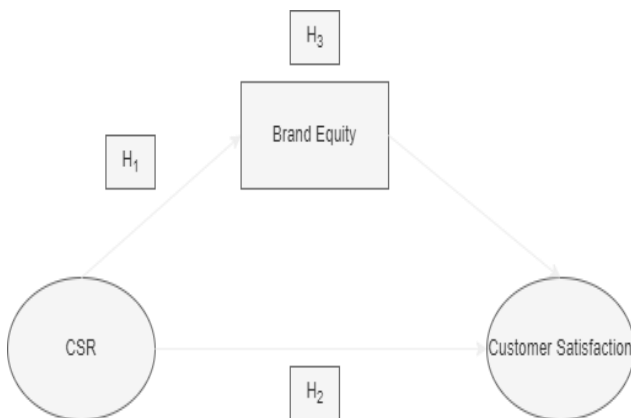


Figure 1: Research model

Research Methodology

The hypotheses for this research have been carefully formulated after a thorough review of the literature. Similar hypotheses have been identified in articles conducting research with analogous hypotheses. This study aims to validate the accuracy of hypotheses previously tested in the

literature regarding a specific process, namely the disaster period (Newman et al., 1998).

In particular, the lack of a study analyzing the measurement of CSR activities during disaster periods with quantitative techniques brings the use of quantitative techniques to the forefront in this study. At the same time, examining the effects of CSR activities on brand equity and customer satisfaction and also examining the mediating role of brand equity between CSR activities and customer satisfaction during the disaster period necessitated the research to be conducted on consumers. Another reason for preferring quantitative research methods is that quantitative research methods allow inferences to be made over a large number of samples

To test the validity of these assumptions, a questionnaire method was employed. The questionnaire consists of four sections. In the first section, consumers are informed about CSR and sample projects are mentioned. In this section, questions about demographic information are included. Minimum wage as the minimum amount for income distribution, since working people are taken into account. The income level distinctions and age assessment were based on the information obtained from TUIK. Other demographic variables such as gender, marital status, age, income status, education level and occupation were not restricted. In the second section, a multiple-choice questionnaire was designed to measure consumers' CSR perceptions. In the third section, questions on the impact of brand equity elements on CSR were prepared. The consumer-based brand equity model was emphasized and the questionnaire form was organized by taking Aaker's (2007, 2009) brand equity elements into consideration in CSR activities. In the fourth part, there are questions to measure the effects of customer satisfaction on CSR.

The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The lack of a specific scale in the literature on the subject of the study caused the survey preparation process to be difficult and prolonged. In creating the scale used in the study, existing studies in the literature were utilized (Araújo et al. 2023; Lai et al., 2010; Guzman &

Davis, 2017). For the questions related to brand awareness, Lai et al.'s (2010) study was utilized, and for the other questions, the scales in Araújo et al.'s (2023) study were utilized. The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot test with a sample of 100 individuals (KMO=0.913, $p<0.01$). The Cronbach's Alpha value for the pre-test was found to be 0.94. As a result, only minor adjustments were made, primarily in terms of wording, and no questions were removed.

To reach the intended number of participants more easily, the surveys were distributed online from August 20, 2023, to August 23, 2023. A total of 429 individuals participated in the survey. Due to cost and time constraints, it is not possible to reach the entire universe. However, since the Kahramanmaraş earthquake on February 6 is still fresh in the memories of people from all walks of life and regions in Turkey, simple random sampling method was deemed appropriate for the sampling. In order to reach the targeted number of people more easily, the surveys were distributed online between August 20, 2023 and August 23, 2023, and 429 people participated in the survey.

Data collected for the study were analyzed using the Jamovi 2.3.19 statistical software package. Jamovi is an analysis program built on the R statistical programming language.

The analysis of the proposed theoretical model was carried out with the Structural Equation Model (SEM).

Findings

Demographic Information

The sample of the study consists of individuals aged 18 and above. Data for the research were collected through surveys, and the sample comprises 439 participants. Among the research participants, 290 (66.1%) are female, and 149 (33.9%) are male. The majority of participants (33%) fall within the 36-45 age range. A significant proportion of participants (83.6%) have completed at least one associate degree program. The income distribution table for the participants is as follows.

Table 1. Income distribution

Income	N	% Total	% Cumulative
35.000 TL +	181	41.2	41.2
25.000 TL-	73	16.6	57.8
35.000 TL			
18.000 TL-	67	15.3	73.4
25.000 TL			
11.402 TL-	63	14.4	87.4
18.000 TL			
0-11.402 TL	55	12.5	100

Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Test Results for Brand Equity Scale

KMO value and Bartlett's Sphericity Test were examined for the Brand Value Scale (KMO=0.929, $p<0.01$). These values indicate the suitability of the data for factor analysis.

Table 6. Factor loadings

Latent	Factor				Uniqueness
	1	2	3	4	
Brand					
Awaraness1				0.706	0.538
Brand				0.775	0.427
Awaraness2				0.474	0.617
Brand				0.659	0.354
Awaraness4				0.558	0.392
Brand	0.761				0.506
Loyalty1					
Brand	0.842				0.229
Loyalty2					
Brand	0.814				0.231
Loyalty3					
Brand			0.769		0.244
Association2					
Brand			0.794		0.184
Association3					
Brand			0.737		0.247
Association4					
Brand			0.374		0.914
Association5					
Brand	0.485				0.364
Association1					
Perceived		0.792			0.193
Quality1					
Perceived		0.846			0.307
Quality2					
Perceived		0.818			0.239
Quality3					

Note: "Maximum likelihood" extraction method and "oblimin" rotation method were used.

Table 2 shows the breakdown of the factors and which statements are grouped under which factor.

are loaded under their own sub-scale except "Brand Association 1".

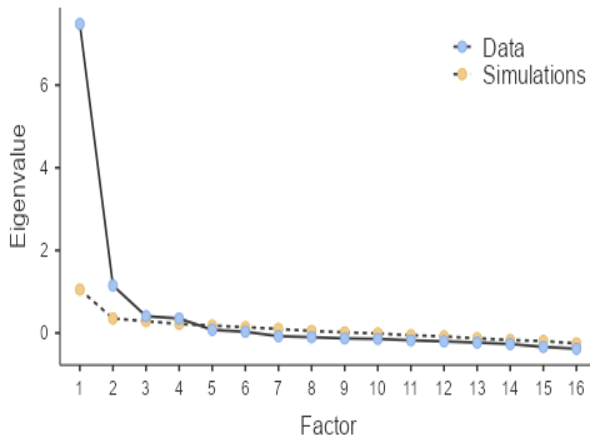


Figure 2. Scree pilot

Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the Proposed Model

Table 3. Model test

Label	X ²	df	p
User Model	586	214	< .001
Baseline Model	8496	253	< .001

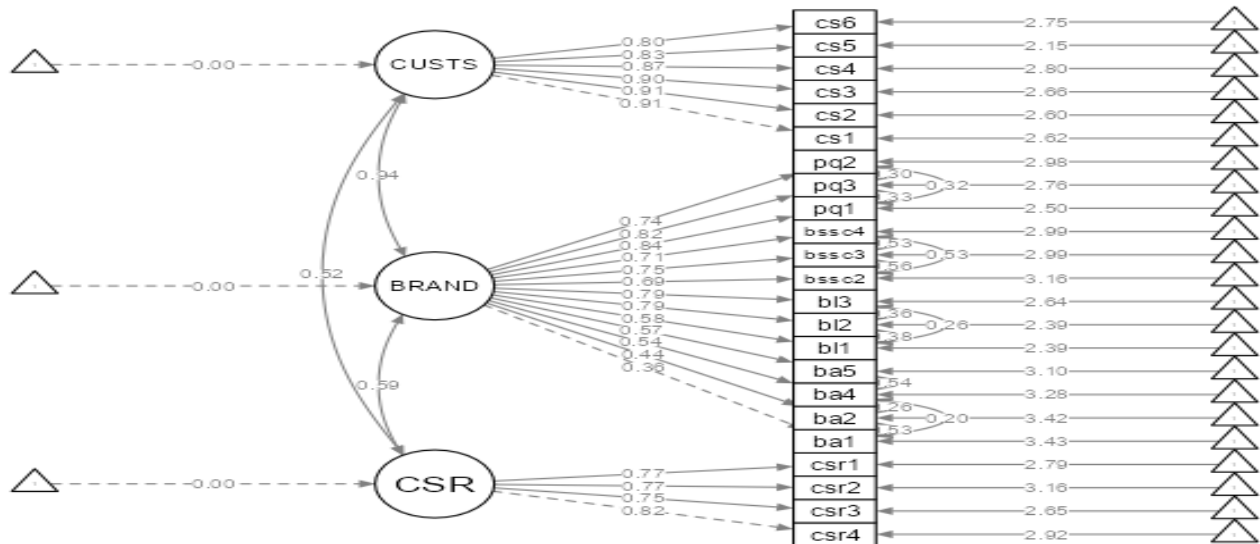


Figure 3. Confirmatory factor analysis

The statements "Brand Association 1", "Brand Association 5" and "Brand Awareness 3" were not included in the analysis due to low factor scores (Hair et al., 2018).

Figure 2 shows the graphical representation of the factor loadings of the statements.

The Cronbach's Alpha value for the Brand Value Scale was found to be 0.921, which is considered highly reliable according to Hair et al. (2018). A scale consisting of four factors was used for the Brand Value Scale; therefore, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine whether these factors are correctly loaded. When the factor loadings are examined, it is seen that all of them

Figure 3 presents the path diagram for the confirmatory factor analysis of the proposed structural equation model.

Table 3 shows that the established models are statistically significant.

Table 4. Index of fit

SRMR	RMSEA	95% Confidence Intervals		RMSEA p
		Lower	Upper	
0.057	0.063	0.057	0.069	< .001

Table 5. User model vs baseline model

Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.955
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.947
Bentler-Bonett Non-normed Fit Index (NNFI)	0.947
Relative Noncentrality Index (RNI)	0.955
Bentler-Bonett Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.931
Bollen's Relative Fit Index (RFI)	0.918
Bollen's Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.955
Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	0.787

In Tables 4 and 5 the goodness-of-fit indices for the model are displayed. Upon examination of these values, it is evident that the model is statistically significant.

Table 6. Measurement model

95% Confidence Intervals						
Latent	Observed	Estimate	SE	β	z	p
CSR	csr4	1.000	0.000	0.81		
			0	9		
	csr3	0.993	0.060	0.75	16.4	<.00
			2	4	8	1
	csr2	0.887	0.052	0.77	17.0	<.00
		2	4	0	1	
	csr1	0.985	0.058	0.76	16.8	<.00
		5	7	4	1	
BRAND E	ba1	1.000	0.000	0.35		
			0	6		
	ba2	1.258	0.144	0.44	7.73	<.00
			1	0		1
	ba4	1.493	0.204	0.53	7.29	<.00
			7	9		1
	ba5	1.623	0.240	0.56	7.75	<.00
			5	6		1
	bl1	1.832	0.270	0.57	7.79	<.00
			0	8		1
	bl2	2.605	0.352	0.79	7.40	<.00
			1	2		1
	bl3	2.621	0.354	0.79	7.40	<.00
		2	3		1	
bassoc2	1.966	0.274	0.69	7.17	<.00	
		3	2		1	
bassoc3	2.176	0.297	0.74	7.30	<.00	
		9	6		1	
bassoc4	2.088	0.289	0.71	7.22	<.00	
		4	1		1	
pq1	2.678	0.357	0.84	7.49	<.00	
		7	0		1	
pq3	2.521	0.338	0.81	7.44	<.00	
		8	5		1	
pq2	2.109	0.289	0.73	7.28	<.00	
		7	9		1	
CUSTSA T	cs1	1.000	0.000	0.91		
			0	4		
	cs2	0.985	0.030	0.90	31.8	<.00
		9	9	2	1	
cs3	0.917	0.029	0.90	31.2	<.00	
		3	4	6	1	

cs4	0.886	0.031	0.87	28.4	<.00
		1	2	6	1
cs5	0.926	0.036	0.82	25.2	<.00
		6	9	9	1
cs6	0.873	0.037	0.79	23.2	<.00
		6	6	2	1

Table 7. Excellent and acceptable value ranges for fit criteria

Model Criteria	Fit	Excellent Fit	Acceptable Fit
RMSEA		$0 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.05$	$0.05 < RMSEA \leq 0.10$
NFI		$0.95 \leq NFI \leq 1$	$0.90 < NFI < 0.95$
CFI		$0.97 \leq CFI \leq 1$	$0.95 \leq CFI < 0.97$
SRMR		$0 \leq SRMR < 0.05$	$0.05 \leq SRMR < 0.10$
GFI		$0.95 \leq GFI \leq 1$	$0.90 \leq GFI < 0.95$
AGFI		$0.90 \leq AGFI \leq 1$	$0.85 \leq AGFI < 0.90$

The measurement values provided in Table 6 indicate that the statements included in the model are meaningfully related to the model. Table 7 shows the acceptable values and excellent values required for the model to be valid. When the values were examined, it was seen that the model met the validity values.

Structural Equation Modeling for the Proposed Model

Although the goodness-of-fit indices for the model initially did not yield satisfactory results, necessary adjustments were made following the modification indices suggested by the program, resulting in the desired model fit. When examining the reliability indices of the model, it is observed that the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) value for brand equity is 0.47. However, Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest that in cases where AVE is less than 0.50, it may be acceptable if Composite Reliability is higher than 0.60. In this study, the Composite Reliability for Brand Equity is 0.91, indicating a sufficient level of reliability.

Table 8. Parameters estimates

95% Confidence Intervals						
Dep	Pred	Estimate	SE	β	z	p
CUST	BRAND E	28757	0.388	0.975	7.4	<.00
			2	1	1	1
CUST	CSR	-0.0628	0.042	-	-	0.14
			7	0.052	1.4	1
				7	7	
BRAND E	CSR	0.2373	0.037	0.587	6.3	<.00
			1	9	9	1

In the absence of a mediating effect, when a regression equation is established, it is observed

organizations and businesses played an active role in providing assistance. Within the framework of

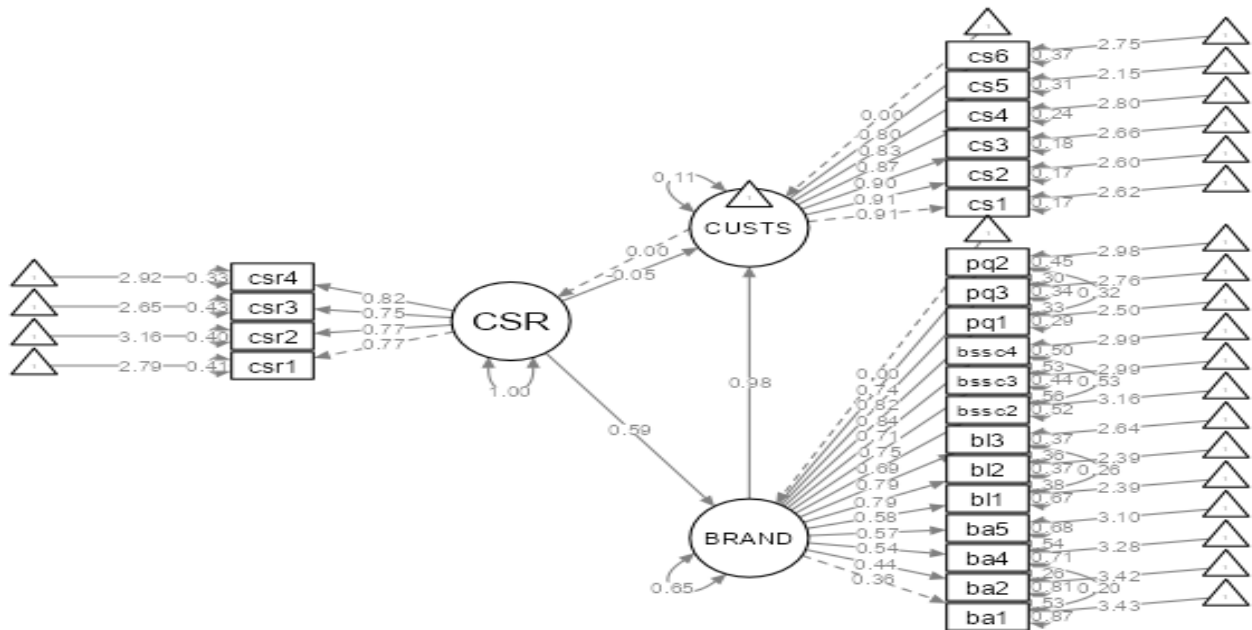


Figure 4. Structural equation model between corporate social responsibility, brand equity and customer satisfaction

that the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction is significant ($\beta=0.52$, $p<0.001$). With the inclusion of the mediating effect, the direct relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction becomes non-significant, but a relationship is observed through the mediator. This situation is interpreted as a full mediation relationship (Gunzler et al., 2013). Table 8 shows the relationships between the variables in the model in the final model. In this table, it is seen that the direct relationship between customer satisfaction and corporate social responsibility is statistically insignificant.

Therefore, CSR has a significant positive effect on brand equity. CSR also has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction. Depending on the model established, when all three variables are simultaneously tested in the model, it is seen that the CSR variable does not have a direct significant effect on customer satisfaction, but it has an indirect positive effect on customer satisfaction through brand equity.

Conclusion

Following the images from the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquake affecting 10 provinces. Not only citizens but also civil society

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), businesses shared their contributions to the earthquake-affected region with the public.

This article aims to investigate whether CSR activities during a disaster period have an impact on brand equity and customer satisfaction. Existing literature predominantly focuses on analyzing business activities during disaster periods through content analysis of their websites and social media platforms (Enser & Demirağ, 2021; Özdemir, 2023; Akcan et al., 2023). However, a gap in the literature is identified regarding how consumers perceive these CSR activities. To address this gap, it is deemed appropriate to assess the ripple effect of these activities on consumers, rather than solely examining business actions. Given that one of the key concepts influencing consumers' perceptions is the concept of a brand, this study specifically targets the impact of CSR on brand equity during disaster periods. Therefore, this article contributes to the literature as the first study to examine how consumers perceive CSR during disaster periods and its implications for businesses.

There are studies in the literature that apply structural equation modeling, one of the quantitative analysis methods, to investigate the relationship between CSR and brand equity

(Araújo et al. 2023; Guzman & Davis, 2017,). However, in the literature, there is a lack of research specifically linking CSR activities during disaster periods to the philanthropic dimension with brand equity and customer satisfaction, and analyzing this relationship using structural equation modeling. The absence of such research in the literature highlights another contribution of this study.

In the first hypothesis of the research, it was tested whether the philanthropic dimension of CSR during a disaster period has a significant and positive contribution to brand equity. The results of the research indicate that the philanthropic dimension of CSR during a disaster period significantly and positively contributes to brand equity. This finding is consistent with other studies in the literature related to CSR and brand equity (Kang & Namkung, 2018; Guzman & Davis, 2017; Araújo, 2023). Based on the research findings, it has been demonstrated that the philanthropic dimension of CSR during a disaster period positively influences consumers' brand perception. This evidence strongly supports the view that CSR is strategically important for businesses (Gazzola & Colombo, 2014; Siltaloppi et al., 2021). Moreover, it can be argued that CSR provides a competitive advantage for businesses over others (Cegliński & Wiśniewska, 2016; Porter and Kramer, 2006; Saeidi et al., 2015). Therefore, during disaster periods, businesses should emphasize CSR activities to enhance their intangible asset, brand value, in their balance sheets.

The second hypothesis of the research aims to test whether the philanthropic dimension of CSR during a disaster period has a significant and positive contribution to customer satisfaction. This finding is consistent with other studies in the literature related to the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction (Islam et al., 2020; Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). Customer satisfaction is crucial because it represents a global measure of how a business's product and service are evaluated concerning the customer's past, present, and future experiences. Since customer satisfaction is linked to subsequent actions such as continued purchasing and brand loyalty (Al-Msallam, 2015; Cuong, 2020), the research's demonstration of the impact of the philanthropic dimension of CSR on

customer satisfaction underscores the importance of businesses being sensitive to their CSR activities.

The third hypothesis of the research aimed to test whether brand equity mediates the relationship between the philanthropic dimension of CSR and customer satisfaction. The research results indicate that brand equity mediates the relationship between the philanthropic dimension of CSR and customer satisfaction. Therefore, the questioning of brand equity's mediating role in this relationship for the first time and the acceptance of brand equity's mediating role within this relationship are another contribution of the article to the literature.

Note to Managers

This study has yielded valuable insights for marketing managers and other professionals in the marketing department. Based on the finding that the philanthropic dimension of CSR during a disaster period has a positive and significant impact on brand equity, it is recommended that managers actively engage in CSR activities during disaster periods. The research results demonstrate the significant importance of the philanthropic dimension of CSR. To enhance consumers' perceptions of the philanthropic dimension of CSR, businesses should communicate their contributions during disaster periods very effectively. Managers can particularly utilize social media channels to publicize these activities, especially during times of disasters.

The findings demonstrate that CSR activities during disaster periods positively impact brand equity and customer satisfaction. During disaster periods, businesses have the opportunity to maximize their brand value through CSR activities. In an era where consumers have better access to information, follow real-time developments, and particularly during times of disasters when the entire community tracks the needs in the earthquake-stricken area through social media, this research findings' suggest that consumers are grateful to businesses engaging in CSR activities and show their appreciation by rewarding them. Marketing managers and those responsible for CSR should consider CSR activities during disaster periods as a strategically important

area for developing ongoing relationships with customers.

Certainly, charitable activities are evaluated based on individuals' conscience. However, businesses are assessed through their financial statements. The concept of brand equity, which is the focus of our research, represents a value in the intangible assets section of a company's balance sheet. When businesses formulate their short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans, they aim to increase the value of this item. Budgets are planned systematically for this purpose. Therefore, the budget allocated by businesses for philanthropy within the scope of CSR is predetermined for the year. In the event of any disaster, businesses make decisions regarding philanthropic spending either within the budget or by altering the proportions in the budget, especially in the case of major disasters like what our country refers to as the "disaster of the century."

At this point, the assumption that the contributions stemming from the culture in Turkey should remain hidden should be questioned from the perspective of business managers. In a competitive environment, businesses engaged in the race to grab a share of the pie with other competitors should allocate time and effort to effectively communicate their philanthropic efforts, even if it goes against Turkey's culture. In addition to current messages, given that customers' memories are often filled with information and they may face attention issues due to technological habits, businesses should permanently showcase these communications under a dedicated section on their websites. This communication will not only contribute positively to the brand equity in terms of customers' perceptions of the business but also encourage other businesses to engage in philanthropy.

Constraints and Recommendations

The first limitation of the research is that it focuses only on the philanthropic dimension of CSR among the four dimensions during a disaster period and its association with brand equity and customer satisfaction. As explained in the theoretical framework on which the hypotheses

are based, there are two different studies indicating varying results for the impact of the philanthropic dimension of CSR on brand equity and customer satisfaction. Therefore, in this study, only the effect of the philanthropic dimension of CSR was measured. Additionally, since the assistance provided during a disaster period falls under the umbrella of philanthropy, only the philanthropic dimension of CSR was analyzed. In the future, research can be conducted that includes other dimensions of CSR specifically in the context of disaster periods.

Despite changing media habits driven by technology, CSR remains a popular research topic among academics. The fact that Turkey is located in a seismic zone, coupled with inadequate infrastructure planning that ignores this reality, increasing incidents of disasters such as fires and floods due to climate change, and insufficient precautionary measures, emphasize the significance of disaster-related research in Turkey. Preventing disasters should naturally be a top priority for everyone. However, acknowledging this fact, research on CSR activities during disaster periods should be diversified. This study's contribution to the field and marketing managers indicate the need for continued research on CSR activities during disaster periods and the existence of gaps in the current literature. In the national literature, qualitative research predominates in studies related to CSR during disaster periods. Another noteworthy point is that content analyses conducted by examining websites and social media accounts are common in national research. Studies questioning the relationship between disaster-period CSR and various topics such as consumer behavior, brand loyalty, brand image, and the continuity of purchases will enrich the literature. Another actor in disaster-period CSR studies in the table is businesses. Research not yet encountered in national and international literature on the impact of disaster-period CSR on marketing managers can be conducted in the future to fill this gap. Therefore, research on disaster-period CSR activities can be diversified in terms of consumers and businesses.

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