

# **A Meta-Analysis of the Relationship Between Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Response in the Chinese Context**

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*Consumers' attitudes toward corporate social responsibility (CSR) and their response levels can significantly affect a firm's behaviors. Based on 61 research papers addressing CSR responses to consumers in China, this study conducted a meta-analysis on three variables: CSR type, CSR characteristics, and CSR publicity behavior, which impact the CSR relationship. The following conclusions are drawn: Corporate social responsibility (encompassing private and public moral dimensions) elicits a positive consumer response, with private moral behavior having a greater positive effect compared to public moral behavior. The four dimensions of CSR characteristics (CSR commitment, CSR level, CSR correlation, and CSR timing) all lead to positive consumer responses. Positive consumer responses also arise from CSR publicity behavior, including publicity initiative and publicity intensity. Additionally, product type, sample time, and sample source have significant moderating effects on these relationships.*

*Keywords: CSR type, CSR characteristic, CSR publicity behavior, consumer response, meta-analysis*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and consumer responsiveness have always been significant concerns for companies (Jin, 2006; Li, 2020). Prior studies have shown that enhancing consumers' perceptions of CSR can effectively boost a company's competitiveness and financial performance (e.g., Smith, 2019). This is because consumers generally hold the belief that "good is rewarded with good and evil is punished". After a company fulfills its social responsibilities, consumers tend to exhibit heightened awareness and trust in its CSR initiatives. This translates into positive evaluations, associations, and increased purchase intentions (Tian & Wang, 2011).

However, real-life examples often demonstrate the occurrence of the phenomenon known as 'good causes and bad effects.' This is exemplified by the experience of two Chinese companies, Hongxing Erke and Li Ning, which donated to the Henan flood relief in 2021 but subsequently received unfavorable

consumer attitudes. This phenomenon underscores the growing concerns among Chinese consumers about the inconsistency between companies' actual actions and their promotional efforts in undertaking social responsibility, as noted by Wagner (2009). Despite engaging in good deeds, companies can still encounter negative evaluations from consumers. As social issues become increasingly prominent in economic development, consumers' expectations for companies to assume greater social responsibility have risen. Consequently, a segment of consumers now considers CSR factors in their purchasing decisions. This leads to the question of whether companies can elicit positive consumer responses solely through engagement in CSR activities.

This paper examines the literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) over the past two decades, with a specific focus on the relationship between CSR and consumer response within the Chinese context. We have observed that scholars have approached the study of this relationship from various perspectives, resulting in a range of diverse conclusions. However, only a few studies have conducted quantitative integrative analyses on this topic. Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors influencing the relationship between CSR and consumers by employing a meta-analysis approach. The objective is to derive more generalized and accurate conclusions.

Meta-analysis is a quantitative research method that synthesizes the results of different studies addressing the same problem (Bullock, 1986). It can effectively reduce or even eliminate measurement and sampling errors in the results of a single study (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). Although Santini and Laderia (2020) conducted a meta-analysis on CSR, their analysis, based on a corporate performance perspective, requires further refinement to guide corporate practice effectively. Our study, in contrast, focuses on the meta-analysis of CSR's impact on consumer response. We explore the influence of CSR behavior on consumer response and incorporate moderating variables into this relationship. Our goal is to provide scientific suggestions on how to enhance consumer response through the effective implementation of CSR.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

### Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to a firm's pro-social behavior (Murray et al., 1997) or social performance (Turban et al., 1997). In other words, a firm's responsibility extends beyond satisfying consumer needs to include an ethical component. Scholars, generally aligning with Ferrell (2006), agree that CSR entails business operators making policies and decisions with the obligation to positively influence society as much as possible while minimizing negative impacts. Through literature search and analysis, we have identified three main perspectives on these variables: CSR type, CSR characteristics, and CSR advocacy behavior. Our paper aims to explore the relationship between CSR and consumer response from these three perspectives.

Regarding the classification of CSR, four main types of studies can be identified. (1) Concentric Circle Method: This approach categorizes CSR into three concentric circles representing the economic function, the responsibility to assist in performing economic functions, and the responsibility to enhance the social environment. (2) Four-Dimensional Model Method: Based on a pyramid structure, CSR is divided into four dimensions, from bottom to top: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities (Carroll et al., 1979). (3) Stakeholder Division Method (Davis et al., 1975): Here, CSR is segmented into seven dimensions according to various groups that impact corporate goals. These include responsibilities to the government, shareholders and creditors, partners, employees, consumers, the community, and the natural environment. (4) Internal and External Division Method (Gallo et al., 1980) divides CSR into internal responsibilities (concern for employee development, sustainable corporate development, concern for consumer welfare) and external responsibilities (such as charitable, public welfare, and environmental responsibilities). Additionally, Chinese scholars have innovatively applied the differential pattern theory to organizational studies, addressing the phenomenon of "scaling the degree of the relationship between the object imposed by morality and oneself." Based on which CSR is divided into two types: public and private morality (Li et al., 2020). Private moral behaviors include economic, consumer, employee, and legal responsibility, while

public moral behaviors encompass environmental responsibility, charity responsibility, and public welfare responsibility.

When it comes to the characteristics of CSR, scholars believe that studying CSR characteristics is essential due to the intrinsic nature of CSR behavior (Basu et al., 2009). CSR behavioral characteristics refer to “the inherent qualities of CSR that emerge from a series of processes in which corporate managers think about and discuss their relationships with stakeholders, their role in social good, allocate resources and forces, and strive to fulfill their socially responsible roles and interconnections”. Building upon this, Gao (2009) categorizes CSR characteristics into four aspects: the type of problem or causes of social responsibility, the form of social responsibility, the timing of social responsibility, and the commitment to social responsibility. In the Chinese context, Liu et al. (2011) explored CSR characteristics in the automobile industry, focusing on aspects such as CSR commitment, CSR level, CSR relevance, and CSR timing.

Regarding CSR communication behaviors, Fassin et al. (2011) suggest that effective CSR should encompass both saying and doing. The lack of corresponding effect of CSR is often attributed to the disparity between consumers’ perceptions of what companies “say” and “do”. In other words, a company’s communication strategy must effectively and timely communicate its actions to elicit a response from consumers (Fassin et al., 2009). The communication behavior of a company can be analyzed based on two dimensions: intensity and initiative (Mou, 2012).

In summary, our paper will utilize meta-analysis methods to explore CSR from three perspectives: CSR types (public moral/private moral), CSR characteristics (including CSR commitment, CSR level, CSR relevance, and CSR timing), and CSR communication behavior (publicity intensity/publicity initiative).

## **Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Response**

### *Types of Corporate Social Responsibility*

Research on the impact of CSR on consumer response is well-established. Numerous scholars have confirmed that the implementation of CSR by companies fosters positive consumer responses. As consumer attitudes have evolved, customers increasingly view CSR as a crucial factor in their purchasing decisions and behaviors, thereby promoting the concept of CSR (Dawkins et al., 2003). Consequently, it is essential for companies to comprehend the psychological and response mechanisms that drive consumer reactions to CSR. CSR exhibits both aesthetic and spillover effects, enabling consumers to develop trust in it, thereby directly or indirectly influencing their responses (Barone et al., 2000; Gourville et al., 2004; Dawar et al., 2004). Additionally, different types of CSR can elicit varying consumer responses due to the diverse nature of CSR initiatives and the limited resources available to companies (Tao et al., 2015).

According to differential pattern theory, a company’s public moral behavior involves utilizing corporate resources to benefit society, thereby reflecting its altruistic spirit. Such behavior is expected to lead consumers to perceive the company as socially responsible. However, recent studies have indicated that consumers often view corporate charitable donations, contributions to society, and support for non-profit organizations with skepticism, perceiving them as opportunistic actions by companies. Consequently, entrepreneurial moral behavior, which includes public actions, does not necessarily succeed in establishing consumer trust in the company’s products or significantly enhancing consumers’ purchase intentions (Grandey et al., 2005). On the other hand, entrepreneurs’ private moral behavior, which refers to the allocation of various resources to improve production capacity and employee welfare, can reduce consumer uncertainty regarding the firm’s product performance. Consumers tend to exhibit a greater willingness to purchase products and are willing to pay a premium for firms that demonstrate high levels of social responsibility, actively support public welfare, and environmental protection, and treat their employees well (Bronn & Vrioni, 2001). This shift in consumer behavior represents a transition from internal to external responses.

Based on the above argument, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H1:** *Fulfilling private and public moral behavior by firms promotes positive consumer response, with private moral behavior exerting a more significant and positive influence on consumer response compared to public moral behavior.*

#### *CSR Characteristics*

**CSR Commitment.** CSR commitment refers to a company's establishment of a mission or corporate vision regarding the fulfillment of social responsibility, along with the implementation of internal rules and regulations to ensure consistent and long-term investment of company resources in social responsibility endeavors (Liu, 2015). A strong CSR commitment conveys positive CSR messages to consumers, indicating a clear corporate vision and well-developed relevant internal regulations related to CSR. When a company adopts CSR as its mission and vision and demonstrates a consistent commitment to CSR, consumers perceive the authenticity of its social responsibility efforts, leading to positive responses toward the company (Marin et al., 2009).

Based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2:** *CSR commitment positively influences consumer response.*

**CSR Level.** The CSR level represents the extent of a company's commitment to social responsibility and is primarily assessed through comparisons with the company's historical commitment to other companies within the same industry, and the company's financial performance when undertaking social responsibility initiatives (Liu, 2015). According to the reciprocity principle, consumers perceive a higher level of CSR input as an indication of increased attention to social interests, environmental protection, energy conservation, public welfare, and other CSR aspects. Consequently, the significance of CSR is heightened in consumers' eyes. These behaviors collectively influence consumers' perceptions of product quality and purchase intentions.

Based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H3:** *CSR level positively affects consumer response.*

**CSR Relevance.** CSR relevance refers to the extent to which a company's actions in fulfilling its social responsibility are aligned with its business operations, capabilities, and events (Liu, 2015; Li, 2010; Hou, 2021). When a company's social responsibility efforts are less relevant to its core operations, consumers often attribute these behaviors to either values-driven or strategy-driven motives. In such cases, the company aims to maximize profits for shareholders while considering stakeholder interests and building consumer trust. Conversely, for companies with limited capabilities, consumers tend to view their implementation of CSR as driven by hype, due to the constraints imposed by their capacities. In order to fulfill CSR, these companies may have to increase costs, potentially compromising product quality (Brown, 2010). Consequently, consumers may negatively evaluate the company, impacting their willingness to make purchases.

Furthermore, the stronger the alignment between a company's behavior and the specific events associated with CSR, the more consumers perceive the company's actions as heartfelt charity. As a result, consumers generate positive responses without the need for further processing (Qian et al., 2019).

In summary, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H4:** *CSR relevance positively influences consumer response.*

**H4a:** *The association between a firm's behavior and capabilities positively affects consumer response.*

**H4b:** *The degree of association between a firm's behavior and events positively influences consumer response.*

*H4c: The degree of association between a firm's behavior and business positively influences consumer response.*

**CSR Timing.** CSR time selection pertains to whether a company fulfills or undertakes social responsibility as a proactive response or in response to external pressures (Liu, 2015). If a company's timing in engaging in corporate social responsibility is perceived as being delayed or reactive, it can convey to consumers that the company is not taking a proactive stance in fulfilling its social responsibility. This may lead consumers to view the company's behavior as hypocritical (Wagner, 2009). Consequently, consumers are likely to develop negative psychological perceptions, which in turn result in negative response behaviors.

Based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H5: The timing of a company's CSR initiatives positively affects consumer response.*

#### *Corporate Social Responsibility Promotion Behavior*

After implementing CSR initiatives, companies often invest significantly in publicity efforts to position themselves as responsible entities in the minds of consumers. The promotional behavior of a company can reinforce or shape consumers' expectations regarding corporate social responsibility. However, if subsequent CSR actions fall short of these expectations, consumers may question the company's motives for engaging in CSR, thereby impacting the effectiveness of its implementation. This study aims to examine the influence of publicity intensity and initiative on consumer response.

Sen et al. (2001) found that publicity intensity has an impact on consumers' purchase intentions. When a company extensively promotes its CSR activities and strives to "leave a name even after doing good deeds," it raises consumers' expectations. However, if the company's actions do not align with these expectations, it can lead to a negative response due to the perceived inconsistency between the company's statements and actions (Wang, 2014). Furthermore, individuals perceive a greater degree of inconsistency when they are exposed to the company's promotional messages before receiving its CSR message. This highlights the importance of companies taking the lead in CSR promotion, as it improves consumers' perception of the consistency of the company's CSR messages, reduces their assessment of corporate hypocrisy, and increases their responsiveness toward the company (Mou et al., 2012).

In summary, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H6: CSR advocacy behaviors negatively influence consumer response.*

*H6a: Advocacy intensity negatively affects consumer response.*

*H6b: Advocacy initiative negatively affects consumer response.*

#### **The Effect of CSR on Moderating Variables of Consumer Response**

##### *The Moderating Effect of the Type of Product of the Enterprise*

Nelson (1974) conducted a study examining the perspective of information search cost and categorized enterprise products as either search-based or experience-based. Search-based products are those that consumers can evaluate for quality prior to making a purchase using their knowledge or relevant information provided by the merchant. These products are highly standardized, such as cameras, USB flash drives, and pharmaceuticals (Huang, 2013). Conversely, experiential products are challenging for consumers to judge based solely on product descriptions. The evaluation of these products occurs only after purchase or usage, involving subjective and uncertain elements. Examples of experiential products include perfume, skin care products, and movies (Mudambi, 2010). The quality of search-based products is determined by their objective attributes, while the evaluation of experiential products depends on the usage experience and the interaction between individuals and the environment (Li et al., 2017).

Compared to experience-based products, consumers invest more time and experience in evaluating search-based products, and the information provided by companies is considered more credible (Weathers, 2015). Consequently, consumers are more likely to notice CSR messages from search-based product companies. Therefore, when encountering CSR information, consumers tend to be more sensitive to the perceptions associated with search-based product companies than those with experience-based product companies.

In summary, this paper argues that the type of product offered by a company can moderate the relationship between CSR and consumer response. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H7a:** *Regarding CSR types, search-based products have a more significant positive effect on consumer response than experience-based products.*

**H7b:** *Regarding characteristics, search-based products have a more significant positive effect on consumer response than experience-based products.*

**H7c:** *Regarding CSR promotional behavior, search-based products have a more significant negative effect on consumer response than experience-based products.*

#### *Moderating Effect of Sample Time*

This study also compares enterprises' social responsibility behaviors before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the outbreak, companies were confronted with the dual responsibilities of maintaining their production and operations, while also contributing to epidemic prevention and control efforts. They played a crucial role in sustaining the supply chain and actively participated in various aspects of combating the pandemic. Their contributions extended beyond monetary and material donations to include providing technical support, building platforms, and supplying equipment, all of which were vital in alleviating the pressures associated with the pandemic.

Furthermore, the prolonged duration and widespread impact of the pandemic have resulted in significant losses for many businesses. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) particularly face challenges and potential closures due to limited resources for social responsibilities like public welfare and charity (Yan, 2022). In this context, the fulfillment of corporate social responsibility becomes even more valuable. Consumers are now more concerned about companies' commitment to social responsibility, favoring those perceived as sincere while being more resistant towards companies seen as hypocritical.

This paper argues that the timing of the study sample can moderate the relationship between CSR and consumer response. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H8a:** *The positive effect of CSR type on consumer response is more significant after the outbreak than before the outbreak.*

**H8b:** *The positive effect of CSR characteristics on consumer response is more significant after the outbreak than before the outbreak.*

**H8c:** *The negative effect of CSR promotional behaviors on consumer response is more significant after the outbreak than before the outbreak.*

#### *Moderating Effect of Sample Source*

Student and social group samples are important sources of data in CSR research. Student samples refer to studies conducted with college students, while social group samples encompass a wider range of occupations, including student groups. While previous research has not specifically examined whether student groups or social groups generate more positive consumer responses, this study argues that the distinct characteristics of these sample groups may influence the findings to varying degrees.

Due to differences in consumption experience and cognitive structure, survey results from student groups may yield different impact outcomes compared to other groups (Liu, 2020). Student groups typically have a limited perception of CSR compared to complex social groups, which consist of individuals from various occupations. Social groups generally possess more extensive experience and a higher level of cognitive ability, making them more sensitive to CSR perceptions. Additionally, the purchasing power of student groups tends to be lower than that of social groups.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, this paper asserts that the sample source can moderate the relationship between CSR and consumer response. The following hypotheses are proposed:

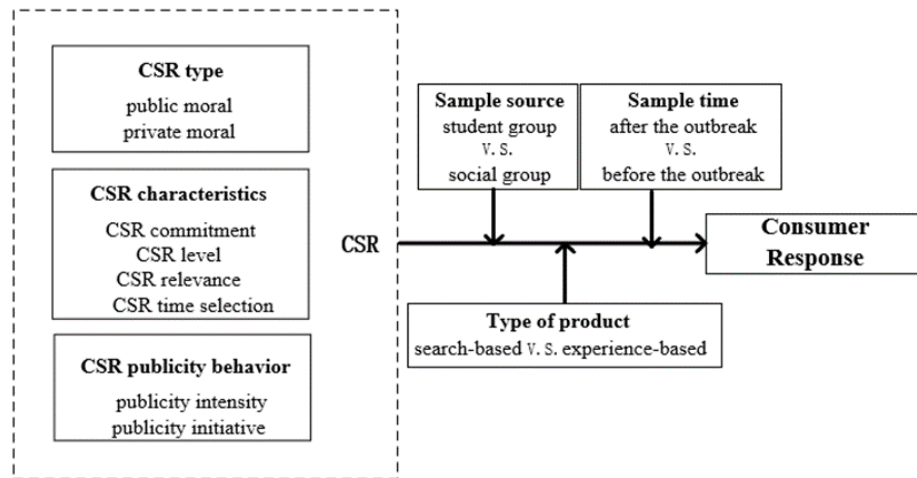
**H9a:** *Regarding CSR type, social groups have a greater positive effect on consumer response than student groups.*

**H9b:** *Regarding CSR characteristics, social groups have a greater positive effect on consumer response than student groups.*

**H9c:** *Regarding CSR advocacy behavior, social groups have a greater adverse effect on consumer response than student groups.*

Based on the above CSR analysis, this paper proposes the following research model (see Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1  
RESEARCH MODEL**



## RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCESS

### Literature Search and Screening

This paper conducted a literature search covering the period from 2000 to 2022, focusing on relevant sources from China. To minimize potential errors, the search included journal papers, dissertations, and conference papers. Various databases, including the China National Knowledge Infrastructure, Wanfang Database, Baidu Academic, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, were utilized with the keywords “CSR,” “Corporate social responsibility,” “hypocrisy,” and “good cause” to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature.

During the screening process, consideration was given to the requirements of meta-analysis and the alignment of the literature content with the research topic. Duplicate studies of the same nature, such as replicated dissertations and journal papers, were eliminated. Additionally, literature with ambiguous sample

sizes or unclear correlation coefficients between CSR and consumer response was excluded. Studies with coefficients that could not be translated into correlation coefficients, such as T-values, regression coefficients, and F-values, were also removed. Ultimately, 61 original papers were deemed suitable for inclusion, comprising 58 Chinese papers and 3 English papers.

### Coding and Effect Values

The literature coding in this study strictly adhered to the requirements of meta-analysis. A coding manual was developed in advance, which included information such as authors, literature titles, sources, primary findings, and statistical data (such as sample size, correlation coefficient, and reliability coefficient).

Pearson correlation coefficients were used as the effect values in this study, and Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were used to measure reliability. It is important to note that when recording statistics, this study recorded correlation coefficients for the effects of CSR type (including public and private moral), CSR characteristics (including CSR commitment, CSR level, CSR relevance, and CSR timing), and CSR publicity behavior (including publicity intensity and publicity initiative) on consumer response. In the coding process, if there were multiple relationships between the independent and dependent variables, the combined effect value formula (Equation 1) was used to calculate the data (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). If the literature did not directly report correlation coefficients but provided other values that could be transformed into correlation coefficients (such as t, F, d), they were calculated using the appropriate transformation formulas (Equations 2, 3, 4) (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004).

In cases where reliability coefficients were missing in the literature, the missing coefficients were recorded as the weighted average reliability based on sample size. For this study, the independent variable had a recorded reliability of 0.862, while the dependent variable had a recorded reliability of 0.844. After recording the correlation coefficient r, this study used equation 5 to obtain each study's true correlation coefficient  $\rho$ .

$$r_{xy} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^m r_{x_i y}}{\sqrt{m+m(m-1)\bar{r}_{xx}}} \quad (1)$$

$$r = \frac{d}{\sqrt{d^2+a}} \quad (2)$$

$$(where\ d = \frac{M_E - M_C}{\sqrt{\frac{SD_E^2 + SD_C^2}{2}}} \text{ and } a = \frac{(n_E + n_C)^2}{n_E n_C})$$

$$r = \sqrt{\frac{F}{F+N-2}} \quad (3)$$

$$r = \frac{t}{\sqrt{t^2+N-2}} \quad (4)$$

$$\rho = \frac{r}{\alpha_x \alpha_y} \quad (5)$$

This study included a total of 77 study samples, 393 effect values, and 22,450 independent samples in the final data table.

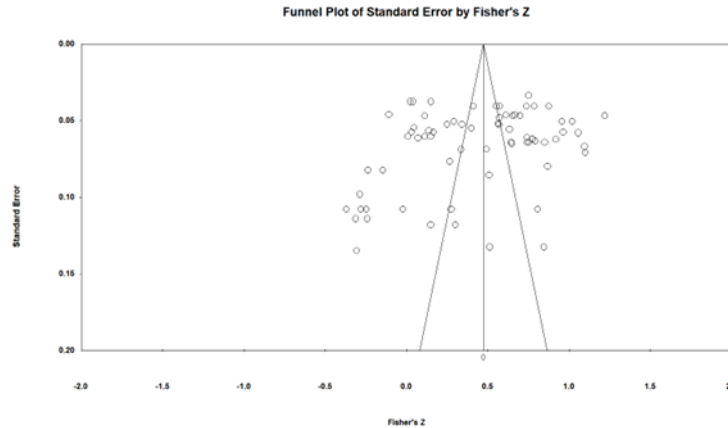
### Publication Bias Analysis

Publication bias refers to the bias that can occur when published studies do not adequately represent the overall study findings (Harrison et al., 2017; Kepes et al., 2012). To ensure the reliability of the study results, it is necessary to conduct publication bias tests on the selected sample of studies.



The funnel plot is a scatter plot-based method commonly used to assess publication bias. A symmetrical funnel plot indicates a smaller publication bias. In Figure 2, the scatter points on the funnel plot are distributed evenly around the center line, demonstrating symmetry. This suggests that there is no publication bias among the literature samples included in this study.

**FIGURE 2  
FUNNEL PLOT OF PUBLICATION BIAS**



The Egger linear regression method, originally proposed by Egger et al. in BMJ, a clinical medicine journal, employs linear regression to test for publication bias. The fail-safe factor, introduced by Rosenthal (1979), is a statistical indicator that assesses the extent of publication bias. Egger’s linear regression method and the fail-safe factor can provide a quantitative analysis of publication bias.

As shown in Table 1, the Egger linear regression test was performed using CMA 2.0 software. The estimate for the intercept term in the Egger linear regression equation was -5.338, with a 95% confidence interval of [-9.534, -1.143]. The two-tailed significance level ( $p=0.013$ ) is greater than the threshold of 0.01, indicating that the result did not reach statistical significance ( $t=2.535$ ). These findings suggest that the issue of publication bias in this study is mild.

**TABLE 1  
EGGER LINEAR REGRESSION TEST**

intercept	Standard Error	Z-value (two-tailed)		t-value	df	p-value (two-tailed)
		Lower limit	Upper limit			
-5.338	2.106	-9.534	-1.143	2.535	75.000	0.013

Note: Z is the statistical value of the two-tailed test, the same below

A higher fail-safe factor suggests a lower probability of publication bias, and the criterion of “5K+10” (K denotes the number of studies) was used in this study to make the determination. This study’s loss of safety coefficient, calculated using CMA 2.0 software, was 4194, much higher than 395 ( $5 \times 77 + 10$ ), indicating no publication bias in this study. Therefore, the results analyzed in this study are relatively robust, free from publication bias, and the conclusions drawn can be considered reliable.

**RESULTS**

In this study, data analysis was conducted using CMA 2.0 software, which offers models for meta-analysis, including the random effects model and the fixed effects model. According to Borenstein (2009),

the random effects model is more applicable to real-world scenarios compared to the fixed effects model. Therefore, the random effects model was utilized for data analysis in this study.

### **Analysis of the Impact of CSR Type on Consumer Response**

The impact of CSR type on consumer response is presented in Table 2. Based on the results in Table 2, it is evident that both corporate public moral (CM) and private moral (PM) behaviors have a significant positive impact on consumer response ( $\rho=0.595$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Specifically, corporate public moral behavior also has a significant positive impact on consumer response ( $\rho=0.539$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Moreover, the impact of private moral behavior is found to be more significant compared to that of public moral behavior ( $0.595>0.539$ ), confirming hypothesis H1.

**TABLE 2**  
**THE RESULTS OF H1**

Variables	Models	K	Effect Value	95% confidence interval		Significance (two-tailed)		Heterogeneity test			
				Lower limit	Upper limit	Z-value	P-value	Q-value	P-value	Degree of freedom	I <sup>2</sup>
PM	Random	24	0.595	0.498	0.676	9.765	0.000***	901.992	0.000	23	97.450
CM	Random	24	0.539	0.449	0.618	9.866	0.000***	683.502	0.000	23	96.635

Note: \* indicates  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* indicates  $p < 0.01$ , and \*\*\* indicates  $p < 0.001$ ; K indicates the number of effects; Q is the homogeneity test statistic; and I<sup>2</sup> is the proportion of true differences in effect values that occupy the observed variance, same below.

### Analysis of the Impact of CSR Characteristics on Consumer Response

The effects of CSR commitment, CSR level, CSR correlation (including correlation 1 for behavior and firm's business, correlation 2 for behavior and event, and correlation 3 for behavior and firm's ability), and CSR timing on consumer response are reported in Table 3. Based on the results in Table 3, it is evident that CSR commitment has a significant positive effect on consumer response ( $\rho=0.448$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Similarly, CSR level also has a significant positive effect on consumer response ( $\rho=0.396$ ,  $p=0.049$ ). In addition, CSR timing shows a significant positive effect on consumer response ( $\rho=0.470$ ,  $p=0.0000$ ). Additionally, CSR correlation, including behavior and firm's business relatedness, behavior and event relatedness, and behavior and firm competence relatedness, all have significant positive effects on consumer response ( $\rho=0.306$ ,  $p=0.000$ ;  $\rho=0.237$ ,  $p=0.004$ ;  $\rho=0.391$ ,  $p=0.000$ ;  $\rho=0.275$ ,  $p=0.000$ , respectively). Consequently, the findings support hypotheses H2, H3, H4, H4a, H4b, H4c, and H5.

**TABLE 3**  
**THE RESULTS OF H2, H3, H4, H4a, H4b, H4c, H5**

Variables	Models	K	Effect Value	95% confidence interval		Significance (two-tailed)		Heterogeneity test			
				Lower limit	Upper limit	Z-value	P-value	Q-value	P-value	Degree of freedom	I <sup>2</sup>
CSR Commitment	Random	4	0.448	0.076	0.710	2.326	0.000***	220.635	0.000	3	98.640
CSR Level	Random	4	0.396	0.001	0.684	1.966	0.049*	233.612	0.000	3	98.716
CSR Timing	Random	10	0.470	0.286	0.620	4.638	0.000***	376.710	0.000	9	97.611
Relevance	Random	20	0.306	0.207	0.399	5.837	0.000***	288.560	0.000	19	93.416
Relevance 1	Random	9	0.237	0.077	0.386	2.876	0.004**	154.332	0.000	8	94.816
Relevance 2	Random	8	0.391	0.230	0.531	4.536	0.000***	127.737	0.000	7	94.520
Relevance 3	Random	3	0.275	0.155	0.386	4.406	0.000***	0.032	0.984	2	0.000

### Analysis of the Impact of CSR Promotional Behavior on Consumer Response

The effects of CSR publicity behavior, publicity intensity, and publicity initiative on consumer response are presented in Table 4. According to the results in Table 4, it can be observed that CSR publicity behavior has a significant negative effect on consumer response ( $\rho=-0.235$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Similarly, publicity intensity also has a significant negative effect on consumer response ( $\rho=-0.215$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Additionally, publicity initiative exhibits a significant negative effect on consumer response ( $\rho=-0.259$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Therefore, these findings support hypotheses H6, H6a, and H6b.

**TABLE 4**  
**THE RESULTS OF H6, H6a, AND H6b**

Variables	Models	K	Effect Value	95% confidence interval		Significance (two-tailed)		Heterogeneity test			
				Lower limit	Upper limit	Z-value	P-value	Q-value	P-value	Degree of freedom	I <sup>2</sup>
Promotional behavior	Random	1 5	-0.235	-0.285	-0.183	-8.632	0.000***	13.870	0.459	14	0.000
Publicity intensity	Random	7	-0.215	-0.320	-0.105	-3.789	0.000***	12.647	0.049	6	52.559
Advocacy Initiative	Random	8	-0.259	-0.329	-0.187	-6.797	0.000***	0.325	1.000	7	0.000

**Analysis of the Effects of Moderating Relationship Between CSR and Consumer Response**

The effects of contextual factors (cultural background, type of firm’s product) and measurement factors (sample time, sample source) on consumer responses are reported in Table 5. The moderating effect analysis was not performed for variables with fewer than two effect values. The results of the within-group heterogeneity test statistic Q for each variable were found to be significant, indicating the presence of moderating effects.

Regarding CSR type, there were significant between-group differences for product type (Q=781.333, p<0.001). The positive effect of the search item (ρ=0.616, p<0.001) on consumer response was more significant than that of the experience item (ρ=0.596, p<0.001).

For sample time, significant between-group differences were observed (Q=781.659, p<0.001). The positive effect on consumer response was more significant after the epidemic (ρ=0.627, p<0.001) compared to before the epidemic (ρ=0.611, p<0.001).

Regarding sample source, there were significant between-group differences (Q=781.659, p<0.001). The social group (ρ=0.623, p<0.001) had a more significant positive effect on consumer response than the student group (ρ=0.580, p<0.001).

Regarding CSR characteristics, there were significant group differences for product type (Q=894.844, p<0.001). The search items (ρ=0.384, p<0.001) had a more significant positive impact on consumer response than the experience items (ρ=0.155, p<0.001).

For sample time, significant between-group differences were observed (Q=1187.731, p<0.001). The positive effect on consumer response was more significant after the epidemic (ρ=0.410, p<0.001) compared to before the epidemic (ρ=0.372, p<0.001).

Regarding sample source, significant between-group differences were found (Q=1149.968, p<0.001). The student group (ρ=0.466, p<0.001) had a more significant positive effect on consumer response than the social group (ρ=0.344, p<0.001).

In summary, hypotheses H7a, H7b, H8a, H8b, and H9a are supported. H9b was rejected, and hypotheses H7c, H8c, and H9c were not tested due to the small number of effect values.

**TABLE 5**  
**THE RESULTS OF H7a, H7b, H8a, H8b, H9a, H9b**

Var.	Grouping	K	Effect Value	95% confidence interval		Significance (two-tailed)			Heterogeneity test		
				Lower limit	Upper limit	Z-value	P-value	Q-value	P-value	dof	I <sup>2</sup>
Product Type	Experience Products	11	0.596	0.574	0.618	39.695	0.000***	781.333	0.000	22	97.184
	Search for products	12	0.616	0.598	0.634	48.084	0.000***				
	Before the outbreak	18	0.611	0.508	0.696	55.105	0.000***				
Sample Time	After the outbreak	6	0.627	0.443	0.761	31.750	0.000***	781.659	0.000	23	97.058
	Students	5	0.580	0.360	0.739	23.469	0.000***				
Sample Source	Social	19	0.623	0.526	0.705	59.089	0.000***	781.659	0.000	23	97.058
CSR Characteristics											
Product Type	Experience Products	10	0.155	-0.035	0.335	13.353	0.000***	894.844	0.000	22	97.541
	Search for products	13	0.384	0.232	0.517	33.922	0.000***				
	Before the outbreak	33	0.372	0.275	0.462	41.656	0.000***				
Sample Time	After the outbreak	5	0.410	0.158	0.612	16.754	0.000***	1187.731	0.000	37	96.885
	Students	12	0.466	0.315	0.595	25.243	0.000***				
Sample Source	Social	25	0.344	0.234	0.446	38.162	0.000***	1149.968	0.000	36	96.869

## CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

### Research Findings

Based on previous research results on the relationship between CSR and consumer response, this paper presents a research framework to investigate consumer response to CSR. This study utilizes meta-analysis as an empirical tool to examine this relationship, with the findings detailed in the sections below.

First, regarding the analysis of CSR types, the results indicate that consumers respond positively to perceived private and public CSR behavior. This finding is consistent with most previous studies, which have highlighted CSR behavior as a crucial factor influencing consumer response, including their purchasing decisions. Drawing on national and international data, this paper confirms that CSR behavior indeed has an impact on consumer response. Additionally, the study concludes that companies engaging in private moral behavior are more likely to elicit positive consumer responses compared to those emphasizing public moral behavior. While the theoretical framework of CSR issues originated in Western contexts, it is important to note that CSR's influence in corporate practice is global. Therefore, the localization of CSR issues in the Chinese context warrants attention.

Secondly, concerning the examination of CSR characteristics, this study provides the following verifications:

- (1) The higher the CSR commitment, the more positive the consumer response. This finding aligns with the results of previous studies, highlighting the positive impact of CSR commitment on consumer response.
- (2) Similarly, the study confirms that a higher CSR level leads to a more positive consumer response. This result is consistent with previous research findings emphasizing the positive relationship between CSR level and consumer response.
- (3) The study also establishes that higher correlations between CSR behavior and various aspects, such as corporate business, corporate capability, and events, result in more positive consumer responses. This aligns with the majority of research in this field. However, it is worth noting that the meta-analytic approach may counteract some studies that report opposite results for the correlation between corporate behavior and corporate business.
- (4) Additionally, the study reveals that more proactive CSR timing plays a crucial role. Proactive and timely CSR actions are seen more favorably by consumers, a finding that echoes the sentiment of earlier studies.

Thirdly, the study's analysis of CSR publicity behavior reveals that excessive promotion of socially responsible actions can backfire, leading to negative consumer responses. It appears that when companies aggressively publicize their CSR efforts, consumers may perceive these actions as insincere or hypocritical. This resistance tends to arise from the belief that the primary motive behind such CSR activities is profit rather than genuine social responsibility, a notion supported by previous research.

Fourthly, regarding the test of moderating effects, this study confirms the following findings:

- (1) The relationship between CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and consumer response is moderated by the type of product offered by the corporation. Specifically, in the context of both CSR types and characteristics, the positive impact on consumer response is more pronounced for search goods.
- (2) The timing of the sample influences the relationship between CSR and consumer response. Specifically, regarding both types and characteristics of CSR, the positive impact on consumers is found to be more pronounced in the period following the epidemic.
- (3) The source of the sample plays a moderating role in the relationship between CSR and consumer response. Specifically, for CSR types, the positive impact of social groups on consumers is more significant, while for CSR characteristics, the impact is opposite for student groups and social groups.

This finding may be attributed to the fact that the student group requires more social experience and accurate perceptions of various dimensions of CSR characteristics, which results in a decreased tendency to perceive inconsistencies.

## **Management Insights**

The results of this study validate the potential pathways through which consumers respond to perceived CSR. These findings have implications for companies in establishing positive interactions with consumers by assuming social responsibility. Furthermore, these findings offer governments valuable perspectives for shaping policies that encourage or regulate corporate social responsibility. By understanding these consumer response pathways, both the corporate sector and policymakers can make more informed decisions.

First and foremost, social responsibility should be a fundamental consideration in enterprises' sustainable development strategies. With increasing consumer awareness of rights and interests, environmental concerns have undergone significant changes. Enterprises can stimulate consumers' purchasing willingness by employing social responsibility strategies effectively, thereby gaining a competitive advantage in sustainable development. Given the existence of information asymmetry, various factors influence consumers' perception of corporate social responsibility. To overcome this challenge, companies need to adopt social responsibility as a long-term business strategy and continually strengthen their awareness of social responsibility across all aspects of their operations. This approach will foster higher levels of consumer trust and lead to a sustained increase in consumer purchase intentions.

Secondly, companies should pay attention to consumers' perceptions of inconsistency. When consumers perceive inconsistency between CSR behavior and corporate business, corporate capability, and events, this perception affects their positive response to CSR. Regarding corporate capability, while most consumers believe that corporate social responsibility is within a firm's capabilities, some are concerned that companies may implement socially responsible behavior at the expense of quality or by shifting costs. In summary, when companies communicate their social responsibility efforts, they should convey to consumers a strong correlation between their social responsibility behaviors and their business operations, corporate capabilities, and events.

Lastly, it's essential for enterprises to adopt a variety of strategies to effectively fulfill their social responsibilities. This includes tailoring CSR practices to suit local conditions, the nature of their products, local cultural norms, and the specific stage of development of the enterprise. In doing so, they must also be judicious in their approach to disclosing social responsibility initiatives, utilizing a range of media channels to foster a positive reputation. However, it is crucial to avoid overly promotional tactics that might give the impression that CSR efforts are merely for marketing purposes. Consumers tend to favor enterprises that demonstrate real, tangible actions over those that engage in superficial rhetoric. By focusing on authentic and contextually relevant CSR activities, companies can better align with consumer expectations and values.

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of social responsibility for businesses and provide practical recommendations for effective CSR implementation. By incorporating social responsibility into their strategies, considering consumers' perceptions of inconsistency, and tailoring CSR approaches to local contexts, companies can enhance their reputation and consumer trust, leading to positive consumer responses.

## **Research Limitations and Perspectives**

Our study, while informative, has limitations that warrant further exploration in future research, particularly due to the constraints of time and specific contextual conditions.

Firstly, the study sample has limitations. The moderating effects of product type, sample time, and sample source on the relationship between CSR promotional behavior and consumer response could not be verified due to the lack of available effect sizes. To overcome this limitation, future research should focus on gathering a more extensive sample that allows for a thorough investigation of these potential moderating effects.

Secondly, this study focused primarily on the relationship between CSR and consumer response from the perspective of corporate behavior, overlooking the influence of personal characteristics of consumers. Factors such as age, cultural background, education level, and income groups can significantly impact consumer responses to CSR. Therefore, future research should include these demographic variables to



investigate how consumer responses to CSR vary across different groups. This broader approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between CSR and consumer perception.

Lastly, there are limitations to the research methodology employed in this study. The empirical research approach utilized meta-analysis, which involved selecting sample data from existing literature and analyzing the findings using CMA 2.0 software. While this approach validates the effects of different variables on the relationship between CSR and consumer response, it does not delve into the underlying mechanisms through which these factors influence the relationship. Future research can build upon this foundation by exploring the mechanisms and causal pathways that drive the observed effects.

Overall, by addressing these identified limitations, future research can significantly enhance our understanding of the relationship between CSR and consumer response. This will lead to a more robust and comprehensive analysis, deepening insights into the complex interplay between corporate social responsibility and consumer behavior.

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