



THE STUDY OF CONSUMER PERCEPTION ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS CONSUMERS ATTITUDE AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive conditions which many of competitive indices of companies are similar, corporate social responsibility and morality have found a special place. Environmental issues like environmental pollution, greenhouse gases, ozone depletion, paying more attention to humanitarian (philanthropic) activities, morality, and economic issues and etc. make the importance of corporate social responsibility more prominent, so it can be used as a factor for developing a positive attitude to the product by the customers, thereby you can benefit from the market by making yourself different than other competitors and gaining the competitive advantage in order to increase the market share. This paper examines the impact of CSR on customer buying behavior regarding the role of mediator towards the company. Statistical population of the study is consisted of all consumers of dairy products companies including Pegah and Kaleh in Ahwaz. All the customers were selected by Cluster Sampling method and due to the infinite populations in statistical research and by considering the error level of 0.05 and the estimate accuracy rate of 0.07 and the success ratio of 0.5, around 200 households were estimated. Wong Szeki (2012) and Galbreath (2010) questionnaires have been used for collecting data. Research findings indicate that costumer positive attitude to corporate social responsibility has positive and direct impact on buying behavior.

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Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, Consumer attitudes to enterprise, Consumer buying behavior.

Contribution/ Originality

This paper's primary contribution is finding that corporate social responsibility has a very important role in creating positive attitude in the consumer's and it leads to buying behavior. So all of companies can use this way to improve of sale in Iran or other countries in all of the world.

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the increasing emphasis of corporate on CSR in the commercial market, little is known about the effects of CSR actions on consumers. Recent studies on ethical behavior suggest that consumers are increasingly caring about ethical dimensions of product, service and business process. These concerns may have positive financial impact for the business involved if company handle it well (Wong Szeki, 2012).

As well as, even though academics and business managements have participated in different kinds of debate about the social responsibilities of business, there has been little investigation on what the general public's attitude towards those social issues (Brammer and Pavelin, 2004). In the other hand, the consumption of organic food has increased substantially in all countries. The demand for organic foods has increased from 15% in a year to 20% in the past decade in Asia. This could be due to concerns arising from negative environmental impacts, Conventional farming practices as well as potential long-term effects of genetically modified foods (Voon *et al.*, 2011). Compared to conventional foods, organic foods are compatible with the environment; they are also fresh, healthy, nutritious and delicious (Saleki *et al.*, 2012). So, the present study has been done to investigate the role of consumer attitudes on the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on consumer buying behavior.

1.1. Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become popular in the early twenty-first century. Almost every large company applies CSR –as a whole- to meet customer needs. Consumers are demanding that companies apply CSR regardless of their size, shape and origin. Since the societies around the world encounter various social problems, customers expect companies to help solving these problems using their resources effectively (Gigauri, 2012a).

Companies should consider two facts, first, the requirements of stakeholders, then their responsibility toward society. A significant proportion of consumers who have the moral standards in their buying decisions are on rise in many countries, moreover, , empirical studies support the idea that CSR has a positive impact on customer perception (Gigauri, 2012b).

Many definitions have been presented for CSR but here we just point out the Mc Williams and Siegel (2001). And you can see the summary of other definitions in Table 1. Corporate social responsibility is defined as a situation which because of that, the firm goes beyond of its main task and the legitimate expectation goes beyond the main task of firm (Mc Williams and Siegel, 2001).

Table-1. Definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility

The authors	Definitions
Zairi and Peters (2002)	CSR includes accounting, auditing and reporting on social and moral issues.
Davis (1960)	Social responsibility described as the kind of decisions and actions which are taken beyond the direct benefits of economic or technical reasons.
Veersalu (2011)	The Degree of moral obligation which may be attributed to the Companies and it is beyond the simple obedience to the rules of the state.
Dahlsrud (2006)	CSR is defined as something that creates an obligation for the manufacturer, which is more than a commitment to shareholders and prescribed by the rules or agreements of the unions, and it's more than ownership.
Danko <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Corporate Social Responsibility encompasses the economic, legal, morals and humanitarian expectations of business units which extend to all stakeholders. The shareholders are defined as any individual or group that can affect activities, decisions, policies, procedures or goals.

The authors have presented various definitions for CSR Fallah Tafti *et al.* (2012); Mohtsham Saeed and Arshad (2012); Virvilaite and Daubaraite (2011); Ali Basah and Yusef (2011); Rasoulzadeh *et al.* (2013); Rangan and Titida (2014) and Adeyanju (2012). Carroll (1991) has considered four dimensions for CSR, economic responsibility, legal responsibility, moral and humanitarian responsibility, respectively. While other authors such as Dahlsrud (2006) have considered five dimensions for CSR, including environment, social and economic responsibility, responsibility towards stakeholders and humanitarian responsibilities. In this research because of overlapping some dimensions, the following dimensions were considered as aspects of CSR:

1.1.1. Economic Responsibility

It's the primary responsibility of the organization in which economic activities and measures are the primary purposes (Fallah Tafti *et al.*, 2012). In another definition, it is the guarantee of return on investment for shareholders, job creation, fair pay for the workers and business development (Mohtsham Saeed and Arshad, 2012).

1.1.2. Legal Responsibility

It means, obeying public and business rules by the organization, this is also called social obligations (Fallah Tafti *et al.*, 2012; Mohtsham Saeed and Arshad, 2012).

1.1.3. Moral Responsibility

It means, respecting social norms (Social Accountability) (Fallah Tafti *et al.*, 2012), being oral and fairness of activities that are rooted in humanitarian grounds (Mohtsham Saeed and Arshad, 2012) it is also defines as doing business in a moral manner (Virvilaite and Daubaraite, 2011) and the relationship between business and society (Rasoulzadeh *et al.*, 2013).

1.1.4. Humanitarian Responsibility

It goes beyond the commitment to the moral or legal issues and let shareholders give moral character to their activities (Fallah Tafti *et al.*, 2012). Humanitarian responsibility means voluntary support of social movements, investing in the welfare ((Virvilaite and Daubaraitė, 2011) quoting Carroll) or activities that are not prescribed by law in the long-term (Rasoulzadeh *et al.*, 2013).

1.1.5. Environmental Protection Responsibility

It becomes important because of increasing the destructive products. However, some managers think this kind of responsibility is really costly but it has some long-term benefits. This kind of responsibility includes protecting the environment, preventing energy loss and reducing the amount of pollution It also includes human rights, human rights, training and developing the local workforce, expert assistance to social programs and etc. (Adeyanju, 2012).

1.1.6. Supporting Employees Responsibility

It means, Human Resources can contribute to sustainable growth of the company, if and only if they're developed by the company. This can be achieved by training plans, evaluating performance and acquainting employees with values and rules (Adeyanju, 2012)

1.2. Attitude

Herbert Spencer and Alexander Bain introduced the term attitude in psychology in the early 60's. At that time the term "attitude" meant an inner state of readiness to perform a task (Cacioppo *et al.*, 1994). There is another definition of attitude: attitude defines as a neurological and psychiatric state through readiness and organized through experience, organizing through experience and Applying a dynamic command or influence in responses to persons and all objects and situations which are associated with them. It can be simplified to mindset or willingness to act in a particular manner, according to temperament of the individual experience (Pickens, 2005). According to the Expectancy-value theory (Fishbain), Attitude is a part of belief. In fact, one can consider their beliefs as causes of the attitude (Kordnaeij *et al.*, 2013). The attitude is defined as a person's positive or negative feelings about an action in general. Attitudes indicate the assessment of sustainable emotions and the tendencies toward a product or an idea. Attitudes are the causes of hate and interest in people. So they can draw people's attention to a product or vice versa (Kordnaeij *et al.*, 2013). So we can say that the attitude of a consumer is his/her overall assessment of a concept (Monirul and Hui Han, 2012).

1.3. Consumer Buying Behavior

Consumer behavior includes mental, physical and emotional activities which people do or use when they want to select, purchase, use or throw away the product or the service that provide their needs and demands (Jeddi *et al.*, 2013). Knowing these attitudes help marketers to get familiar with the way costumers think and feel, as well as the way they choose various brands, products and etc.

or how the environment, reference groups, family, vendors, etc. can affect them (Abdul Brosekhan *et al.*, 2013). Understanding consumer buying behavior can help marketers get more familiar with their customers; moreover, it could be the basis for marketers to develop appropriate marketing strategies. If marketers be familiar with consumer buying process, they know how costumers try to get information about the thing they want to buy, what factors can encourage them and what factors influence their decision to buy it (Bakhshi, 2012). In many studies about consumer behavior, the classical principle of consumer behavior was a five-step decision-making model includes:

1. Identifying problem, 2. Information Retrieval, 3. Evaluating Alternatives, 4. Selecting the product, 5. Evaluating after the purchase (Bakhshi, 2012)

1.4. The Impact of CSR on Consumer Attitudes

Responsible manufacturing can encompass a wild range of social and environmental factors, including ensuring fair work practices and minimizing environmental impacts. Costumers punish or reward the companies that obey (or don't obey) the social responsibility initiatives by buying products. Many researchers and managers believe that social responsibility should be applied by costumers. The company presents responsible products as long as costumers are demanding such products. The CSR affects customer attitudes and customer attitudes influence their desires and intentions, and desires will lead to behavior (Trudel and Cotte, 2011). The growing number of market survey show, there is a positive relationship between the effects of CSR on consumer behavior (Davids, 1990). Some of evidences indicate that the companies are supporting CSR initiatives like philanthropy, relationship-based marketing, and plan for the protection of minorities, employment and production of social responsibility over the past few years (Sen *et al.*, 2006). Researchers show a positive relationship between CSR initiatives and consumer attitudes toward company (Brown Tom and Peter, 1997). Costumers have a negative attitude toward companies which use child labor and in turn, they have a positive attitude toward companies that employ survivors of natural disasters, this is a fact which is completely confirmed (Wong Szeki, 2012). Therefore, according to the discussion, the following hypothesis can be expressed as:

H1: CSR initiatives have positive and significant impacts on consumer attitudes.

1.5. The Impact of Attitude on Consumer Behavior

Psychologists, especially social psychologist believe that the attitude – as a social structure- is so important in establishing and maintaining social order and also believe, attitudes must be changed before behavior (Chaiklin, 2011). With regard to the Social psychology theories, marketing researchers study the relationship between attitude and behavior. This is more like evaluating a process. It means, first attitude then behavior is formed subsequently (Reily *et al.*, 1999). The researches conducted during the 21st century approve that attitude has a huge impact on marketing and consumer behavior. Due to this fact, also, given the fact that costumers behavior is what he/she shows before, during and after buying a product or service. So we can say, costumers attitude to the service or product is the key factor of anticipating and continuing customer behavior,

and the attitude is some passivity or a sense of agreement or disagreement about a stimulant. Actually, stimulants are emotional feelings that people have about a phenomenon (Montazeri *et al.*, 2013). Intrinsic factors, external factors and consumer attitudes toward the product are factors affecting consumer's purchase intention (Jaafar *et al.*, 2012).

So the second hypothesis is:

H2: Consumer's attitude has positive and significant impact on consumer buying behavior.

1.6. The Impact of CSR on Consumer Buying Behavior

For making a relation between purchase intention and CSR activities, it needs to ask a question, "Will customers buy products they need, from a company which proves that it is truly concerned about the environment?" (Pornprotang *et al.*, 2013). Resounding to the question, Yoon *et al.* (2006) that many customers tend to buy products that its manufacturer cares about environment. In addition, sometimes CSR activities have a positive relationship with customer buying decision, that's why, an environmental concern has stronger positive effect on buying decision than the prices. Sen *et al.* (2006) supported the positive relationship between CSR activities and consumer purchase intention. Lin *et al.* (2011) support the positive relationship between CSR activities and customer buying behavior. A society becomes affluent and the awareness increases among customers, if costumers become sensitive about ethical behavior of companies, and this in turn affect their buying behavior (Rahim *et al.*, 2011). Given the above, the third hypothesis is as follows:

H3: CSR has a positive and significant impact on customers buying behavior through customer attitude.

2. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

According to the theoretical principle and the background which is presented for the relationship between variables, the conceptual model is presented in Fig.1:

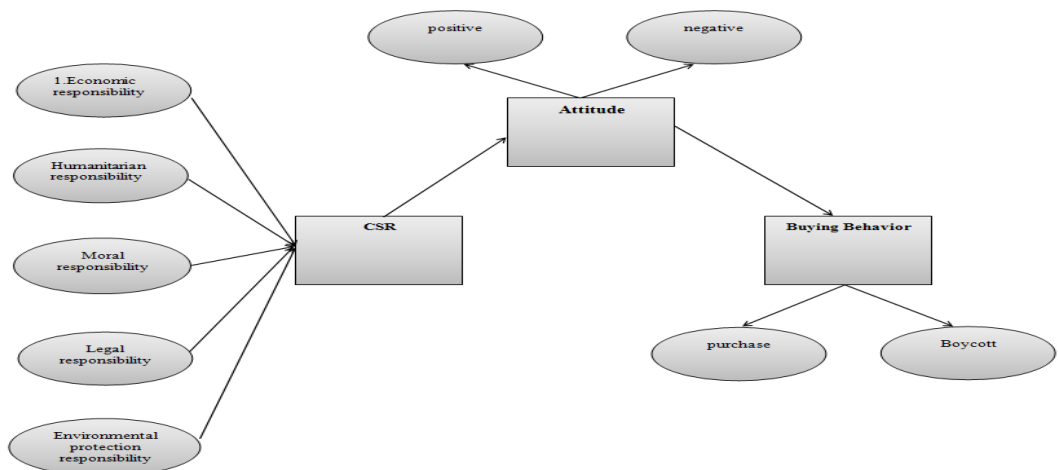


Figure-1. Conceptual model and components

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The application method and the way of collecting descriptive data were based on the correlation-casual method in this study because the purpose of the study is to examine the relationships between variables in the food industry, in particular the dairy. The library method was used for gathering data about the theoretical principles. The field study and questionnaire was used in order to gather preliminary data and information to investigate the hypothesis. The first part of the questionnaire consists of demographic information and the second part is about the variables. It should not that because legal liability is related to employees not customer so we didn't ask any questions about it. All the customers of Pegah and Kaleh dairy products in Ahvaz were the population of this study. Due to the infinite populations in statistical research and by considering the error level of 0.05 and the estimate accuracy rate of 0.07 and the success ratio of 0.5, around 200 households were estimated. The cluster sampling method was used in this study. Firstly, we identified 20 main streets in Ahvaz, and then 10 streets were randomly selected among them, then 5 lanes were randomly selected from each of these streets. Then 4 houses were determined from each lane for gathering the data.

Table-2. Characteristics of Data Gathering Tools

Variables	components	Number of items	Item Number	Resources
Customer attitude	-	5	1-5	Wong Szeki (2012)
CSR	Supporting employees	4	6-9	Galbreath (2010) and Wong Szeki (2012)
	Supporting environment	4	10-13	
	Economic dimension	4	14-19	
	Ethical dimension	4	20-23	
	Humanitarian dimension	4	24-27	
Consumer buying behavior	-	7	28-34	Wong Szeki (2012)

4. ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1. Descriptive Statistic of Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

We used SPSS software to describe the demographic characteristics of respondents; the results of our study are summarized in the following table:

Table-3. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic characteristics	Items	Frequency	The cumulative frequency
Gender	man	111	111
	woman	89	200
Age	15-24	48	48
	25-34	89	137

Continue

	35-44	42	179
	Over 45	21	200
Education		11	11
		21	32
		17	49
		123	172
		28	200
Employment status	Employed	108	108
	Unemployed	23	131
	Student	69	200

As the results of the above table show, the largest number of respondents, in terms of gender, were men. In terms of age, most of the respondents were in the age range of 25 to 34 years. In terms of education, the largest number of respondents have a bachelor's degree and in terms of employment and the highest frequency related to employed persons.

4.2. Stability

Given that the PLS software has used in the research, so Cronbach's alpha, Combined Reliability and Factor loadings were used for measuring the reliability of the survey instruments. Cronbach's alpha and Combined Reliability show the internal consistency between the indicators. Acceptable extent for Cronbach's alpha and combined reliability is at least 0.7. Factor loadings are another criterion for measuring the reliability which shows the correlation between structures and related indicators. The minimum acceptable standard of factor loadings is 0.5.

The following table shows information about the reliability of variables:

Table-4. Cronbach's alpha coefficients, Combined Reliability coefficients and factor loading for each variable

Structures	Questions/ Dimensions	Factor loadings	Cronbach's coefficient	alpha
CSR	Support	0.84	0.87	0.9
	Environment	0.56		
	Economic	0.94		
	Ethical	0.73		
	Human	0.95		
Attitude	A ₁	0.96	0.90	0.93
	A ₂	0.93		
	A ₃	0.92		
	A ₄	0.65		
	A ₅	0.95		
Behavior	B ₁	0.85	0.93	0.95
	B ₂	0.85		
	B ₃	0.71		
	B ₄	0.85		
	B ₅	0.71		
	B ₆	0.81		
	B ₇	0.71		

Cronbach's alpha coefficient and combined reliability coefficients for all variables are greater than 0.7, which indicates the reliability of variables. All the factor loadings are greater than 0.5, also, which shows the model is reliable.

4.3. Validity

Content validity and construct validity are used for measuring the validity of research model:

4.3.1. Content Validity or Using Experts' Opinions

The existence of content validity is verified because of using standardized questionnaires, but according to the topic, more changes were added to questionnaires (by professors) for establishing more validity

4.3.2. Construct Validity

Convergent and divergent validity were conducted in this research. Convergent validity represents the correlation coefficient between the indicator and its structure which is checked by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The acceptable level of construct validity is 0.5. The Fornell and Larcker method was used to examine the divergent validity. The method compares AVE and the square of the correlation coefficient (R²) between variables. the results listed below:

Table-5. Comparison between coefficient of AVE and R²

Variables	CSR	Behavior	Attitude	AVE
CSR	1	0.0064	0.462	0.67
Behavior	-	1	0.324	0.63
Attitude	-	-	1	0.8

We checked all coefficients of AVE and we found they are greater than 0.5 for all variables. The value of AVE is greater than all values of R², which indicates (the validity of the variables), that all variables have validity.

4.4. Fitting Assessment Criteria of the Structural Part (Of Model)

In the present study, t-value and R² criterion are used to evaluate the assessment criteria of the structural part. t-values are obviously bigger than 1.96, this verifies the relationship between structures, and thus confirm the hypothesis of the study at the confidence level of 0.95. An R² criterion represents the impact of exogenous variables on endogenous variables China defines three values, as the criterion for weak, average and high values. These values are 0.19, 0.33 and 0.67. The results of these criteria are presented in Table 4.

Table-6. T-values and R2

Structures	Diminutions or Questions	t- value	R ²	Fitting rate regarding R2 criteria
CSR	Support	16.23	0.73	strong
	Environment	5.44	0.32	weak
	Economic	19.14	0.89	strong
	Ethical	11.26	0.54	middle
	Human	21.43	0.97	strong
Attitude	A ₁	32.36	0.36	middle
	A ₂	37.99		
	A ₃	38.22		
	A ₄	4.72		
	A ₅	34.19		
Behavior	B ₁	10.61	0.064	weak
	B ₂	14.9		
	B ₃	8.09		
	B ₄	11.8		
	B ₅	5.60		
	B ₆	13.15		
	B ₇	8.32		

As you can see, all the T-values are significantly greater than 1.96; this shows that all the questions and the relationships between values are significant at confidence level of 95%. The table above shows the R2 value is in the strong or middle range for most of the variables and this indicates the strong fitting of the structural model.

5. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

This study has three main hypotheses:

H1: CSR activities have positive and significant impact on consumer attitude.

H2: Customer attitude has positive and significant impact on consumer buying behavior.

H3: CSR has positive and significant impact on consumer buying behavior through consumer attitude.

Structural equation modeling was used as PLS software to examine the hypotheses. The results of which are shown separately in Table 7.

Table-7. Results of Hypotheses

H number	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Mediator variable	Path coefficient			T-statistics	Results
				Direct	indirect	total		
1	CSR	Attitude	-	0.683	-	-	15.543	Confirmed
2	Attitude	Behavior	-	0.615	-	-	10.424	Confirmed
3	CSR	Behavior	Attitude	0.073	0.386	0.459	11.173	Confirmed

The impact of CSR on customer attitude is discussed in the first hypothesis. The results of analysis show that t-value for this test is equal to 15.543 which is greater than 1.96. Consequently, this hypothesis is confirmed. The impact of every single dimension of corporate social responsibility (include supporting employees, protecting the environment, Moral responsibility

economic and humanitarian responsibility on consumer attitudes have been tested and approved. The second hypothesis examines the effects of consumer attitudes toward the company's consumer buying behavior. According to the results, the t- value for this test is equal to 10.424 which is greater than 1.96. Consequently, this hypothesis is confirmed. The third hypothesis is the impact of CSR on consumer buying behavior with regard to consumer attitudes mediating variable. Indirect impact of CSR on consumer buying behavior has been confirmed, while the direct impact has been rejected. It means that, consumer attitude toward the company influencetheeffect of CSR on purchase behavior. The t- value for this test is equal to 11.173 which is greater than 1.96 and all of sub-hypotheses of this hypothesis have been confirmed.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The impact of CSR on customer attitude is discussed in the first hypothesis. The results of analysis show that t-value for this test is equal to 15.543 which is greater than 1.96. Consequently, this hypothesis is confirmed. The impact of every single dimension of corporate social responsibility (include supporting employees, protecting the environment, Moral responsibility economic and humanitarian responsibility on consumer attitudes have been tested and approved. The result of this hypothesis is consistent with the results of [Trudel and Cotte \(2011\)](#) research. They stated (in their study) that the CSR initiatives are affected consumer attitudes, consumers attitudes will influence their desire and intentions, desires cause treats. The CSR initiatives may inspire consumers to change their buying behavior, for example purchasing a different product than the original product, rewarding and punishing for responsible products and even punishing companies that don't obey the rules intentionally ([Trudel and Cotte, 2011](#)). Sen and his colleague have an statement in thi9s regard, they believe there is a positive relationship between CSR initiatives of the company and consumer attitudes toward the company and its products ([Sen et al., 2006](#)). The second hypothesis examines the effects of consumer attitudes toward the company's consumer buying behavior. According to the results, the t- value for this test is equal to 10.424 which is greater than 1.96. Consequently, this hypothesis is confirmed. This hypothesis is consistent with [Jaafar et al. \(2012\)](#) study. They stated that the consumers' attitude is an important factor in tendency effect of costumer to buy a product with a special label. They also stated that consumer buying behavior is very complex and is influenced by the perceptions and attitudes of consumers. They also stated that the internal and external factor and consumer attitudes toward the product are effective factors on consumer buying intent ([Jaafar et al., 2012](#)). On the other hand, he said if you want to change a behavior, you should change the attitude before. He is pointed out the social psychologists believe that the change of attitude is a procedure for changing behavior ([Chaiklin, 2011](#)). Reilly et al have stated that a behavior emerge after the attitude subsequently. [Montazeri et al. \(2013\)](#) point out that Consumer attitude toward a product or a service is a key factor in predicting consumer behavior ([Montazeri et al., 2013](#)). The third hypothesis is the impact of CSR on consumer buying behavior with regard to consumer attitudes mediating variable. Indirect impact of CSR on consumer buying behavior has been confirmed, while the

direct impact has been rejected. The t- value for this test is equal to 11.173 which is greater than 1.96 and all of sub-hypotheses of this hypothesis have been confirmed. It means that, consumer attitude influence the effect of all of dimensions of CSR on purchase behavior. However, exploring the impact of supporting employees on consumer buying behavior with regard to the consumer attitudes mediating variable have been rejected in [Wong Szeki \(2012\)](#). The hypothesis which studies the effect of Ethical dimension of corporate social responsibility with regard to the mediator's attitude on the consumer behavior has been approved. This hypothesis has also been approved in [Wong Szeki \(2012\)](#). The hypothesis which studies the effect of the humanitarian dimension of corporate social responsibility with regard to the mediator's attitude on consumer behavior has been approved. This hypothesis has also been approved in [Wong Szeki \(2012\)](#).

7. SUGGESTIONS

Given that the research hypotheses are confirmed, some Suggestions can be presented as follows:

- Donating some money for humanitarian aid or certain patients, Participating in Environmental protection activities, helping the poor and needy people and any activity that build a good business reputation.
- Setting reasonable prices (in terms of supply and demand) for products with Maintaining Product Quality.
- Providing safe working conditions for employees and Flexible work hours policy
- employment non-discrimination policies
- Providing conditions and treatment facilities for employees and their families

Generally speaking, it can be said that verification of three hypotheses, shows that the implementation of corporate social responsibility will create positive attitudes and buying behavior of consumers in the food industry companies. Thus it is recommended that: Food industry manufacturers increase their knowledge in this field, Staffs train to implement CSR policies, and Procedures develop for implementing all aspects of CSR and implementation of CSR policies monitor by staffs.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORKS

1. This study was conducted in Ahvaz city. So the result of this paper may not be generalizable to the other statistical societies. So this study can be considered in other societies and use the result to economic growth in that society.

2. This study was conducted in food industry. So the result of this paper may not be generalizable to the other industries. So this study can be considered in other industries and use the result to economic growth in that special industry.

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