



# Leveraging Corporate Social Responsibility to Strengthen Customer-Based Brand Equity in Ghana's Hotel Industry

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## Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is gaining increasing importance in the hospitality industry, particularly in emerging markets where customers are becoming more attentive to social and environmental practices. However, the influence of CSR on the components of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) has not been sufficiently examined in the Ghanaian hotel sector. This study, therefore, investigates the effect of CSR initiatives on CBBE, focusing on four key dimensions: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, based on Aaker's multidimensional brand equity framework. A quantitative research approach was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to 249 hotel customers in Kumasi, Ghana. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS to test the hypothesized relationships between CSR and the four dimensions of CBBE. The findings reveal that CSR has a statistically significant and positive effect on brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. These results suggest that CSR initiatives can strengthen customers' perceptions of hotel brands and enhance overall brand equity in the hospitality context. Nevertheless, the study is limited to the hotel sector in Kumasi, Ghana, which restricts the broader generalizability of the findings. Future research could extend this work by examining other geographic regions, different hotel categories, and additional variables such as customer satisfaction or brand meaning to develop a more comprehensive model. This study contributes to the literature by empirically linking CSR to the development of customer-based brand equity in the Ghanaian hospitality industry. By integrating CSR into Aaker's brand equity model, the study offers both theoretical insights and practical implications, highlighting how hotel managers can leverage CSR as a strategic tool to build strong, loyal brands in socially conscious markets.

**Keywords:** *Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Perceived Quality, Brand Loyalty, Hotel Industry*

## INTRODUCTION

In increasingly competitive service markets, brand differentiation no longer depends solely on functional attributes such as price or availability. Instead, intangible factors, such as trust, identification, and perceived ethical conduct, play a decisive role in shaping how consumers evaluate and relate to service brands. Within this context, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has moved from a peripheral philanthropic activity to a strategic signaling mechanism that communicates organizational values and intentions (Suganthi, 2020; Thirumalesh Madanaguli et al., 2023). Theoretically, CSR is more than a managerial practice; it serves as a reputational and relational asset that influences how consumers construct brand meaning. In emerging economies such as Ghana, where institutional voids and service inconsistencies may heighten uncertainty, CSR may serve as a credibility signal that shapes customer perceptions beyond immediate service

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encounters (Obeng et al., 2025). Despite its increasing prominence, the theoretical mechanisms by which CSR contributes to Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) in Ghana's hospitality sector remain insufficiently articulated.

Brand equity theory, particularly the multidimensional framework proposed by Keller (1993), conceptualizes CBBE as comprising brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Prior studies suggest that CSR can influence these dimensions by strengthening consumer-brand identification, enhancing perceived integrity, and reinforcing trust-based evaluations (Myint & Kohsuwan, 2019; Martínez & Nishiyama, 2019). Nevertheless, much of this evidence originates from Western and Asian contexts, where institutional environments, consumer expectations, and CSR norms differ substantially from those in Sub-Saharan Africa. The implicit assumption that CSR uniformly enhances brand equity across contexts remains underexamined in the literature. Without contextualized analysis, it is unclear whether CSR operates through similar psychological and relational mechanisms in emerging African hospitality markets.

The Ghanaian hotel industry is a particularly relevant setting for investigating this issue. Structural challenges, including infrastructure constraints and regulatory unpredictability, may amplify the importance of reputational signals in consumer decision-making (Amoah et al., 2023). In such environments, customers may rely on broader ethical and social cues to evaluate service reliability and quality (Osman et al., 2025). Yet existing scholarship rarely disaggregates how CSR influences each specific dimension of CBBE in African hospitality settings. This theoretical gap limits understanding of whether CSR functions as a generalized reputational enhancer or as a multidimensional construct that differentially shapes awareness, associations, perceptions of quality, and loyalty (Perera & Chaminda, 2013; Singh et al., 2025).

### **Problem Statement**

Although CSR is widely acknowledged as a strategic branding instrument, its multidimensional effects on Customer-Based Brand Equity in Ghana's hotel industry remain underexplored, both theoretically and empirically.

### **Research Questions:**

1. How does CSR influence brand awareness in the hotel industry of Ghana?
2. How does CSR affect brand association among hotel customers?
3. What is the relationship between CSR and perceived quality in Ghana's hospitality sector?
4. How does CSR contribute to brand loyalty among hotel customers?

This study addresses these questions by empirically examining the effects of CSR on the four dimensions of CBBE in Ghana's hotel sector. Theoretically, it contributes by contextualizing brand equity theory in a Sub-Saharan African service environment and clarifying the mechanisms by which CSR operates across distinct brand equity dimensions. Practically, it provides evidence-based guidance for hospitality managers and policymakers seeking to align socially responsible initiatives with sustainable brand development.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Background**

This study is grounded in the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model (Aaker, 1991), which conceptualizes brand equity from the consumer's perspective. According to Aaker, CBBE consists of four key dimensions: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. These elements collectively shape the consumer's overall evaluation of a brand and

influence their behavioral responses, such as repurchase intentions and word-of-mouth referrals.

In the hospitality industry, where services are intangible, and customer experience plays a critical role, building strong brand equity is essential for competitive differentiation (Duh & Uzezi Wara, 2024). Recent studies suggest that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can serve as a powerful strategic tool to enhance brand equity by shaping customer perceptions of trust, credibility, and emotional connection (Tran, 2023).

CSR refers to a company's commitment to ethical practices, environmental stewardship, and social well-being, going beyond profit maximization (Kandpal et al., 2024). In the hotel industry, CSR activities such as reducing environmental impact, supporting local communities, and maintaining fair labor practices can enhance consumers' cognitive and affective evaluations of the brand (Fatma & Khan, 2024). These evaluations align closely with the dimensions outlined in Aaker's framework, making CSR a relevant antecedent of brand equity.

Moreover, stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1999) provides a supporting foundation by suggesting that businesses are accountable not only to shareholders but also to other stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the community. By aligning CSR initiatives with stakeholder expectations, hotels can reinforce brand image and foster long-term customer relationships.

Despite growing interest in CSR and branding, empirical research directly linking CSR to CBBE, particularly in the hospitality sector in emerging markets such as Ghana, remains limited. This study seeks to address this gap by applying Aaker's framework to assess how CSR practices influence each dimension of CBBE, offering theoretical and practical insights tailored to the hospitality context.

### **CSR studies in the hospitality industry**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is one of the most widely discussed yet loosely defined concepts in the tourism and hospitality literature (Font et al., 2012). While there is no universally accepted definition, scholars generally agree that CSR refers to the voluntary integration of social, environmental, and ethical considerations into business operations, beyond the goal of profit maximization (Campayo-Sanchez et al., 2024). In the context of hospitality, CSR is uniquely positioned due to the industry's dependence on local communities, cultural heritage, and natural environments (Khatter, 2025).

When practiced responsibly, tourism and hospitality can stimulate local economies, create jobs, and improve infrastructure and cultural understanding (Qadri et al., 2024). However, mismanaged growth can also lead to environmental degradation, social displacement, and the erosion of local traditions. Consequently, hospitality firms are increasingly incorporating CSR into their strategic agendas to address these social and ecological concerns (Montañés-Del Río et al., 2025).

The body of literature on CSR in the hospitality sector has predominantly focused on its relationship with financial performance (Song et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2025), CSR reporting and disclosure practices (Guix et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2024), and stakeholder perceptions, particularly those of customers and employees (Moyeen & Mehjabeen, 2024; Sun & Zainal, 2024). Other studies have examined managerial motivations for CSR adoption, including cost efficiency, regulatory compliance, and customer pressure (Fennell et al., 2025). More recently, researchers have begun exploring CSR's influence on customer loyalty and employee behavior.

Montañés-Del Río et al. (2025) demonstrated that CSR initiatives positively affect hotel customer loyalty through trust and identification, while Liu et al. (2024) confirmed that CSR perceptions influence guests' brand preference and loyalty. Yet, despite these developments, little attention has been given to how CSR influences the antecedents of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), such as brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. To the

best of current scholarly knowledge, the role of CSR in shaping CBBE in the hospitality context, especially in developing economies such as Ghana, remains a major research gap that this study seeks to address.

### **Customer-based brand equity in the hospitality industry**

Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) has emerged as a vital construct in the hospitality industry, where service differentiation and customer perception are key drivers of success. The hospitality sector is highly experiential, making a brand's strength in consumers' minds particularly influential in shaping customer behavior and preferences (Huang, 2025). CBBE is generally understood as the value a brand holds in consumers' minds, shaped by their perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with the brand (Keller, 1998). The dominant theoretical frameworks for understanding brand equity in hospitality are derived from Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), with Aaker's model being most frequently applied.

Aaker (1991) conceptualized brand equity in terms of five dimensions: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and proprietary assets. However, subsequent studies, such as Singh (2024), suggest that consumers primarily evaluate brand equity through cognitive and behavioral indicators, rendering the proprietary assets dimension less relevant in CBBE assessment. In a competitive, service-driven industry like hospitality, building a strong brand can foster emotional resonance and sustained consumer engagement, as exemplified by globally recognized hotel brands such as Hilton and Meliá (Pan & Chen, 2025).

Extensive research has linked CBBE to favorable business outcomes in the hospitality industry. CBBE contributes to increased market share, customer retention, willingness to pay a price premium, and improved brand communication effectiveness (Martínez & Nishiyama, 2019; Akbari et al., 2020). For instance, Nuseir (2022) introduced a customer-based index to evaluate hotel brand equity, positioning the customer as the primary driver of long-term profitability. Tasci (2021) empirically examined the relationships among CBBE dimensions and validated their predictive power for customer satisfaction and loyalty in hotels.

Similarly, Sankaran and Chakraborty (2023) developed a framework for measuring CBBE as a direct outcome of brand strategy execution. In addition, Zhang et al. (2024) and Liu et al. (2023) categorized CBBE into cognitive and emotional dimensions, emphasizing the psychological attachment guests form with hotel brands. These studies underscore the critical role of CBBE in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors, yet they also reveal that brand equity in hospitality is influenced by multiple, interrelated factors, including CSR, service quality, and emotional branding, which are context-specific and warrant further empirical investigation.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Association**

The relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and brand association has received increasing attention in the hospitality literature, as CSR initiatives shape the symbolic meanings consumers attach to brands. Brand association refers to the network of mental connections, values, emotions, and corporate identity that customers link to a brand (Aaker, 1991). Theoretically, CSR contributes to these associations by functioning as a signaling mechanism that communicates organizational values beyond core service delivery.

Prior studies suggest that socially responsible initiatives enable consumers to associate brands with desirable attributes such as trustworthiness, ethical responsibility, and environmental stewardship (Amoako et al., 2021; Tiep Le et al., 2023). For example, Montañés-Del Río et al. (2025) found that CSR perceptions enhanced associations of hotel brands with integrity and community care, while Van Huy et al. (2025) argue that CSR strengthens moral credibility, thereby enriching brand meaning structures. In the hospitality sector, where experiential and emotional factors

strongly influence decision-making, CSR operates as a symbolic cue that differentiates brands in competitive markets (Sahin et al., 2020).

However, this relationship is not unconditional. The impact of CSR on brand association depends on customer awareness, perceived authenticity, and alignment between CSR initiatives and core brand values (Ghaffar et al., 2023; Chi et al., 2019). When CSR is perceived as superficial or poorly communicated, it may fail to translate into positive brand meanings. These boundary conditions are particularly relevant in emerging markets such as Ghana, where skepticism toward corporate motives and levels of institutional trust may shape the interpretation of CSR signals. Despite increasing CSR adoption within Ghana's hospitality industry, limited empirical research has examined whether and how CSR meaningfully strengthens brand associations in this specific context. This contextual and theoretical gap warrants further investigation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Corporate Social Responsibility has a positive impact on Brand Association.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility and brand awareness**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been widely acknowledged as a strategic instrument for enhancing brand awareness, particularly in the hospitality industry, where differentiation relies heavily on reputation and symbolic value. Brand awareness refers to a consumer's ability to recognize or recall a brand, forming the cognitive foundation upon which subsequent evaluations and purchase decisions are built (Keller, 1993). Theoretically, CSR contributes to awareness by increasing brand salience through value-based signaling and social visibility.

When hotels engage in socially responsible initiatives, they generate narratives that extend beyond core service attributes, thereby enhancing recognition and recall (Vera-Martínez et al., 2022; Jha et al., 2022). Kandampully et al. (2018) demonstrate that CSR engagement increases the likelihood that firms are remembered in competitive markets, while Omidvar et al. (2024) argue that CSR strengthens brand salience through media exposure and positive word-of-mouth, particularly when initiatives are strategically communicated.

However, CSR does not automatically translate into stronger brand awareness. Its impact is contingent upon consumer awareness, communication intensity, and perceived authenticity. Yuan et al. (2024) note that many CSR initiatives fail to influence awareness simply because customers remain uninformed about them. Similarly, Kucukusta et al. (2019) emphasize that targeted communication strategies are essential for converting CSR engagement into brand recognition.

These boundary conditions are especially relevant in Ghana's hospitality sector, where formal advertising budgets may be limited, and brand recognition often depends on relational trust and community-based reputation. Despite increasing CSR visibility among Ghanaian hotels, empirical evidence remains limited regarding whether CSR meaningfully enhances brand awareness within this specific institutional and cultural context. This contextual gap highlights the need for further investigation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Corporate Social Responsibility has a positive impact on brand awareness.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility and perceived quality**

Perceived quality, defined as a customer's judgment of a product or service's overall excellence or superiority (Zeithaml, 1988), has increasingly been linked to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in hospitality research. Theoretically, CSR influences perceived quality by serving as a signal of trust and credibility. Because hotel services are largely intangible and cannot

be fully evaluated prior to consumption, customers rely on indirect cues—such as ethical conduct and social responsibility to infer service standards.

CSR initiatives communicate organizational integrity, accountability, and long-term commitment, thereby reducing perceived risk and enhancing quality evaluations (Ahn & Kwon, 2020; Yen & Chen, 2025). Empirical evidence supports this mechanism. Montañés-Del Río et al. (2025) demonstrate that CSR engagement strengthens perceived service quality through trust and emotional satisfaction, while Yikilmaz et al. (2025) find that socially responsible practices such as environmental sustainability and fair employee treatment positively shape judgments of reliability and excellence. Rather and Camilleri (2019) further argue that in experience-based services, ethical brand behavior serves as a heuristic that informs customers' perceptions of quality, particularly when direct performance evaluation is difficult.

However, the influence of CSR on perceived quality is not automatic. Its effectiveness depends on the alignment between CSR initiatives and core service delivery, as well as on customer awareness and perceived authenticity. If CSR is perceived as disconnected from actual service performance or as a superficial branding tactic, it may fail to enhance—and may even undermine quality perceptions.

This concern is particularly relevant in emerging markets such as Ghana, where institutional trust may vary, and customers may scrutinize corporate claims more critically. Despite the growing adoption of CSR practices among Ghanaian hotels, limited empirical research has examined whether CSR meaningfully enhances perceived quality in this hospitality context. This theoretical and contextual gap necessitates further investigation. Based on this context, this paper proposes that:

H3: Corporate Social Responsibility has a positive impact on perceived quality.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and brand loyalty**

Brand loyalty, defined as a consumer's consistent preference for and commitment to repurchase a brand despite external influences (Tran, 2023), has increasingly been associated with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in hospitality research. Theoretically, CSR contributes to loyalty by strengthening relational bonds between customers and brands. Through socially responsible initiatives, hotels communicate shared values, ethical commitment, and long-term societal engagement, which foster trust and emotional attachment, key antecedents of loyalty in service-based industries (Montañés-Del Río et al., 2025).

Empirical evidence supports this relational mechanism. Shah and Jan (2021) and Jaiyeoba et al. (2023) show that perceived CSR enhances customers' intention to remain committed to hotel brands, while Muniz and Guzman (2023) find that CSR engagement can sustain loyalty even when customers face higher prices or competitive alternatives. CSR aligns brand identity with socially conscious consumers' values, thereby deepening psychological commitment beyond mere transactional satisfaction. Abu Zayyad et al. (2021) further argue that CSR fosters emotional identification, transforming customers into advocates who actively support the brand.

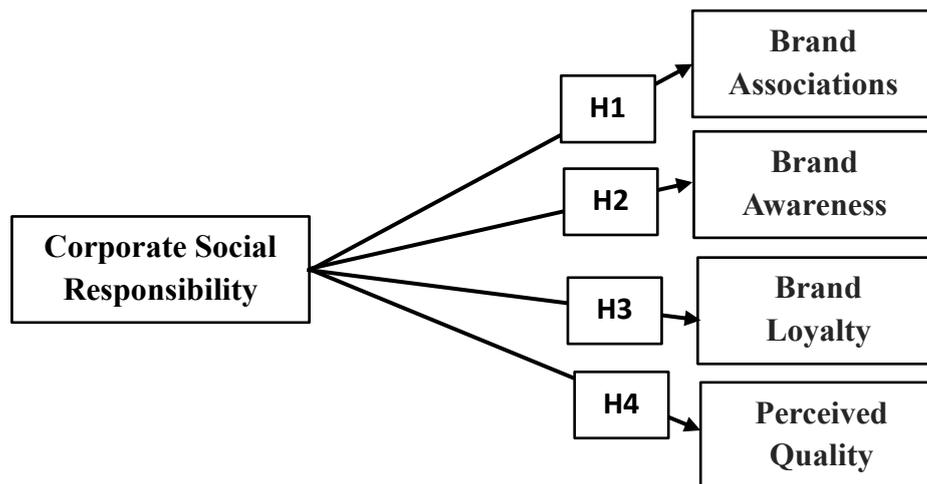
Nevertheless, the influence of CSR on loyalty is contingent rather than automatic. Loyalty effects depend on perceived authenticity, consistency of CSR engagement, and alignment with actual service experiences. If CSR initiatives are viewed as symbolic or disconnected from core service delivery, they may generate skepticism rather than commitment. This concern is particularly relevant in Ghana's hospitality sector, where customer loyalty often develops through relational trust and word-of-mouth rather than extensive brand advertising.

In such contexts, CSR may enhance loyalty only when initiatives are visible, credible, and meaningfully embedded in the service experience. Despite growing CSR adoption among Ghanaian

hotels, limited empirical research has examined whether CSR consistently translates into brand loyalty within this specific institutional and cultural environment. This contextual and theoretical gap warrants systematic investigation. Therefore, this paper proposes that:

H4: Corporate Social Responsibility has a positive impact on brand loyalty.

### The Conceptual Model



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of the Study

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Design

This study employs an explanatory, quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to empirically examine the effect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) in Ghana's hospitality sector. The explanatory design is appropriate because the study seeks to test hypothesized causal relationships between CSR and the four dimensions of CBBE—brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty using statistical modeling.

A cross-sectional approach was employed, with data collected from respondents at a single point in time, enabling assessment of relationships among constructs within the existing market context. The quantitative survey method allows for structured data collection and rigorous empirical testing of the proposed model using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This design is suitable for examining predictive relationships among latent constructs and for drawing evidence-based conclusions regarding the directional influence of CSR on brand equity dimensions in Ghana's hotel industry.

### Sampling Procedure

A non-probability sampling approach was employed due to the absence of a comprehensive database of hotel customers aged 18 years and above in Kumasi, Ghana (Bustos-Rivera et al., 2023). Specifically, the study relied primarily on convenience sampling, in which respondents were approached based on their availability and willingness to participate. To improve the diversity and demographic balance of the sample, elements of quota sampling were incorporated. This approach allowed the researchers to include respondents from different genders and age groups, thereby reducing the risk of overrepresentation of any single demographic category within the collected data.

The sampling process was implemented in stages. In the first stage, several hotel locations and surrounding neighborhoods in Kumasi were identified as data collection points because they attract a regular flow of hotel guests and visitors. In the second stage, potential respondents were approached within these locations and screened to ensure that they were at least 18 years old and had experience with hotel services. In the third stage, gender- and age-based quotas were applied during data collection to maintain demographic balance within the sample.

While this approach helped improve the diversity of respondents, it does not constitute probability sampling and therefore does not permit generalization of the findings to the entire population of hotel customers in Ghana. Instead, the sampling strategy was intended to obtain a diverse and balanced sample of hotel customers in the study context, appropriate for the exploratory analysis of the relationships examined in this research.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using structured, self-administered questionnaires distributed by trained final-year students from Kumasi Technical University. Participation was limited to respondents aged 18 or older who had stayed at a registered hotel in Ghana within the past 12 months, with screening questions to verify eligibility. During the survey, respondents were instructed to answer the questionnaire based on their most recent hotel stay, which served as the unit of analysis for evaluating perceptions of both Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE).

This approach ensured that participants reflected on a specific, recent service experience rather than offering general opinions about hotels as a whole. Although the surveys were administered in respondents' homes to ensure comfort and thoughtful responses, participants were purposively identified within selected neighborhoods in the Kumasi Metropolis to ensure they had relevant and recent hotel experience. Respondents reported stays in different hotel categories, including budget (1–2-star), mid-range (3-star), and upscale (4–5-star), enabling the study to capture experiences across varying service levels.

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test involving 30 participants was conducted to refine the questionnaire and ensure clarity, reliability, and appropriateness of the measurement items. Out of 354 distributed questionnaires, 281 were returned, and after excluding incomplete responses, 249 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. In addition to satisfying the PLS-SEM "10-times rule," a statistical power analysis (assuming four predictors, medium effect size  $f^2 = 0.15$ ,  $\alpha = 0.05$ , and power = 0.80) indicated that a minimum sample size of approximately 85 respondents was required. The final sample of 249 respondents therefore substantially exceeds the recommended threshold, confirming adequate statistical power and supporting the robustness of the study's empirical findings.

### **Analytical Technique**

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was selected as the main analytical technique. The data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4 for structural modeling and IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) for preliminary data screening, including descriptive statistics, missing value analysis, and reliability checks. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for this study because: (1) it is effective for exploratory and explanatory research focusing on prediction rather than overall model fit; (2) it handles complex models with multiple constructs and indicators; (3) it performs well with relatively small to medium sample sizes; and (4) it is robust against violations of normality assumptions (Hair et al., 2019).

Given these advantages, PLS-SEM provides a rigorous and appropriate approach for testing the hypothesized relationships between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Customer-

Based Brand Equity (CBBE) in Ghana's hospitality sector. To assess the significance of the path coefficients, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was performed, as recommended by [Hair et al. \(2019\)](#). Bootstrapping enables the estimation of standard errors, t-values, and confidence intervals without relying on distributional assumptions. A two-tailed significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was adopted as the criterion for hypothesis testing. Path coefficients were considered statistically significant when the corresponding t-values exceeded 1.96, and the p-values were below 0.05.

### Measurement of Constructs

All constructs in this study were measured using established and validated scales adapted from prior literature to ensure content validity, reliability, and relevance to the hospitality context. However, to improve contextual appropriateness for the Ghanaian hotel sector, minor wording adjustments were made to several items so that respondents could clearly relate the statements to their hotel service experiences. General references to "companies" or "firms" in the original scales were modified to refer specifically to "hotels" or "the hotel I stayed in." These adaptations were carefully made to maintain the conceptual meaning of the original items while ensuring that the measures were clearly applicable to the hospitality setting.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was assessed using a three-item scale originally developed by [Brown and Dacin \(1997\)](#). Brand association was measured with a four-item scale adapted from [Dada \(2021\)](#), and perceived quality was measured with a four-item scale adapted from [Parasuraman et al. \(1988\)](#). Brand awareness was evaluated using a five-item scale developed by [Yoo and Donthu \(2001\)](#), and brand loyalty was measured with a four-item scale adapted from [Zeithaml et al. \(1996\)](#).

To ensure content validity, the adapted items were reviewed by two academic experts in marketing and hospitality management, and minor refinements were made to improve clarity and contextual fit. In addition, a pilot test with 30 respondents was conducted prior to the main survey to verify that the wording of the items was clear and understandable for hotel customers in Ghana. All items across the constructs were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. These steps helped ensure that the measurement instruments were both theoretically grounded and contextually appropriate for the Ghanaian hospitality industry.

### Common Method Bias

To address potential concerns related to Common Method Bias (CMB), both procedural and statistical remedies were employed to enhance the credibility and accuracy of the study's findings. Procedurally, the questionnaire was carefully designed to improve clarity and reduce the likelihood of response bias. Items measuring different constructs were randomly distributed throughout the survey, and a mix of positively and negatively worded statements was used to minimize response patterns and encourage more thoughtful responses from participants. These design strategies help reduce respondents' tendency to provide consistent answers based on a single response pattern rather than their true perceptions, thereby lowering the likelihood of systematic measurement bias.

Statistically, Harman's single-factor test was conducted as an ex-post diagnostic to detect any substantial CMB. The results showed that a single factor accounted for only 21% of the total variance, which is well below the 50% threshold, suggesting that common method bias was not a significant concern ([Reio Jr., 2010](#)). To further strengthen this assessment, a marker variable technique was applied through partial correlation analysis. The inclusion of the marker variable did not meaningfully change the magnitude or significance of the relationships among the study constructs, indicating that the observed relationships were not driven by a common measurement source.

In addition, multicollinearity diagnostics were examined, and all inter-construct correlations remained below the 0.70 threshold, suggesting that the constructs were not excessively correlated and that the results are unlikely to be inflated by common method variance (Johnson & LeBreton, 2004). Together, these procedural and statistical assessments provide consistent diagnostic evidence that common method bias is unlikely to threaten the validity of the study's findings.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	145	58.2
	Female	104	41.8
Age	30 years or below	60	24.1
	31–40 years	165	66.3
	41–50 years	14	5.6
	51 years and above	10	4.0
Educational Level	MSLC/JHS	7	2.8
	SHS	47	18.9
	Diploma	117	47.0
	Bachelor's Degree	58	23.3
	Postgraduate	19	7.6
Marital Status	Other	1	0.4
	Single	200	80.5
	Married	47	18.9
	Divorced	2	0.8
	Widowed	1	0.4

Source: Field data (2025)

The demographic characteristics of the 249 respondents who participated in the study as shown in table 1. In terms of gender distribution, 145 respondents (58.2%) were male, and 104 (41.8%) were female, indicating that males comprised the majority of the sample. Regarding age, 60 respondents (24.1%) were aged 30 years or younger, 165 (66.3%) were aged 31 to 40 years, 14 (5.6%) were aged 41 to 50 years, and 10 (4.0%) were aged 51 years or older. This suggests that the largest proportion of participants were in the 31–40 years age group, while the least represented age group was those aged 51 and above.

As for educational attainment, 7 respondents (2.8%) had completed only MSLC/JHS, while 47 (18.9%) had a Senior High School (SHS) qualification. The majority of participants held a diploma (117 respondents, 47.0%), followed by 58-degree holders (23.3%). Additionally, 19 respondents (7.6%) had attained postgraduate education, and 1 respondent (0.4%) reported a different educational background. Regarding marital status, the results showed that the majority of respondents were single (200, 80.5%). This was followed by 47 married individuals (18.5%), 2 divorced respondents (0.8%), and 1 widowed respondent (0.4%).

### Validity and Reliability Assessment

To ensure the robustness of the measurement model, the study first evaluated the constructs for validity and reliability. The results of the convergent validity assessment showed that all key indicators met or exceeded recommended thresholds. Specifically, the Outer Loadings (OL) for all items were above the minimum acceptable level of 0.70, indicating strong item reliability.

Additionally, both Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) values for each

construct exceeded the 0.70 benchmark, indicating internal consistency (Hair Jr. et al., 2017). Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were all above the 0.50 threshold, providing further evidence of adequate convergent validity. These findings suggest that the measurement items are reliable and that the constructs used in the study are valid representations of the underlying theoretical dimensions. Therefore, the model meets the standard criteria for convergent validity and reliability, ensuring that subsequent structural analysis is built on a sound measurement foundation. The detailed results of the convergent validity and reliability tests are presented in Table 2.

The fit indices of the proposed model were assessed using commonly reported model fit indicators. As shown in Table 5, the model produced a Chi-Square value of 567.794, a Normed Fit Index (NFI) of 0.658, and a Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) of 0.064. The SRMR value falls below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating an acceptable level of residual error and suggesting that the model reasonably represents the observed relationships in the data (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). However, the NFI value of 0.658 is below the commonly suggested benchmark of 0.90, indicating that the overall model fit is moderate rather than strong.

This result suggests that while the model demonstrates an acceptable level of fit based on SRMR, it may not fully capture all relationships among the constructs. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, given that the primary objective of PLS-SEM is prediction and explanation of variance rather than strict optimization of model fit, the model remains useful for examining the relationships between Corporate Social Responsibility and the dimensions of Customer-Based Brand Equity in the Ghanaian hotel context.

The structural model results indicate substantial explanatory power and predictive relevance for the proposed framework. The  $R^2$  values show that CSR explains 75.6% of the variance in brand awareness, 72.9% in brand association, 67.2% in perceived quality, and 60.8% in brand loyalty, reflecting strong model performance in capturing the antecedents of customer-based brand equity. The  $f^2$  effect sizes suggest that CSR exerts a large impact on all endogenous constructs, with values ranging from 0.311 to 0.421, indicating that CSR is a meaningful predictor of brand-related outcomes.

Additionally, the  $Q^2$  values, all exceeding zero, confirm that the model possesses predictive relevance, demonstrating its robustness in anticipating customer perceptions in the Ghanaian hospitality context. Collectively, these results validate the significance of CSR in shaping the multiple dimensions of brand equity and support the reliability of the structural relationships examined as outlined in Table 6.

**Table 2.** Validity and Reliability Results

Research Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Rho _A	CR	AVE	Loadings
<b>Brand Association</b>	0.844	0.919	0.897	0.693	
BA1: When I think of this hotel brand, I can easily recall specific characteristics or images associated with it.					0.855
BA2: This hotel brand is associated with positive values, such as trust, comfort, and reliability					0.882
BA3: I can relate this hotel brand to a specific lifestyle or identity.					0.960
BA4: I associate this hotel brand with high standards in service and hospitality					0.904

<b>Brand Awareness</b>	0.953	0.956	0.966	0.876	
BAW1: I am aware of this hotel brand when I think of places to stay.					0.989
BAW2: I can easily recognize this hotel brand among other hotel brands.					0.976
BAW3: I have heard about this hotel brand through advertisements, social media, or word of mouth.					0.979
BAW4: I am familiar with the logo, name, and visual identity of this hotel brand.					0.988
BAW5: When I need hotel services, this brand comes to my mind first.					0.980
<b>Brand Loyalty</b>	0.754	0.766	0.890	0.802	
BL1: I would choose this hotel brand again when I need accommodation.					0.915
BL2: I would recommend this hotel brand to friends and family.					0.983
BL3: I consider myself loyal to this hotel brand compared to other hotels.					0.935
<b>Corporate Social Responsibility</b>	0.992	0.992	0.993	0.967	
CSR1: CSR1: This hotel is committed to protecting the environment through its operations.					0.831
CSR2: This hotel actively supports and contributes to local community development.					0.960
CSR3: The hotel operates ethically and in a socially responsible manner.					0.950
<b>Perceived Quality</b>	0.922	0.933	0.945	0.812	
PQ1: The overall service quality at this hotel exceeds my expectations.					0.884
PQ2: The physical facilities (e.g., rooms, lobby, restaurant) are clean and well-maintained.					0.954
PQ3: Hotel staff demonstrate professionalism and competence in service delivery.					0.959
PQ4: I am confident in the reliability and consistency of the services this hotel provides.					0.946

Source: Field data (2025)

### Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated to ensure that the constructs in the model are both conceptually and statistically distinct. Initially, the Fornell–Larcker Criterion was applied (see Table 3). This criterion requires that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeds the correlations with other constructs in the model.

After carefully re-examining the discriminant validity matrix, it was observed that some inter-construct correlations are relatively high, indicating that certain constructs share substantial variance. This result is not entirely unexpected, as the dimensions of Customer-Based Brand Equity

(CBBE), such as brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, are theoretically related and often interact closely in branding research.

To provide a more robust assessment, discriminant validity was further evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), which is widely recommended as a more sensitive indicator in PLS-SEM analysis. The HTMT values were examined against the recommended threshold of 0.90, and the results indicate that the construct pairs remain within acceptable limits, confirming that the constructs are empirically distinguishable despite their strong relationships. These findings suggest that the relatively high correlations reflect the theoretical interconnectedness of CBBE dimensions rather than measurement overlap. Therefore, the constructs are considered sufficiently distinct to support the validity of the measurement model and the subsequent structural analysis. Additional results related to total effects are presented in Table 4.

**Table 3.** Discriminant Validity

	<b>BA</b>	<b>BAW</b>	<b>BL</b>	<b>CSR</b>	<b>PQ</b>
Band Association	0.901				
Brand Awareness	0.958	0.983			
Brand Loyalty	0.827	0.804	0.945		
Corporate Social Responsibility	0.930	0.934	0.773	0.915	
Perceived Quality	0.863	0.889	0.954	0.818	0.936

Source: Field data (2025)

**Table 4.** Total Effects

	<b>BA</b>	<b>BAW</b>	<b>BL</b>	<b>CSR</b>	<b>PQ</b>
Band Association					
Brand Awareness					
Brand Loyalty					
Corporate Social Responsibility	0.930	0.934	0.773		0.818
Perceived Quality					

Source: Field data (2025)

**Table 5.** Model Fit Summary

	<b>Saturated Model</b>	<b>Estimated Model</b>
SRMR	0.064	0.064
d_ ULS	0.340	0.340
d_G	0.368	0.368
Chi-square	567.794	567.794
NFI	0.658	0.658

Source: Field data (2025)

**Table 6.** Structural Model Assessment:  $R^2$ ,  $f^2$  Effect Sizes, and  $Q^2$  Predictive Relevance

<b>Endogenous Construct</b>	<b><math>R^2</math></b>	<b><math>f^2</math> Effect Size</b>	<b><math>Q^2</math> (Predictive Relevance)</b>
Brand Awareness	0.756	0.421	0.512
Brand Association	0.729	0.398	0.496
Perceived Quality	0.672	0.352	0.443
Brand Loyalty	0.608	0.311	0.398

**Table 7.** Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct	BA	BAW	BL	CSR	PQ
Brand Association (BA)	—	0.88	0.79	0.86	0.82
Brand Awareness (BAW)		—	0.77	0.84	0.83
Brand Loyalty (BL)			—	0.72	0.87
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)				—	0.80
Perceived Quality (PQ)					—

The positive readings across all variables confirm that the model fits the data perfectly.

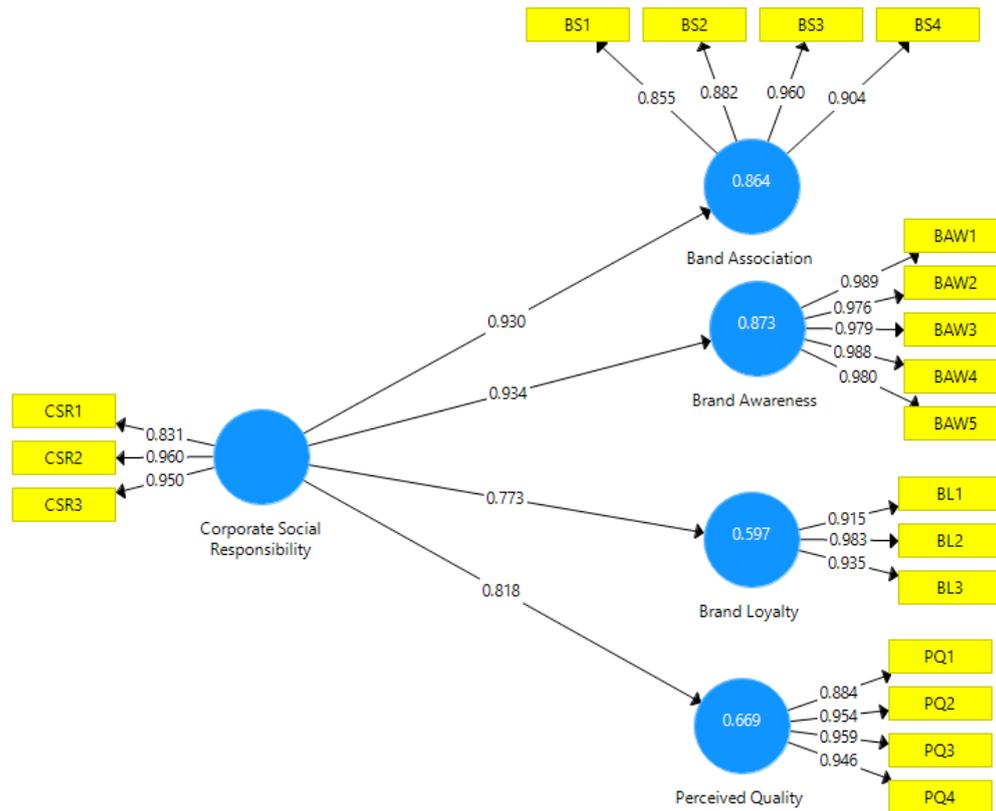
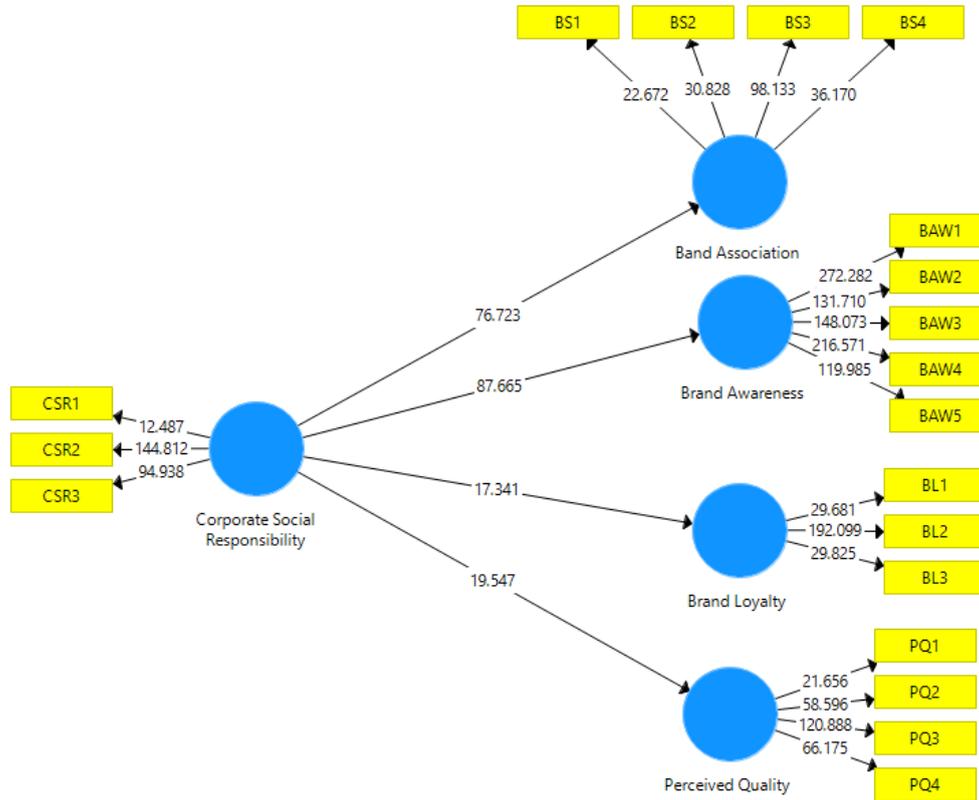


Figure 2. Structural Model of the Path Coefficient



**Figure 3.** Structural Model of The Hypothesized Relationships

**Table 8.** Structural Model from the Hypothesized Relationships

Study's hypothesis	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T Statistics	P Values	Supported/Rejected
CSR-> BA	H1	0.930	78.039	0.000**	Supported
CSR -> BAW	H2	0.934	95.361	0.000**	Supported
CSR -> BL	H3	0.773	18.281	0.000**	Supported
CSR -> PQ	H4	0.818	21.185	0.000**	Supported

Source: Field data (2025)

Note: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Brand Associations (BA), Brand Awareness (BAW), Brand Loyalty (BL), and Perceived Quality (BL).

\*\* = significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; \* = significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

### Discussion

This research evaluates the impact of corporate Social Responsibility on customer-based brand equity in the Ghanaian hotel industry. Table 8 presents the results of hypothesis testing for the association between each pair of factors. The regression analysis revealed that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) had a significant and positive influence on brand associations ( $\beta = 0.930$ ,  $t = 78.039$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. This finding aligns with previous studies in the hospitality sector showing that CSR initiatives strengthen the meanings and values consumers attach to brands.

Studies such as [Montañés-Del Río et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Kucukusta et al. \(2013\)](#) demonstrate that socially responsible practices—including environmental protection, community engagement, and employee welfare enhance customers' emotional and cognitive connections with hotel brands. The mechanism underlying this relationship lies in CSR's signaling function: when hotels demonstrate responsible and ethical behavior, customers interpret these actions as indicators of integrity, care,

and long-term commitment. These signals strengthen both emotional and cognitive brand associations, helping customers embed the brand within their value systems and differentiate it from competitors in the hospitality market.

The Ghanaian context provides additional explanation for the strength of this relationship. In emerging markets such as Ghana, where service standards and institutional trust may be less predictable than in more mature markets, consumers often rely on broader reputational signals such as ethical conduct and social contributions to evaluate firms (Amoako et al., 2021). CSR initiatives, therefore, act as credibility cues that reinforce positive brand meanings and strengthen consumer perceptions. However, the relationship is not unconditional.

Prior research cautions that CSR initiatives must be perceived as authentic and effectively communicated to stakeholders; otherwise, they may generate skepticism rather than positive associations (Rim et al., 2024; Reimann, 2024). Thus, while the findings confirm CSR as a strong driver of brand associations in Ghana's hospitality sector, they also highlight that authenticity, transparency, and strategic communication are critical conditions for translating CSR activities into meaningful brand value.

Secondly, the results indicated that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) had a significantly positive effect on brand awareness ( $\beta = 0.930$ ,  $t = 95.361$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), thereby supporting Hypothesis 2. This finding is consistent with previous studies in the hospitality sector showing that CSR initiatives enhance a hotel's visibility and recognition among consumers. For example, Peña-Miranda et al. (2022) and Goffi et al. (2022) found that when hotel firms actively engage in socially responsible practices such as community development, environmental sustainability, and ethical labor practices, they attract greater public attention, which strengthens brand recall and differentiation.

CSR functions as a signaling and communication mechanism that increases the salience of the brand in consumers' memory. In experience-driven sectors like hospitality, where service quality is difficult to evaluate prior to purchase, CSR activities provide symbolic cues that help brands stand out in competitive markets and foster stronger customer recognition.

The Ghanaian context further explains why CSR may strongly influence brand awareness. In emerging markets such as Ghana, where hospitality firms often rely more on reputation, social networks, and community engagement than on large-scale advertising campaigns, CSR initiatives can be a key pathway for customers to learn about and recognize hotel brands. Activities such as community support programs or environmental initiatives can generate local visibility and positive word-of-mouth, thereby strengthening brand familiarity.

However, this relationship is subject to important boundary conditions. Prior research indicates that CSR initiatives may have a limited impact if they are not effectively communicated or if customers perceive them as insincere (Sideri, 2021; Fan et al., 2025). Therefore, while the findings confirm that CSR contributes significantly to brand awareness in Ghana's hotel sector, they also suggest that transparency, credibility, and consistent communication are essential for ensuring that CSR initiatives translate into meaningful brand recognition.

In addition to the above, the results revealed that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) had a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.773$ ,  $t = 18.281$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), thereby supporting Hypothesis 3. This finding aligns with a growing body of hospitality literature suggesting that CSR initiatives strengthen customer loyalty by fostering trust, identification, and emotional attachment to hotel brands. For example, Montañés-Del Río et al. (2025) found that hotels engaging in visible and authentic CSR practices, such as environmental protection and community support, are more likely to retain customers who feel emotionally connected to the brand.

Similarly, Liu et al. (2025) reported that CSR initiatives aligned with guests' personal values

significantly increase their willingness to remain loyal. In experience-based services such as hospitality, where customer relationships extend beyond functional service delivery, CSR serves as a symbolic cue that deepens psychological commitment and encourages repeat patronage and advocacy behaviors (Tsai, 2011).

The strength of this relationship can also be interpreted within the Ghanaian context. In Ghana's hospitality sector, where customer trust and reputation play an essential role in service choice, socially responsible actions may reinforce relational bonds between hotels and guests. Community engagement, environmental responsibility, and ethical treatment of employees can resonate strongly with customers who value businesses that contribute positively to society.

This may explain why the findings align with studies conducted in other regions, yet are particularly salient in emerging markets, where relational trust and social reputation strongly influence consumer behavior. However, the relationship is not unconditional. Previous studies indicate that CSR perceived as insincere or poorly communicated can lead to skepticism and weaken loyalty (Ryoo, 2025; Liu et al., 2024). Therefore, while CSR appears to be a significant driver of brand loyalty in Ghana's hotel industry, its effectiveness ultimately depends on authenticity, credibility, and consistent communication of CSR initiatives.

The final results indicated that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) had a significant and positive effect on perceived quality ( $\beta = 0.818$ ,  $t = 21.185$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), thereby supporting Hypothesis 4. This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that CSR initiatives shape how customers evaluate service quality in the hospitality sector. Thomas (2022) and Montañés-Del Río et al. (2025) show that when hotels engage in socially responsible practices such as environmental conservation, fair treatment of employees, and community engagement, customers often perceive their services as more trustworthy, dependable, and professionally delivered. CSR, therefore, functions as a quality signal, creating a halo effect that positively influences guests' perceptions of service standards.

Within the Ghanaian context, this relationship may be particularly salient because customers frequently rely on reputational and ethical cues when evaluating service providers. In environments where institutional trust and service standards can vary, visible CSR initiatives may signal organizational reliability and professionalism, thereby reinforcing perceived service quality (Wahyuni et al., 2023; Narayanan, 2022). This helps explain why the present findings are broadly consistent with results reported in other regions and highlights the heightened importance of CSR signals in emerging hospitality markets such as Ghana.

However, the relationship between CSR and perceived quality is not universal and may vary across contexts. Fan et al. (2025) caution that if CSR initiatives are poorly aligned with the core service offering, customers may view them as symbolic gestures rather than indicators of quality. Similarly, Koh et al. (2022) argue that the influence of CSR on perceived quality depends heavily on consumer awareness and the perceived authenticity of CSR initiatives.

In Ghana's hospitality sector, where word-of-mouth communication and social reputation strongly shape customer perceptions, CSR initiatives that are integrated into everyday service practices—such as sustainable operations, local sourcing, or community-based tourism—may have a stronger influence on perceived quality than externally communicated CSR campaigns. Thus, while the present study confirms the positive role of CSR in shaping perceived quality, it also suggests that contextual factors such as trust dynamics, service transparency, and authentic engagement with local communities may help explain why CSR effects in Ghana's hospitality industry can be particularly pronounced compared with those in some developed market contexts.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study makes a precise theoretical contribution by extending the Customer-Based Brand

Equity (CBBE) model (Aaker, 1991) beyond its traditional focus on brand-related marketing activities and product/service attributes. While Aaker conceptualized brand equity as comprising brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, the model did not explicitly theorize Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a foundational antecedent of these dimensions. This study advances the framework by empirically positioning CSR as a strategic upstream driver that simultaneously influences all four brand equity components. In doing so, it reconceptualizes CSR not as an external reputational variable, but as an integrated brand-building mechanism embedded within the CBBE structure.

Second, the study provides empirical evidence that CSR is a direct antecedent of each dimension of CBBE in an emerging-market hospitality context. Specifically, the findings confirm that CSR significantly enhances brand awareness (by increasing brand visibility and recall through socially responsible initiatives), strengthens brand associations (by embedding ethical and sustainability-related meanings into brand image), elevates perceived quality (by signaling reliability and trustworthiness), and reinforces brand loyalty (by fostering emotional attachment and long-term commitment). This comprehensive validation responds to calls for contextual testing of brand equity models in non-Western and service-intensive environments, thereby strengthening the cross-context robustness of Aaker's framework.

Beyond the general conclusion that "CSR matters," this study offers a more nuanced insight: CSR operates as both a cognitive signal and an affective cue in service branding. In the hospitality sector, where offerings are intangible and experiential, customers rely heavily on symbolic and ethical cues to evaluate service providers. The findings therefore demonstrate that CSR simultaneously reduces perceived risk, enhances brand meaning, and deepens relational bonds. This clarifies the mechanism through which CSR translates into brand equity, rather than merely establishing a positive association.

Furthermore, by validating this integrated CSR-CBBE model in Ghana's hospitality industry, the study contributes to theory development in emerging market contexts. It shows that CSR-driven brand equity formation is not confined to developed economies but is equally salient in markets characterized by growing social and environmental awareness.

Thus, the study refines brand equity theory by embedding CSR within its structural logic and advances CSR theory by demonstrating its measurable impact on specific brand equity dimensions rather than on generalized reputational outcomes. Collectively, these contributions provide theoretical precision by (1) extending Aaker's model structurally, (2) empirically validating CSR as a multidimensional antecedent of CBBE, and (3) clarifying the cognitive and affective pathways through which CSR strengthens brand equity in emerging market hospitality settings.

### **Managerial Implications**

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for hotel managers and decision-makers aiming to strengthen their brand equity through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Specifically, the results highlight that brand association, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and perceived quality are all significantly influenced by consumers' perceptions of CSR initiatives.

Therefore, hotel managers should not view CSR as merely a philanthropic add-on but as a strategic branding tool that can enhance customer perceptions and drive long-term loyalty. Incorporating CSR into branding strategies can help firms build stronger emotional and cognitive connections with guests, which in turn supports competitive differentiation and brand resilience, especially in volatile markets like Ghana.

Practically, hotel businesses are encouraged to invest in CSR programs that are visible, authentic, and aligned with customer values. These could include environmentally sustainable practices such as reducing energy and water consumption, minimizing waste, and protecting local

ecosystems.

Additionally, social initiatives such as partnering with local suppliers, supporting community development projects, or providing fair working conditions can strengthen brand associations and enhance customer trust. Importantly, these initiatives should be effectively communicated through marketing and public relations efforts to increase brand awareness and reinforce perceived quality. By embedding CSR into the brand's core identity, hotel managers can foster deeper brand loyalty and position their businesses as responsible, customer-oriented entities in the eyes of increasingly socially conscious consumers.

### **Recommendations of the Study**

For hospitality practitioners, the study highlights the strategic role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in enhancing customer-based brand equity. Hotel managers should embed CSR into their core service delivery by focusing on initiatives such as environmental conservation, fair labor practices, and community engagement. Beyond implementing these practices, managers need to ensure authenticity and effective communication, making CSR visible to guests through transparent reporting, staff training, and integration into daily operations. By aligning CSR with service quality and customer experience, hotels can build stronger emotional bonds with consumers, improve brand loyalty, and achieve long-term competitiveness in Ghana's hospitality sector.

Policymakers and regulatory bodies should establish supportive frameworks that encourage and reward authentic CSR practices in the hospitality industry. This could include certification schemes, tax incentives, or recognition programs for hotels that demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainability and social development. Government agencies should also promote awareness campaigns to educate both businesses and consumers on the value of CSR, ensuring that responsible practices are widely recognized and incentivized. Additionally, fostering partnerships between hotels, communities, and governmental organizations can create shared value, enhance institutional trust, and contribute to Ghana's broader sustainable development goals.

For academics, this study underscores the need for further research exploring the mechanisms and boundary conditions that shape the CSR-brand equity relationship in emerging economies. Future studies could examine moderating factors such as consumer skepticism, cultural values, or communication strategies to better understand when and how CSR initiatives strengthen or weaken brand outcomes. Longitudinal and comparative studies across different regions or service sectors would also provide deeper insights into the sustainability of CSR's impact over time. By refining theoretical models and incorporating diverse contextual factors, researchers can enrich the discourse on CSR's role in service-based industries and offer more nuanced guidance for both practitioners and policymakers.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study examined the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) within the Ghanaian hotel industry, focusing on four key dimensions: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. The findings confirm that CSR exerts a significant and positive effect on all four dimensions. However, the results also reveal meaningful differences in the relative strength of these relationships. Among the four dimensions, CSR shows the strongest influence on brand awareness ( $\beta = 0.930$ ), brand association ( $\beta = 0.933$ ), followed by perceived quality ( $\beta = 0.818$ ) and brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.773$ ).

This pattern suggests that CSR initiatives primarily function as mechanisms that increase brand visibility and shape how customers cognitively interpret and associate values with hotel brands. In other words, socially responsible activities appear to first strengthen customers'

recognition and mental connection of positive meanings, such as ethical responsibility, community engagement, and environmental care, with the hotel brand.

These findings provide important insights into the role of CSR as a branding mechanism in the hospitality industry. In service-oriented sectors where customers often rely on reputation and symbolic cues to evaluate firms, CSR operates as a powerful signal that enhances brand recognition and reinforces favorable brand meanings. By strengthening brand awareness and associations, CSR helps hotels differentiate themselves in competitive markets and build a distinctive brand identity rooted in social and environmental responsibility.

Over time, these enhanced perceptions contribute to improved evaluations of service quality and foster deeper customer loyalty. Therefore, CSR should be viewed not merely as an ethical obligation or reputational tool, but as a strategic brand-building mechanism that shapes how hotel brands are recognized, interpreted, and trusted by customers within Ghana's evolving hospitality landscape.

### **LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH**

Despite its contributions, this study has several methodological limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research employed a cross-sectional survey design, which limits the ability to draw strong causal inferences and to observe how CSR affects Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) over time. Although PLS-SEM enables the testing of directional relationships, the design captures perceptions at a single point in time. Future studies should adopt longitudinal or time-lagged designs to examine whether CSR initiatives gradually build brand loyalty, strengthen perceived quality, and deepen brand associations over extended periods. Such designs would provide stronger evidence of temporal ordering and cumulative brand-building effects.

Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported, single-source data collected from hotel guests, which may introduce common method bias and perceptual inflation. Future research should incorporate multi-source data by combining customer perceptions with managerial reports on CSR investment, third-party CSR ratings, or objective performance indicators. Integrating multiple data sources would enhance robustness and reduce potential bias associated with perceptual measures.

Third, while the study tested structural relationships using survey data, it did not employ experimental controls. Future research could utilize experimental or quasi-experimental designs, such as exposing participants to different CSR communication messages or comparing hotels with high versus low CSR visibility. Manipulating CSR communication exposure would allow researchers to isolate causal mechanisms and determine whether CSR messaging directly enhances brand awareness, trust, and loyalty.

Additionally, this study applied a purely quantitative approach, which limits deeper insight into the psychological mechanisms underlying the CSR-brand equity relationship. Future research should consider mixed-method approaches, incorporating qualitative interviews or focus groups to explore why and how CSR signals trustworthiness, quality, and emotional attachment to guests in Ghana. Such qualitative insights could uncover culturally specific interpretations of CSR and refine theoretical explanations of its signaling effects in hospitality contexts.

Finally, while the study was grounded in Aaker's multidimensional CBBE framework, future research may extend the model by integrating complementary constructs such as emotional attachment, brand experience, or customer satisfaction to capture a more holistic brand-building process. Comparative studies across different hospitality segments (luxury, mid-range, and budget hotels) or across emerging and developed markets would further clarify contextual variations in the CSR-CBBE relationship. By addressing these methodological and contextual limitations, future research can move beyond cross-sectional association testing toward stronger causal inference, deeper theoretical explanation, and broader generalizability of CSR's role in shaping brand equity.

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