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THE IMPACT OF HOPEBOX CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON BRAND LOYALTY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CONSUMER TRUST

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Abstract:

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an important marketing tool because of worries about the environment, globalization, and rising social expectations. Today's consumers want companies to act morally and actively solve social and environmental problems. Organizations are therefore moving from conventional advertising toward more community-oriented and ethical marketing techniques. Beyond charitable endeavors, CSR has become a key component of brand positioning and differentiation that helps companies to establish trust, improve reputation, and keep their competitiveness in a society-

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aware market. This study explores the connection between brand loyalty and CSR activities, with a special emphasis on the mediating part of consumer trust in the context of the Hopebox Program at a private university in Selangor. The Hopebox Program is an illustration of how universities may lead social responsibility by means of volunteer-driven food distribution projects meant to lower social exclusion and assist underprivileged metropolitan areas. From 120 respondents chosen with purposive sampling, including those enrolled in media studies and communication-related programs, quantitative data were gathered through survey questionnaires. To assess the measurement and structural models, the gathered data were examined using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The results show that social and ethical responsibility greatly improve brand loyalty, but commercial responsibility does not noticeably affect it. Moreover, consumer trust controls the link between brand loyalty and social responsibility, therefore stressing its crucial part in strengthening stakeholder involvement. This study helps to improve brand value of companies looking to do so via practical consequences for higher education and volunteer-based settings by expanding knowledge of CSR. The results also show how, by tackling food insecurity and supporting social inclusion, CSR initiatives help the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Still, the concentration on one organization reduces generalisability; hence, more study should investigate many educational environments for more general comparative knowledge.

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Keywords:

Brand Loyalty, Commercial Responsibility, Consumer Trust, Corporate Social Responsibility, Hopebox Program



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Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a crucial strategic effort in multiple sectors, including education. As organizations encounter mounting pressure to tackle societal, environmental, and ethical issues, CSR has transformed from a voluntary charitable endeavor into a fundamental corporate practice (Qureshi, 2025). SR initiatives now include sustainability, ethical governance, community engagement, and social welfare, and in higher education they are increasingly tied to value creation, stakeholder attraction, and institutional reputation (Lessa & Coelho, 2024). In Malaysia, the importance of CSR in education has grown significantly in recent years. Following the Malaysian government's directive in 2009 to embed CSR into public universities, many higher education institutions have formally adopted CSR as part of their core operations, particularly in areas such as sustainability, community outreach,

and ethical governance (L. Yan et al., 2025). Recent empirical studies further highlight the growing significance of CSR in Malaysian higher education. A comparative study involving 600 students from both public and private universities found that CSR initiatives positively influence brand equity and brand loyalty, with private institutions leveraging CSR to strengthen competitive positioning (Echezona, 2024a). Another study involving 300 students at a Malaysian private university demonstrated that CSR directly enhances brand image and indirectly boosts brand loyalty through consumer trust (Jeromina, 2024). Additionally, CSR programs targeting primary and secondary schools, such as scholarship schemes and community outreach projects, have improved educational access and outcomes, although concerns regarding the sustainability of such initiatives remain (Tan et al., 2021). Similarly, research at a Malaysian private university found that CSR positively affects brand reputation, brand trust, and brand loyalty, including indirect effects through trust (Tan et al., 2021).

Amid these developments, CSR has emerged as a strategic mechanism for universities to enhance their brand image, build consumer trust, and foster long-term loyalty. Social Identification Theory suggests that CSR initiatives can strengthen stakeholders' emotional bonds with an institution by fostering shared values and social connections, thus encouraging loyalty (Mallick et al., 2021). Furthermore, university-led CSR projects help to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), by tackling food insecurity and helping underprivileged areas via volunteer-driven projects. Such projects not only have good societal effects but also help to confirm stakeholders' alignment with the organization, therefore building trust, reputation, and long-term loyalty. Furthermore, within the higher education sector, particularly among private institutions in Malaysia, there remains a limited understanding of how CSR initiatives influence brand loyalty through the mediating role of consumer trust (Latif et al., 2021). While prior studies have examined CSR's effects on consumer behaviour in corporate settings, their findings cannot be readily generalized to educational institutions, which operate under distinct value systems and stakeholder expectations (Lessa & Coelho, 2024). However, there remains limited evidence in higher education on how specific CSR dimensions shape loyalty through consumer trust, especially in the Malaysian context. Recent work outside education shows that CSR dimensions do not affect trust and image uniformly: economic, legal, and philanthropic responsibilities were linked to customer trust, while different dimensions showed different pathways to corporate image through trust mediation (Chen et al., 2021). This supports the need to examine more precisely how commercial, ethical, and social responsibility influence brand loyalty through consumer trust in university settings. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationships between CSR dimensions and brand loyalty, with a focus on the mediating effect of consumer trust. Specifically, the study identifies the impact of commercial, ethical, and social responsibilities embedded in the Hopebox Program at private institutions on brand loyalty among university staff. By addressing this gap, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of CSR initiatives as tools for strengthening institutional reputation and stakeholder loyalty in Malaysian higher education.

Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility

In the last few years, firms and academia have become very interested in corporate social responsibility. CSR is the phrase for the voluntary steps a corporation takes to make sure that its operations are good for the economy, society, and the environment CSR extends beyond the

legal compliance that surround the primary and secondary activities of an organization, based on three main principles: (a) the principle of mutual benefit, which involves achieving economic, political, and social results; (b) the legal principle, respecting and extending social rights; and (c) the ethical principle, which helps to preserve future generations by addressing the primary social, economic, and environmental challenges (Alaidaros & Mohamad, 2026; Mohammed et al., 2025). To adhere to business ethics, corporate social responsibility is a sort of rational philosophy that relates to social contracts. From a marketing perspective, adherence to CSR principles leads to enhanced long-term performance. CSR initiatives significantly improve financial performance by strengthening corporate reputation and client loyalty (Mohammed et al., 2025). Moreover, CSR promotes sustainable development and green innovation, essential for long-term viability (Arhinful et al., 2025), while fostering trust and collaboration with stakeholders (Coelho et al., 2023).

Corporate Social Responsibility in Education

In higher education, social responsibility is increasingly treated as part of the university mission, not only as an add-on activity (Alsrehan, 2025). Recent education-focused studies describe universities as institutions that shape citizenship, sustainability awareness, and students' ethical and social orientation (Saari et al., 2024). As knowledge institutions and moral stewards, universities are in a unique position to embed CSR values among students. However, existing research highlights a fragmented and inconsistent application of CSR within academic contexts. Scholars argue that early exposure to CSR principles significantly affects young adults' ethical reasoning, social consciousness, and professional values (Agustina et al., 2022). Saari et al. (2024) mention that the younger generation will shape the future of CSR through their roles as future managers, consumers, and citizens. However, (Yessentayeva et al. 2026) caution that awareness alone does not guarantee behaviour change or commitment to CSR principles. (Coelho & Menezes, 2021) found that while students often express interest in social responsibility, not all internalize the value necessary for its sustained application. Educational effort that merely informs students about CSR without engaging them experientially or emotionally tends to be insufficient (Agustina et al., 2022). Hence, a pedagogical shift towards transformative, experiential, and value-based learning is essential for creating lasting impacts. Moreover, when CSR is not embedded into institutional or cultural or pedagogical practices, it risks being perceived as performative rather than principled. This undermines student trust in CSR initiatives and may even foster skepticism toward CSR commitments in the workplace later.

Parallel to these perspectives, CSR initiatives increasingly shape educational institutions by promoting ethical practices, community participation, and mutual benefits for both students and corporations (Qu et al., 2025). Academic structures nowadays prioritize research productivity and individual achievement over civic engagement and ethical development (Licandro et al., 2024). As a result, CSR initiatives may be seen as additional rather than integral to academic development. Agustina et al. (2022) stress that meaningful CSR exposure within universities is crucial in cultivating students who value, trust, and remain loyal to ethically driven brands (Aldulaimi et al., 2025). These collective efforts not only build corporate reputation and brand loyalty (Echezona, 2024b), but also support ethical leadership within corporate human resource management. CSR in education also refers to an institution's voluntary initiatives to improve educational access, infrastructure, and quality, often targeting underserved communities. Education that focuses on CSR fosters long-term societal development while simultaneously shaping a favorable public image for the brand.

Furthermore, students' emotional engagement with CSR aligns with their values later in life. Thus, institutions that fail to provide structured, impactful CSR learning risk diminishing their roles as agents of change within the broader CSR ecosystem.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Social Identification Theory suggests that consumers' positive perception of a company influences their identification with the company, based on shared characteristics and values (Wang, 2025). Studies by Raza et al. (2020) confirm that consumer trust in a company's CSR activities leads to consumer commitment and identification with the company. Social identification refers to the sense of belonging to a particular group. Research by Min et al. (2023) suggests that CSR initiatives can strengthen customer loyalty due to the more positive perception of such firms. We propose that better CSR performance can lead to improved corporate innovation by enhancing the company's societal recognition. Building on this perspective, we propose that consistent and authentic CSR performance enhances societal recognition and strengthens stakeholder attachment, thereby fostering brand loyalty.

In this study, the theory supports a mediated framework rather than a simple direct-effect model. Recent evidence shows that CSR often affects loyalty through intervening psychological mechanisms, especially trust and customer identification with the company. Other studies show the direct CSR to loyalty path weakens or disappears once mediators are included (Glaveli, 2020). This is important to link the framework modeling consumer trust as a mediator instead of treating loyalty as an automatic result of CSR exposure. It also supports the view that authentic and well-aligned CSR matters more than CSR in name only, because fit, attribution, and authenticity shape whether stakeholders actually trust and identify with the organization (Min et al., 2023). The commercial, ethical, and social responsibilities are not just operational dimensions; it distinct cues of institutional character that stakeholders use to judge whether the university is competent, fair, and socially committed (Hayat et al., 2023). This is why consumer trust is theoretically defensible as a mediator in the framework, where CSR first shapes perceptions of integrity and shared values, and those perceptions then translate into loyalty (Irshad et al., 2024).

Commercial Responsibility

Through the implementation of corporate social responsibility, higher education can position itself as a proactive agent of social change. They can address urgent environmental concerns and encourage conscientious decision-making. By doing this, they can improve society and strengthen the credibility of their brand. According to Omidvar et al. (2025), brand loyalty is positively impacted by CSR implementation and efforts. It will therefore benefit the business, which increases its competitive advantage and helps it maintain its edge over competitors. In their study of CSR practices in private institutions in Malaysia, Rasoolimanesh et al., (2023) discovered a clear and positive correlation between brand loyalty and CSR. Using the Hierarchy of Effects Model as a foundation, their study showed how CSR activities, including environmental efforts, community involvement, and ethical governance, strengthen students' psychological connections and commitment to their institution. Additionally, a study by Irshad et al., (2024) provides a comprehensive overview of the intricate relationships between CSR, brand association, and brand loyalty within the Chinese market. Chinese consumers have high standards for social and corporate responsibility, and companies that successfully meet these expectations have a competitive advantage in building brand loyalty. Most importantly, it was

found that brand loyalty and a company's corporate image might be improved by being informed about its CSR activities. In a study by Chen et al., (2021), the primary objectives of the research were to find out what consumers thought of different CSR activities and how CSR affected brand loyalty and image. The study's main findings were that, even though many consumers did not know what corporate social responsibility was, they believed businesses needed to be socially responsible. Furthermore, establishing a favourable environmental relationship, which forms the base of the CSR concept, will contribute to the development of stakeholder confidence as well as brand loyalty. To stand out from the competition and promote brand loyalty, higher education institutions are increasingly adopting commercial responsibility, mainly through CSR. Increased competitiveness and rising expectations from socially conscious stakeholders and students are the main drivers of this strategic shift. Thus, this research makes the following hypothesis:

H1. Commercial responsibility has a significant influence on brand loyalty.

Ethical Responsibility

Ethical responsibility within the scope of CSR refers to a firm's commitment to fairness, honesty, and doing what is right beyond regulatory compliance. In the education sector, this includes practices such as equitable access to learning resources, transparency in governance, and integrity in faculty-student relations. Prior research has consistently demonstrated that ethical responsibility enhances brand loyalty by fostering positive emotional connections. Qureshi (2025) emphasise that when stakeholders perceive an organisation as ethically responsible, they develop favourable attitudes that contribute to brand allegiance. This is particularly important in educational institutions, where brand loyalty translates not only into sustained enrolment but also into strong alumni networks and institutional reputation. Education is a high-involvement service where emotional and value-based perceptions significantly influence stakeholder decisions. Ethical behaviour by educational institutions assures stakeholders, including students, parents, and the wider community, of the credibility and trustworthiness of the brand. Yessentayeva et al., (2026) suggest that ethical conduct builds symbolic capital, which strengthens stakeholder loyalty in the long run. The ethical responsibility of brands significantly drives consumer loyalty, particularly through transparency, sustainability, and social responsibility. Studies indicate that CSR initiatives improve customer confidence and loyalty. In addition, sustainable marketing practices are fundamental in influencing consumer behaviour (Jeromina, 2024). The interaction of these factors strengthens brand relationships and influences purchasing decisions. This loyalty extends beyond immediate service satisfaction and enters the domain of institutional advocacy and word-of-mouth promotion. It becomes more than a moral obligation; it is a strategic imperative that enhances institutional loyalty through consistent value alignment with stakeholders' expectations.

H2. Ethical responsibility has a significant influence on brand loyalty.

Social Responsibility

Social responsibility has a significant influence on brand loyalty is well-supported in both corporate and educational contexts. As educational institutions become more market-oriented, their brand value increasingly depends on how stakeholders such as students, parents, and the wider community will perceive their commitment to ethical, social, and environmental responsibilities. In this regard, CSR is not just a moral obligation but a strategic tool for fostering loyalty. (Godonoga & Sporn, 2023) found that CSR practices in universities, such as

scholarships, green campus initiatives, and inclusive policies, will enhance students' emotional attachment and loyalty toward the institution. Their study highlights that CSR is most effective when it aligns with stakeholder values and is consistently communicated through brand messaging. (Latif et al., 2021; Salem & Salem, 2021) also affirm that CSR positively affects customer loyalty across service sectors, including education. Their structural equation model demonstrates that CSR efforts significantly improve brand equity by shaping favourable attitudes and emotional connections, which are precursors to loyalty. Moreover, Lessa & Coelho, (2024) emphasise that stakeholders respond not just to what an institution does, but how sincerely it does it, CSR must be authentic to produce long-term loyalty outcomes. In Malaysia, Kim-soon et al., (2015) investigated the private higher education sector and found a strong positive relationship between CSR and student loyalty. Their study suggests that socially responsible actions enhance the credibility of educational brands, especially when CSR addresses local community needs and student welfare. However, critics argue that CSR's influence on loyalty may be overstated if initiatives are perceived as superficial or disconnected from core institutional values. This underscores the importance of integrating CSR into institutional culture rather than treating it as a mere marketing strategy.

H3. Social responsibility has a significant influence on brand loyalty.

The Mediating Effect of Consumer Trust

In the evolving landscape of ethical business and sustainability, consumer trust has emerged as a critical mediator in the relationship between CSR and brand loyalty. As consumers increasingly expect organisations to demonstrate social and environmental responsibility, the perceived sincerity and credibility of CSR initiatives greatly influence their attitudes and behaviours toward brands (Min et al., 2023). Therefore, trust plays a pivotal role in translating CSR perceptions into sustained loyalty. Consumer trust is defined as the willingness of a consumer to rely on a brand based on the belief that it will act in their best interest (Iglesias et al., 2018). In the context of CSR, trust is developed when stakeholders perceive a brand's actions to be authentic, consistent, and aligned with socially desired goals (Echezona, 2024a). Trust enhances a customer's confidence in a brand's intentions, particularly in complex and ethically sensitive domains. When companies engage in CSR initiatives that resonate with consumers' values, trust is reinforced, leading to stronger brand relationships and advocacy behaviours (Fatma & Khan, 2023). Consumers who trust a brand because of its social responsibility are more likely to remain loyal, even when facing competitive alternatives. The mediating role of trust in the CSR and brand loyalty relationship has been widely examined in marketing and consumer behaviour literature. This mediation is particularly significant in settings involving youth or student populations, who tend to be sceptical of traditional marketing but responsive to brands that align with their ethical and social values (Saari et al., 2024). If CSR education at universities is inadequate or perceived as insincere, it may prevent students from developing trust in CSR claims, thereby weakening their emotional connection to brands advocating such values.

H4. Consumer trust has a significant influence on brand loyalty.

Recent research provides strong evidence for the mediating role of trust. Consumer trust is frequently identified as the critical mediating factor that bridges the relationship between corporate responsibility and brand loyalty. In a Malaysian private university context, Saari et al. (2024) conducted an empirical investigation of this relationship and discovered that trust and brand reputation fully mediated the link between CSR and brand loyalty, and according to their findings, taking responsible actions alone is insufficient unless it builds trust among

stakeholders. Figueiredo et al., (2026) say a sense of emotional connection arises when consumers see brands as dependable, trustworthy, and aligned with their values and beliefs. When the business acts ethically, actively engages in impactful CSR initiatives, and pioneers green innovation, consumers perceive the company as genuinely committed to creating positive social and environmental change, rather than solely prioritizing profit. Corporate social responsibility initiatives, like ethical practices, environmental efforts, and community engagement, significantly improve customer perceptions, according to an article by Mousa, (2025) that examines the effect of CSR on customer trust and loyalty within the Greek mobile telecommunications sector. Customers are possible to trust businesses that actively participate in CSR because they perceive their efforts as genuine and socially conscious. As a result of this trust, customers become more loyal, which promotes repeat business and brand appreciation. Maximizing CSR's influence on customer trust and brand loyalty requires integrating it into fundamental business operations. conducted a literature review examining how consumer trust and brand loyalty are affected by CSR, emphasizing CSR as a strategic tool for creating sustainable relationships with consumers. Based on several empirical studies, the authors demonstrate how initiatives related to CSR, like community service, environmental stewardship, and ethical corporate practices, facilitate the growth of strong emotional bonds between customers and brands. These relationships enhance trust, which is essential for customer loyalty and decision-making. According to the review, authentic CSR initiatives that are in line with consumer values are more successful than conventional marketing techniques in fostering trust and loyalty, making CSR an essential part of modern brand strategy. Accordingly, this research puts forward the following hypothesis:

H5. Consumer trust mediates the relationship between commercial responsibility and brand loyalty.

Numerous studies suggest that the influence of ethical responsibility is channeled through consumer trust, which acts as a critical psychological mediator. Trust refers to the readiness to be vulnerable to another party's actions, grounded in the expectation of positive behavior (X. Yan et al., 2022). In the educational context, where services are intangible and quality is difficult to assess in the short term, trust becomes central to stakeholder decision-making. Iglesias et al. (2018) argue that ethical behavior encourages trust, which in turn fosters brand commitment. This trust is cultivated when institutions demonstrate transparency, accountability, and fairness as key evidence of ethical responsibility. (X. Chen et al., 2025) further support this by showing that CSR-driven ethical behavior builds emotional trust, which then sustains brand loyalty, especially in high-involvement services like education. Yessentayeva et al. (2026) found that companies exhibiting ethical responsibility saw increased brand loyalty only when trust was established because of those actions. Aligned with this, consumer confidence also acts as a key driver in bridging the gap between ethical practices and customer loyalty. Research indicates that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives significantly increase brand confidence, which in turn promotes customer loyalty (Mousa, 2025). In addition, (Min et al., 2023) highlights co-creation as a factor that strengthens both trust and loyalty, while Rasoolimanesh et al. (2023) identify brand reputation as a critical mediator within this dynamic. This perspective aligns with the theoretical framework of stakeholder theory (Wang, 2025), which posits that institutions are morally accountable to their stakeholders, and trust serves as the foundation for lasting stakeholder relationships. Thus, ethical responsibilities alone may not guarantee brand loyalty unless they are internalized by stakeholders through trust and confidence. Accordingly, testing the mediating role of consumer trust and confidence offers a more nuanced understanding of how ethical responsibility and

CSR initiatives affect brand outcomes in educational settings. Thus, this research makes the following hypothesis:

H6. Consumer trust mediates the relationship between ethical responsibility and brand loyalty.

Consumer trust mediates the relationship between social responsibility and brand loyalty has gained increasing relevance in educational settings, where reputation, ethical behavior, and trust are key drivers of stakeholder loyalty. While corporate social responsibility (CSR) can directly influence brand loyalty, growing evidence suggests that trust functions as a critical psychological mechanism that facilitates this relationship. Irshad et al. (2024) assert that CSR activities build a positive institutional image that strengthens consumer trust, which subsequently enhances brand loyalty. Using structural equation modelling in service sectors, including education, their findings support the mediating role of trust in translating CSR into behavioral loyalty. In educational institutions, this is especially crucial, as students and parents seek alignment between institutional values and personal beliefs. Similarly, Echezona, (2024b) found that CSR influences brand loyalty more significantly when mediated by trust. Their study emphasizes that when students perceive CSR efforts as sincere and beneficial to society, they are more likely to develop trust in the institution, which in turn deepens brand attachment. Iglesias et al. (2018) further support this mechanism by showing that perceived authenticity of CSR initiatives fosters trust, which then drives brand loyalty. They caution, however, that any discrepancy between CSR messaging and actual practices can diminish trust and, consequently, brand commitment. This highlights the relevance of CSR transparency and alignment with institutional behaviour. In Malaysia, Kim-soon et al. (2015) conducted a study on private higher education and concluded that CSR had no significant direct effect on brand loyalty unless trust was established. This reinforces the idea that trust is not only a mediator but also a necessary condition for CSR to influence loyalty, particularly in educational environments where stakeholders are highly sensitive to credibility and value alignment.

H7. Consumer trust mediates the relationship between social responsibility and brand loyalty.

The conceptual framework proposed for this study is illustrated in Figure 1. According to the framework, commercial responsibility, ethical responsibility, and social responsibility are treated as independent variables, while brand loyalty is the dependent variable. The framework also incorporates the mediating role of consumer trust in the relationship between CSR factors and brand loyalty.

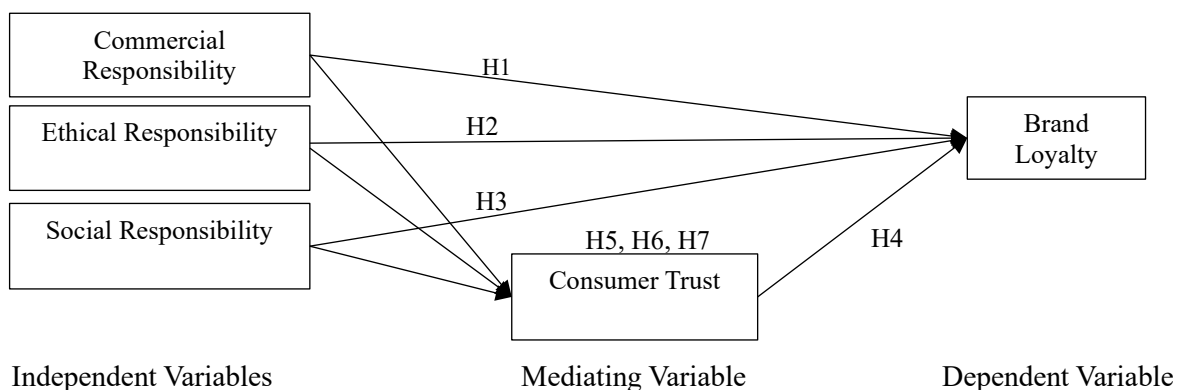


Figure 1: Research Framework

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section collected sociodemographic information of university staff, including gender, age, education level, and job position. The second section measured the impact of CSR dimensions on brand loyalty towards the Hopebox program, namely commercial responsibility, ethical responsibility, social responsibility, consumer trust, and brand loyalty. All measurement items were adapted from well-established prior studies to ensure content validity. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To guarantee content validity, construct reliability, and comparison with past CSR and consumer behavior research, the measurement items applied in this study were derived from well-established and validated instruments in earlier literature. Tezi (2009) adapted commercial responsibility (5 items), social responsibility (4 items), and ethical responsibility (3 items) as these aspects capture consumers' views of corporate social responsibility actions from economic, social, and moral angles. The scale created by Tezi (2009) is well-known for its ability to evaluate several aspects of CSR activity and, in earlier research, has shown good psychometric features. Furthermore, eight items taken from Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) were used to assess customer confidence. This scale was chosen since it accurately shows consumers' confidence, reliability impressions, and goals for a brand or company. As trust is seen as a major mediating mechanism linking CSR activities to good customer results, the use of this well-known tool improves the validity and reliability of trust measurement in the present study. Moreover, brand loyalty was evaluated using six factors modified from Echezona (2024b) and Tezi (2009). In CSR and marketing studies, these metrics have been widely used to assess customer loyalty, repeat purchase plans, and readiness to keep long-term relationships with a brand. Since the current study seeks to investigate how CSR elements affect customer trust and then boost brand loyalty, the application of these proven scales is especially pertinent. Therefore, using already proven tools not only guarantees measurement consistency and dependability but also helps to enable comparison of the results with past empirical studies in the CSR and consumer behavior literature.

The study focused on staff from private universities in Selangor, Malaysia, including both academic and non-academic employees who were involved in or familiar with the Hopebox program. Data were collected through an online survey distributed via Google Forms between 1 September 2024 and 28 February 2025. The survey link was shared through university staff WhatsApp groups. Of the 500 questionnaires distributed, 233 usable responses were returned, representing a response rate of 46.6%.

This study applied purposive sampling to select respondents who were considered information-rich cases. Specifically, respondents were chosen based on three criteria: (1) being a staff member, (2) having direct experience participating in or handling Hopebox program activities, and (3) possessing sufficient familiarity with the program's CSR initiatives. From the total responses received, only 120 respondents who met these criteria were included in the final analysis. Participants were also asked to reflect on their actual involvement in Hopebox activities to ensure accurate and meaningful responses. Purposive sampling was selected because the study required respondents with specific experience and knowledge of the Hopebox program. Unlike probability-based sampling methods, which may include individuals unfamiliar with the program, purposive sampling ensured that only relevant respondents were analysed, thereby enhancing the validity of the findings (Cheung et al., 2023).

The data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). To evaluate the suggested research model, partial least squares structural equation modeling was applied. PLS-SEM was chosen because it doesn't need a lot of assumptions about how normal the data are, it works well with small sample sizes, and it lets you look at how reliable and valid your measurements are at the same time as how your structural model is put together (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Moreover, PLS-SEM is especially appropriate for modeling higher-order constructs and producing strong predictive results (Hair et al., 2019; Shmueli et al., 2019). Therefore, PLS-SEM was thought to be a good way to reach the goals of this study.

Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics of the sample. A total of 120 respondents participated in the survey. In terms of gender, the majority were female, comprising 85% of the respondents, while males accounted for 15%. Most of the respondents were aged between 35 to 44 years old, representing 54.2% of the total. This was followed by 25% in the 25 to 34 age group, 17.5% aged between 45 to 54, and only 3.3% aged between 55 to 64 years. Regarding educational background, most of the respondents held a master's degree, making up 65.8% of the sample. Meanwhile, 23.3% had a PhD, 6.7% possessed a bachelor's degree, and 4.2% held a diploma. In terms of job position, most of the respondents were lecturers, comprising 65% of the total. Senior lecturers accounted for 28.3%, administrative staff for 6.4%, and associate professors for 4%. Additionally, all respondents (100%) reported being aware of the Hopebox program.

Table 1: Demographic Information Of Survey Respondents

Items	Details	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	18	15
	Female	102	85
Age	From 25 to 34 years	30	25
	From 35 to 44 years	65	54.2
	From 45 to 54 years	21	17.5
	From 55 to 64 years	4	3.3
Education	Diploma	5	4.2
	Bachelor's degree	8	6.7
	Master's degree	79	65.8
	PhD	28	23.3
Position	Administrative	7	6.4
	Lecturer	74	65
	Senior lecturer	34	28.3
	Associate professor	5	4
Did you know the Hopebeat program?	Yes	100	100
	No	0	0

Measurement and Structural Model

According to Kalnins & Hill (2023), the model's variance inflation factor (VIF) values must be less than 3.3 to ensure that multicollinearity was not an issue in the study. Therefore, the study's

VIF values were less than 3.3, indicating that multicollinearity was not a major concern. The results of VIF are commercial responsibility (2.342), ethical responsibility (2.832), social responsibility (1.632), consumer trust (1.732), and brand loyalty (2.243). This study aimed to examine the predictive relationships between constructs, using PLS-SEM. It was chosen instead of covariance-based SEM, as recommended by Hair & Alamer (2022). In addition, the use of Smart PLS is appropriate because it can accommodate data sets that do not meet the assumption of multivariate normality. Following the approach proposed by Anderson & Gerbing (1988), the analysis was conducted in two stages: first, the reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed, and then, the structural model was assessed. To determine the statistical significance of the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables, the bootstrapping technique was used in accordance with the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019).

The analytical process began with an assessment of the measurement model before examining the structural model. In this initial stage, construct validity was evaluated by examining both convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity was assessed to confirm that the indicators consistently represent their respective latent constructs Hair et al.,(2019). According to Hair et al. (2019), acceptable convergent validity is indicated when indicator loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceed 0.50, while Composite Reliability (CR) surpasses the threshold of 0.70. As presented in Table 2, all constructs in this study satisfy these recommended criteria, demonstrating adequate reliability and validity.

Table 2: The Results Of Construct Validity And Reliability

Construct		Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Commercial Responsibility (CR)		CR1	0.704	0.912	0.751
		CR2	0.836		
		CR3	0.651		
		CR4	0.823		
		CR5	0.773		
Ethical (ER)	Responsibility	ER1	0.923	0.891	0.782
		ER2	0.893		
		ER3	0.918		
Social (SR)	Responsibility	SR1	0.860	0.942	0.723
		SR2	0.830		
		SR3	0.852		
		SR4	0.90		
Consumer Trust (CT)		CT1	0.948	0.954	0.838
		CT2	0.948		
		CT3	0.844		
		CT4	0.754		
		CT5	0.965		
		CT6	0.951		
		CT7	0.890		
		CT8	0.882		
Brand Loyalty (BL)		BL1	0.801	0.865	0.782

BL2	0.765
BL3	0.821
BL4	0.872
BL5	0.755
BL6	0.871

Subsequently, discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT), following the guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (2020) and supported by Franke and Sarstedt (2019). This approach is considered more robust than the traditional Fornell–Larcker criterion. Discriminant validity is established when HTMT values remain below 0.85. The results shown in Table 3 indicate that all HTMT ratios fall within the acceptable range, thereby confirming that the constructs are empirically distinct.

Table 3: The Results Of Discriminant Validity Using Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT)

Variables	CR	ER	SR	CT	BT
Commercial responsibility (CR)					
Ethical responsibility (ER)	0.427				
Social responsibility (SR)	0.730	0.66			
Consumer trust (CT)	0.517	0.46	0.593		
Brand loyalty (BL)	0.642	0.53	0.516	0.363	

*Note: CR – commercial responsibility, ER – ethical responsibility, SR – social responsibility, CT – consumer trust, BL – brand loyalty

The evaluation of the structural model was conducted in accordance with the recommendations of Hair et al. (2018), which emphasize the examination of explanatory power (R^2), path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and effect sizes (f^2) using a bootstrapping approach with 5,000 resamples. Based on this procedure, the relationships between the independent constructs and the dependent variable were tested. The results show that the model demonstrates strong explanatory capability, with an R^2 value of 0.914, indicating that 91.4% of the variance in brand loyalty is accounted for by the proposed framework. In addition, the Stone–Geisser predictive relevance measure (Q^2) was 0.834, exceeding the recommended threshold of zero and confirming the model's adequate predictive relevance. With respect to the hypothesized direct effects, ethical responsibility ($\beta = 0.589$, $p < 0.001$), social responsibility ($\beta = 0.453$, $p < 0.001$), and consumer trust ($\beta = 0.361$, $p < 0.001$) were found to exert significant positive influences on brand loyalty. In contrast, commercial responsibility did not demonstrate a statistically significant effect on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.023$, $p > 0.325$). Accordingly, hypotheses H2, H3, and H4 were supported, whereas H1 was rejected, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing

Path Analysis	Std beta	Std error	t-value	p-value	BCI LL	BCI UL	f^2
H1: CR $\rightarrow$ BL	0.023	0.050	0.453	$p > 0.325$	-0.064	0.102	0.178
H2: ER $\rightarrow$ BL	0.589	0.045	7.636	$p < 0.001$	0.411	0.535	0.186
H3: SR $\rightarrow$ BL	0.453	0.078	5.414	$p < 0.001$	0.299	0.487	0.143
H4: CT $\rightarrow$ BL	0.361	0.056	0.934	$p < 0.01$	0.215	0.487	0.120

H5 CR → CT → BL	0.212	0.048	4.459	P < 0.001	0.111	0.302
H5 ER → CT → BL	0.188	0.043	4.344	P < 0.001	0.121	0.274
H5 SR → CT → BL	0.568	0.042	13.671	P < 0.001	0.494	0.649

*Note: CR – commercial responsibility, ER – ethical responsibility, SR – social responsibility, CT – consumer trust, BL – brand loyalty

To further explore the underlying mechanisms, mediation analysis was performed to assess the indirect effects through consumer trust. The findings indicate that consumer trust significantly mediates the relationships between commercial responsibility and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.212$, $p < 0.001$), ethical responsibility and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.188$, $p < 0.001$), as well as social responsibility and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.568$, $p < 0.001$), thereby providing support for hypotheses H5, H6, and H7. Consistent with the criteria outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008), none of the confidence intervals for the indirect effects included zero, confirming the presence of mediation. Among all predictors, consumer trust emerged as the most influential determinant of brand loyalty, as evidenced by the largest standardized coefficient, underscoring its central role within the proposed model.

Discussion

Based on social identification theory, this study hypothesized that commercial responsibility (CR), ethical responsibility (ER), and social responsibility (SR) would positively influence brand loyalty (BL), with consumer trust (CT) acting as a mediating variable. The results provided partial support for the hypotheses. Among the three CSR factors, both ethical responsibility and social responsibility demonstrated significant positive effects on brand loyalty. Ethical responsibility emerged as the strongest predictor of brand loyalty among the CSR dimensions. Customers who believe that a brand is fair, honest, and ethically responsible are significantly more likely to become loyal to that brand. This is consistent with research by Phukan & Kumar (2025), which indicates that ethical considerations play a crucial role in consumers' decision-making processes regarding brand loyalty. In addition to meeting customer expectations, ethical branding strengthens brand identification and fosters customer loyalty. In addition, brand loyalty was significantly positively impacted by social responsibility, in addition to ethical responsibility. According to social identity theory, consumers feel more connected and at home when businesses practice ethical business practices, environmental sustainability, and community support. Brand actions that are in line with societal values improve consumer identification, which in turn strengthens brand loyalty, as claimed by Irshad et al. (2024). Furthermore, the results highlight the significance of CSR programs since they foster a sense of value that goes beyond business dealings and encourage enduring brand loyalty from customers.

Consumer trust plays a critical mediating role in the relationship between brand loyalty, social responsibility, and ethicality. It highlights how trust functions as a connecting factor that influences consumers' behavioral and emotional reactions to brands. Consumers who trust a brand are more likely to stick with it, even in competitive markets, according to a study by Min et al. (2023), which found brand trust to be a significant mediator between CSR initiatives and brand loyalty. This idea is consistent with research from Chen et al. (2025), which shows that increased brand trust can strengthen customer loyalty, especially when brands actively interact with customers on social media. Customers' trust in a brand increase when they believe it is dedicated to moral behavior and social welfare, and this in turn leads to increased levels of loyalty. Recent studies that demonstrate a strong positive correlation between trust and loyalty

metrics provide additional evidence of the mediating role of trust. For example, Shen et al. (2025) emphasize how purchase intentions for two important markers of brand loyalty are influenced by consumer trust (X. Chen et al., 2025; Huang & Mohamad, 2025). This result is consistent with the findings of Koay et al., who stress that brand trust is essential to the success of social media marketing strategies and not only promotes feelings of loyalty. Brands build trust by upholding accountability and transparency in their business practices, which strengthens customer loyalty through emotional connections, especially.

Furthermore, trust's mediating function goes beyond personal moral behavior to more extensive business endeavors. Businesses can create positive perceptions among customers and increase their loyalty by prioritizing community engagements through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, such as health and education programs, according to Echezona (2024b). The study highlights the significance of ethical branding in cultivating enduring loyalty by illuminating a causal pathway whereby CSR initiatives enhance brand perceptions as consumer trust increases. It is evident from combining the findings of Khan & Fatma (2023) that consumer engagement, which is made possible by trust and corporate social responsibility, promotes brand loyalty through the emotional bonds formed during marketing initiatives. These exchanges foster a feeling of belonging and common values, which fortify the bonds of brand loyalty with customers. As a result, the interaction of loyalty, trust, and ethical behavior produces a robust framework that brands can use to handle consumer skepticism and competitive pressures in a variety of markets.

Conclusion

This study enhances understanding of the relationship between ethical branding, corporate social responsibility, and brand loyalty, highlighting consumer trust as a critical mediating mechanism. The findings demonstrate that ethical behavior and socially responsible initiatives contribute significantly to trust formation, which in turn directly influences brand loyalty. By clarifying the role of trust in consumer-brand relationships, this study positions it as a key explanatory variable linking brand values with sustained loyalty, particularly within an internal stakeholder context. The results suggest that organizations seeking to strengthen brand loyalty should not treat ethics and CSR as peripheral activities. Instead, these elements should be strategically embedded within core business practices, with transparent communication and measurable actions supporting brand promises. In an increasingly value-driven market environment, trust emerges as a strategic asset that enables long-term relationships and encourages repeat engagement. Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Although the study achieved a 46.6% response rate, which is considered acceptable for online surveys, the potential for non-response bias cannot be entirely ruled out. Staff members who chose not to participate may hold different perceptions of the Hopebeat program or CSR initiatives, which could influence the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the use of purposive sampling and the focus on respondents with direct program experience may also limit the extent to which the results can be generalized beyond the specific institutional context studied. Future research is therefore encouraged to include broader demographic, cultural, and organizational contexts to assess the robustness of the trust-loyalty mechanism across different settings. Longitudinal designs could provide deeper insights into how trust evolves, particularly in response to consistent ethical behavior or reputational challenges. Additionally, incorporating other explanatory variables such as customer satisfaction, emotional attachment, perceived authenticity, or industry-specific

factors may further clarify how ethical branding and CSR translate into long-term loyalty across diverse sectors.

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