

# Millennial's CSR Perception, Social Influences, And Intention to Buy Social Responsible Products: A Conceptual Framework

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**Abstract.** This paper aims to develop a conceptual framework presenting how social influences, including technology-based influence, and millennials' inherent corporate social responsibility (CSR) perception affect millennials' attitudes and purchase intention related to socially responsible (SR) products. Millennials' CSR perception and behaviour and the relevant antecedents are considered in developing the conceptual framework based on the theory of planned behaviour and social conformity. The discussion about subjective norms considers social conformity and millennials' reliance on technology-based media, while the attitude towards SR products consists of cognitive and affective attitudes. The framework and the subsequent empirical study will help companies to evaluate in which CSR initiatives they should get involved and which social influences would be the most effective for delivering CSR-related messages.

**Keywords:** Millennial, CSR, Social Conformity, Theory of Planned Behaviour

## 1 Introduction

Millennials are 'people born between 1986 and 2002' [1][2]. This generation grew up with computers at home [2] and is comfortable with connecting with others, e.g., with their family, friends or even strangers, through various channels, such as cellphones, computers, and mobile devices [1][2]. Millennials are also the first generation growing up with CSR [3]. They believe they should make the world a better place, and companies have the responsibility of pursuing the same endeavor [4][5].

Marketers consider millennials a promising generational segment [6][1]. Market reports and academic research have reported how a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives influence the millennial's job-seeking, e.g., [7][8] and brand perception, e.g., [9][10][11]. However, millennial consumer studies still call for an un-

derstanding of the relationship between millennials' characteristics and CSR perception. In addition, they are interested in how this relationship influences millennials' consumption behaviour.

Though market reports mention that the millennial is a CSR conscious generation [3][4][12], it is not clear to what extent CSR motivates and influences these consumers' purchases and which CSR dimension is these consumers' primary concern. Understanding such influences would help companies to evaluate in which CSR initiatives they should get involved and which social influences would be the most effective for delivering CSR-related messages. Therefore, this paper aims to develop a comprehensive framework for an empirical study investigating how CSR perceptions and social influences shape millennials' attitudes and purchase intention of socially responsible (SR) products.

## 2 The Conceptual Framework

According to the theory of planned behaviour (TPB, [11]), subjective norm, attitude towards the behaviour, and perceived behavioral control influence a consumer's behavioral intention and, in turn, actual behaviour. In this paper's context, millennials' social influences, CSR perceptions, and behaviour will be considered in the development of the TPB-based conceptual framework (Figure 1).

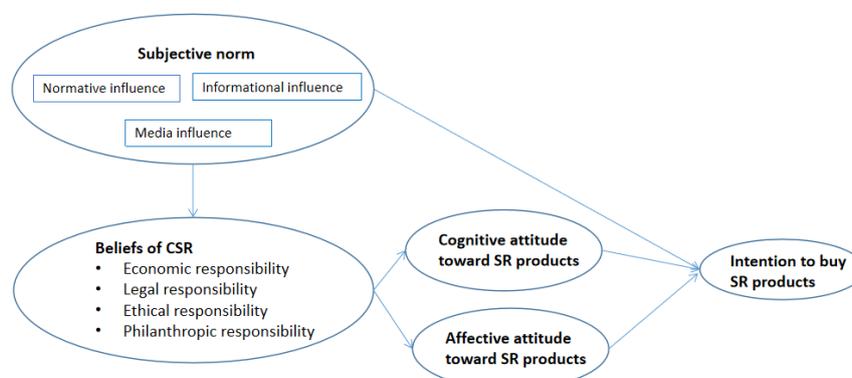


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1 CSR Beliefs And Attitudes towards SR Products

Because millennials grew up with information on cause-related marketing and CSR, such information is internalised as millennials' beliefs and influences how they evaluate companies and products [14][2].

Ben Brik et al. [15] argue that CSR enables a company to build a positive relationship with its customers and other stakeholders. Therefore, a consumer with CSR in mind would consider an SR product positive. Past studies in consumers' CSR perception have considered the CSR sub-dimensions separately, e.g., [16][17] [18][19][20]. In this paper, CSR belief is considered a holistic construct consisting of beliefs about different CSR sub-dimensions, i.e., economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic CSRs [21], and influencing millennials' evaluation of SR products. Such an evaluation is termed 'customer value' by Papista & Krystallis [19] and can be cognitive and affective [22][19]. The discussion here leads to the following propositions.

**P1.** Millennials' CSR beliefs, including economic, ethical, legal, and philanthropic responsibilities, affect millennials' cognitive attitude towards socially responsible products.

**P2.** Millennials' CSR beliefs, including economic, ethical, legal, and philanthropic responsibilities, affect millennials' affective attitude towards socially responsible products.

## 2.2 CSR Beliefs And Attitudes towards SR Products

When shopping for products or services, millennials often ask opinions from family and friends [23][1] and want to conform with peer groups and social trends [24][25]. Such a tendency can be explained by social conformity theory [26]. Social conformity includes normative conformity and informational conformity. The former is motivated by the concern of gaining others' approval or maintaining social harmony with others. The latter relates to 'the desire to be correct' and the concern of making an accurate and valid judgment [26][27].

In the context of millennials, research [24][28][29] also shows that various media, mainly technology-based/social media, have been a part of millennials' daily life. These media are critical channels for delivering marketing messages, and the information from these channels could even influence millennials' prosocial emotion towards charitable causes [30]. Therefore, social influences, both from their social circles and from online sources, e.g., company websites and blogs, play an essential role in assisting millennials' decision-making [23]. The discussion here leads to the following proposition.

**P3.** Subjective norms, including normative influence, informational influence, and media influence, affect millennials' willingness to purchase responsible products.

In addition, millennials grew up with the information of cause-related marketing and CSR [3]. They have been subject to the influences of CSR information from various sources. Therefore, the subjective norm defined here could also affect millennials' beliefs about CSR. This inference leads to the following proposition.

**P4.** Subjective norms, including normative influence, informational influence, and media influence, affect millennials' CSR beliefs.

### **2.3 Attitudes towards SR Products And Purchase Intention**

Past studies [31][18] have shown that attitudes towards a brand's socially responsible behaviour could influence purchase intention. Millennials' attitudes towards SR products will affect these consumers' willingness to purchase such products [3][32]. Since there are two types of attitudes, namely cognitive and affective, [22][19] and both exert different levels of influence on purchase intention [33], their influences on willingness to purchase should be considered separately. Particularly when millennials consider both the functionality and 'feel good' aspects of a product [23], the effects of both their cognitive and affective attitudes on purchase intention of SR products should be considered.

**P5.** Millennials' cognitive attitudes towards socially responsible products influence the willingness to purchase socially responsible products.

**P6.** Millennials' affective attitudes towards socially responsible products influence the willingness to purchase socially responsible products.

## **3 Conclusion and Potential Contributions**

Millennials are a CSR-conscious generation and concern whether companies play an active role in fulfilling their social responsibility [4][5]. Therefore, integrating CSR in a company's core business is essential for attracting potential millennial job seekers and consumers. However, studies exploring millennials' intrinsic motivation for supporting CSR are still scant.

This study aims to seek a theoretical explanation and empirically investigate how such motivation and social influences affect millennials' intention to purchase socially responsible products. As the first step, this paper establishes a TPB-based framework demonstrating the possible antecedents of millennials' attitudes towards and purchase intention of socially responsible products. The next step would be to survey millennials to examine the relationships proposed in this paper empirically. The data will be analysed through structural equation modeling in order to elucidate and verify the proposed framework.

Theoretically, it is expected that the empirical study will make the following contributions. First, this study provides a modified TPB framework for explaining millennials' disposition for evaluating and purchasing socially responsible products. Second, including both social conformity and the influence of technology-based media, subjective norms in the modified framework will help to examine whether a consumer's tendency towards socially responsible products is due to an individual's pure desire to be

correct or due to external influences such as the pressure of maintaining social harmony and immersion in the media message. Third, unlike past studies often examining separate CSR sub-dimensions, the framework here considers a consumer's belief about CSR, a composite construct consisting of various sub-dimensions. Fourth, unlike the original TPB viewing attitude as a single construct, attitude in this framework consists of cognitive and affective attitudes; such design will reflect the view on attitude in the extant literature.

Managerially, the empirical study extended from this paper will help managers to understand the primary source of social influences affecting millennials' purchase intention of socially responsible products and design more impactful marketing messages targeting millennials. Besides, the potential study results will show which CSR sub-dimension is millennials' primary concern so that marketers could consider the fit with their core businesses and should accentuate in their marketing messages.

Finally, the discussion in this paper is subject to several limitations. First, when discussing the theoretical framework, this paper does not consider different cohorts that might exist in the millennial segment [23]. Second, this paper does not consider the difference between product categories in the discussed relationships [34].

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