

January 2024

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### Recommended Citation

Lee, Cheonglim; Kwon, Yongju; and Yi, Youjae (2024) "Enhancing Customer Happiness Through Corporate Social Responsibility: Unveiling the Impact of CSR on Customer Well-Being," *Asia Marketing Journal*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 4 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.53728/2765-6500.1621>

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# Enhancing Customer Happiness Through Corporate Social Responsibility: Unveiling the Impact of CSR on Customer Well-Being

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## Abstract

Previous literature supports the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) by demonstrating its effects on various aspects of firm performance. However, the extent to which CSR contributes to social well-being, its original objective, has rarely been examined. The current research investigates the impact of customers' perceived CSR of service firms on customer happiness. Two studies confirm our proposition that perceived CSR increases customer happiness by enhancing perceptions of warmth and competence associated with the service company. Furthermore, we examine how the type of service moderates this effect. Specifically, we find that the indirect effects of CSR on customer happiness through perceptions of warmth and competence are stronger for credence services than for experience services. This research makes theoretical contributions to the literature on CSR, happiness, and service, and offers practical implications for marketing tactics, including fostering long-term customer relationships and monitoring the effectiveness of CSR activities and corporate budget allocations.

**Keywords:** Corporate social responsibility, Happiness, Warmth, Competence, Service type, Credence, Experience

## 1. Introduction

In the past, companies were often exempted from fulfilling their social responsibilities, as governments prioritized trickle-down economics, which assumes that economic prosperity for major corporations and the upper classes would eventually benefit small businesses and the lower classes. However, as the notion of trickle-down economics loses its credibility, modern corporations are now expected to embrace their role as social actors. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to voluntary practices and contributions of firms aimed at improving societal well-being (Korschun, Bhattacharya, and Swain 2014; Nickerson et al. 2022).

Stakeholders, including consumers and investors, demonstrate their preference and support for companies that engage in CSR activities. According to the Aflac (2019)'s CSR survey, 70% of consumers believe

that large firms have a specific responsibility to make the world a better place, with 49% considering this responsibility even more important than maximizing shareholder profits. The survey also reveals that consumers show support for companies involved in CSR efforts in various ways, such as purchasing a product or service (77%), recommending the company to others (68%), sharing information about the company's CSR initiatives (58%), expressing support on social media (41%), and more. Moreover, a majority of investors recognize that a company's CSR efforts to improve societal well-being have a positive impact on return on investment (ROI; 73%) and investigate a company's societal and environmental role before making investment decisions (61%).

While multiple surveys and prior studies emphasize the positive consequences of CSR for firms, such as improved employee performance (Jones 2010), job satisfaction (Lee and Park 2023), organizational

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Received 10 October 2023; accepted 13 December 2023.  
Available online 15 January 2024

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<https://doi.org/10.53728/2765-6500.1621>

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identification (Carmeli, Gilat, and Waldman 2007), purchase intent, and brand loyalty (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2007), the impact of CSR on customers has received limited attention. Considering that customers and corporations are dyadic partners in value co-creation (Grönroos 2011), it is crucial to understand how CSR influences consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards a company by examining its psychological effects. Furthermore, it is important to determine whether CSR truly contributes to societal well-being, as originally intended. To address these questions, the present research investigates the relationship between customers' perception of CSR by service firms and customer happiness, as well as the underlying mechanisms driving this effect. We propose that perceived CSR increases customer happiness by enhancing the perceived warmth and competence of a company. Additionally, we suggest that the type of service offered moderates the indirect effects of perceived CSR on customer happiness through the proposed mechanisms.

In the following section, we will elaborate on why customer happiness is an important outcome of CSR, how perceived CSR influences customer happiness by shaping perceptions of warmth and competence of corporations, and how the mediating roles of perceived warmth and competence vary based on service types (i.e., credence vs. experience service). Finally, we will present our hypotheses and a research framework.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Customers' perceptions of corporate social responsibility

Previous literature has examined CSR using various measures. Objective measures of CSR encompass different domains, such as community support, diversity, employee well-being, environmental initiatives, and overseas operations (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). Objective measures are typically binary, indicating whether a firm engages in CSR activities within a specific domain (e.g., García-Piqueres and García-Ramos 2022). On the other hand, subjective measures, such as perceptions of CSR, have been also employed in research. In the present research, we will focus more on subjective measures, as they are more relevant to psychological functioning (Adler et al. 2000). Perceived CSR can be evaluated by various stakeholders, including employees, stockholders, and customers. In this research, our focus will be on customers, as they are core partners of corporations who co-create value and significantly influence the success or failure of firms through their purchasing decisions, advocacy,

and word-of-mouth recommendations. For convenience, we will refer to "customers' perceived CSR" as "perceived CSR".

Previous literature has accumulated evidence on the positive effects of perceived CSR on companies, with much effort dedicated to understanding the benefits firms achieve when consumers recognize CSR practices. For instance, studies have found that perceived CSR enhances perceived product or firm performance, customer satisfaction, purchase intention, brand loyalty, and corporate reputation (Bianchi, Bruno, and Sarabia-Sanchez 2019; Chernev and Blair 2015; Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2007; Swaen, Demoulin, and Pauwels-Delassus 2021). Consequently, CSR has been portrayed as a means for firms to improve their performance, and the positive connection between corporate social performance and financial performance has been used as a rationale for promoting CSR practices (Margolis and Walsh 2003). However, considering that the goal of business is to create value for stakeholders (Donaldson and Walsh 2015) and that customers and corporations co-create value through interactions (Grönroos 2011), examining only the benefits firms derive from CSR activities provides a limited and fragmental understanding of why companies should engage in CSR. The value derived from CSR should be seen beyond the financial realm (Chia, Kern, and Neville 2020), and it is equally important to investigate the benefits that customers, another value co-creator, receive from CSR practices. As CSR is defined as voluntary activities undertaken by firms to improve societal well-being, companies should address whether their substantial investments in CSR are perceived as being in the right direction from the perspective of the main target of CSR, i.e., customers, and whether they genuinely enhance customer well-being.

Companies can contribute to customer well-being by improving objective societal conditions or positively affecting subjective well-being of individuals within society (Mindell et al. 2012; Waddock 2014). Among the various concepts related to customers' subjective well-being, we will focus on customer happiness, which refers to a customer's subjective state of feeling good and functioning well (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013). Customer happiness not only affects companies but also is influenced by them. First, happy customers contribute to a firm's profitability by displaying brand loyalty, price insensitivity, and high purchasing behavior (Hellén and Sääksjärvi 2011). Moreover, individuals who experience higher levels of happiness tend to be more successful in their careers (Boehm and Lyubomirsky 2008) and engage in socially beneficial behaviors (Aknin, Dunn, and Norton 2012). Their

improved physical and mental well-being reduces social burdens and serves as valuable social resources even for firms (Bray and Gunnell 2006; Lawless and Lucas 2011). Conversely, companies have an impact on customer happiness. Customers' emotions and decisions are significantly influenced by companies which intersect with various aspects of their daily lives. People purchase or use products and services, and they are exposed to corporate information or news through various media channels from morning till night (Wiist 2010). Therefore, companies bear responsibility for the happiness of their stakeholders, especially customers whose lives are directly affected by the output of firms (Chia, Kern, and Neville 2020). Then, how is perceived CSR connected to customer happiness? We propose that perceived CSR can increase customer happiness by enhancing the perceived warmth and competence of service firms, based on social perception theories. In the next section, we will explain how perceived CSR influences the perceived warmth and competence of companies, and subsequently, customer happiness.

## *2.2. Mediating roles of warmth and competence for the link between CSR and happiness*

The stereotype content model, an influential social perception theory, proposes warmth and competence as two dimensions of social perceptions that people assess swiftly. These dimensions guide people in perceiving, characterizing, and interacting with others (Fiske et al. 2002). Warmth is comprised of morality, trustworthiness, friendliness, kindness, and sincerity, assessing a perceived intention of a person, whereas competence consists of skill, intelligence, efficacy, confidence, and creativity, assessing perceived capability to realize the intention (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2008). Based on combinations of warmth and competence, people experience distinct emotions.

Prior literature on brand perception suggests that individuals perceive brands and build relationships with them as they do with people (Aaker 1997; Ahuvia 2005; Fournier 1998). Consequently, social perception theories explaining how individuals construct perceptions of people have been extended to brand perception. Specifically, the stereotype content model has been applied to brand perception, wherein customers perceive warmth and competence from brands, and these perceptions influence how customers feel, perceive, or behave toward the brands (Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone 2012). In the present research, we focus on warmth and competence as mediators connecting perceived CSR and customer happiness.

Prior research indirectly suggests that perceived CSR can enhance the perceived warmth of a company. Warmth is perceived when an entity has cooperative intentions or motives (Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone 2012; Reeder et al. 2002). For instance, people view allies or ingroups as warm, whereas they consider competitors or other entities (e.g., countries or other people) that conflict with them as lacking warmth (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2008; Phalet and Poppe 1997). In a business context, consumers perceive non-profit companies as warmer than profit-oriented ones, because they perceive non-profits as more committed to social good (Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner 2010; Han et al. 2015). Similarly, companies engaging in CSR activities can be perceived by customers as having good intentions, being their allies, and committing to social good, thereby conveying warmth.

Other previous research provides more direct evidence by examining the link between CSR and perceived warmth. CSR attributes of a brand, such as the use of recycled materials, positively affect purchase intention by enhancing the perceived warmth of the brand (Grazzini, Acuti, and Aiello 2021; Johnson, Lee, and Ashoori 2018). Other studies also found that a firm's commitment to non-selfish causes and other CSR activities (e.g., environmental protection) influences consumers' warmth impressions from the firm (Gao and Mattila 2014; Johnson et al. 2019; Shea and Hawn 2019). These studies directly support the notion that perceived CSR increases customers' impressions of warmth from the firm. Consistent with these findings, we also expect that CSR will enhance the perceived warmth of a firm.

In contrast to perceived warmth, perceived competence has shown inconsistent relationships with CSR. Johnson et al. (2019) found that corporate ability, rather than CSR, drives competence impressions, revealing a null effect of CSR on perceived competence. Some previous studies found that CSR even negatively affects the perceived competence of a firm. For instance, a company's benevolent intentions to design green products backfire, as consumers perceive firms intentionally designing green products as allocating resources away from product quality, resulting in decreased purchase interest (Newman, Gorlin, and Dhar 2014). In addition, consumers perceive products made by companies committed to sustainability as less successful in strength-related attributes (Luchs et al. 2010). A firm's social responsibility also harms the perceived performance of its products (Luo and Bhattacharya 2006; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). On the other hand, other researchers found conflicting results that directly or indirectly support the idea that CSR enhances impressions of corporate competence. First, some previous studies

found that CSR has positive effects on corporate financial performance (Orlitzky, Schmidt, and Rynes 2003; Yumei et al. 2021) and competitive positioning (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2007). Considering that consumers are exposed to corporate news from various media coverage, they might notice that firms committing to social responsibilities performing well in competitive markets, leading them to perceive those companies as competent. Second, more directly, other studies found that CSR positively influences perception of product performance. For example, CSR strengthens the perceived superiority of gentleness-related attributes of products (Luchs et al. 2010) and influences consumers' evaluation of product performance through the halo effect: A firm's CSR affects the overall impression of the product made by the firm, and consumers perceive that the product's performance would be good because it comes from the company's good underlying motives (Chernev and Blair 2015).

In line with the latter stream of research, we also expect that consumers would perceive a service company as competent when they believe that the firm is committed to social responsibility. Consumers have lay beliefs about CSR costs, understanding that CSR activities can be expensive for companies, which might decrease profits. Therefore, once consumers become aware that a company engages in CSR activities, this fact can signal to consumers that the company is not struggling for survival but is making enough earnings or has sufficient resources. Accordingly, perceived CSR might increase the perceived competence of the company.

Overall, we expect that perceived CSR can have positive impacts on perceived warmth and competence of a service company. In addition, we anticipate that both perceived warmth and competence of a company will affect customer happiness. When a company is perceived as warm and competent, both firms and consumers can benefit from the warmth and competence. Perceived warmth strengthens consumers' perceptions of emotional value, such as enjoyment, good feeling, and pleasure (Kolbl et al. 2020). In addition, perceived competence enhances trust and the relationship between customers and service providers, reflecting consumers' perceptions of confidence, intelligence, and skillfulness from firms and employees (Coulter and Coulter 2002; Grandey et al. 2005; Wirtz and Mattila 2004). Furthermore, prior research has raised the possibility that perceived warmth and competence of a company can be linked to customer happiness. Specifically, warm and competent companies can reduce customer stress and contribute to subjective well-being by building trust and providing a safe haven (MacInnis 2012).

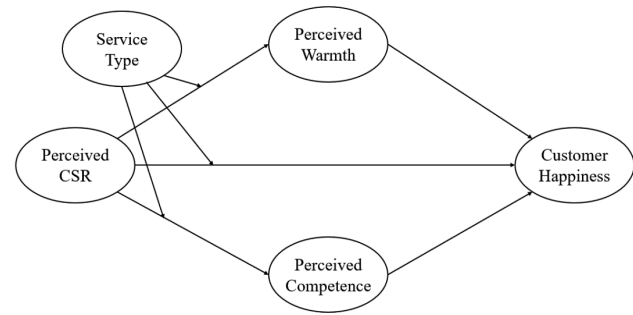


Fig. 1. Research model.

However, this possibility has only been suggested and has not yet been empirically tested.

Combining previous findings, in the present research, we hypothesize that the perceived CSR of a service firm enhances customer happiness, and perceived warmth and competence serve as psychological mechanisms in the relationship between CSR and happiness (Fig. 1).

**H1.** *Perceived CSR of a service firm will positively impact customer happiness.*

**H2.** *Perceived warmth and competence will mediate the relationship between perceived CSR and customer happiness.*

In the next section, we will also propose a boundary condition for the proposed mediation effects.

### 2.3. The moderating role of service types

The Search-Experience-Credence framework, introduced by Nelson (1970) and expanded by Darby and Karni (1973), serves as a tool for classifying products. Based on this framework, researchers have defined three types of services: search-based services, which can be evaluated before purchase or consumption; experience-based services, which can be evaluated only after purchase or consumption; and credence-based services, which are difficult to evaluate even after purchase or consumption (Mazaheri, Richard, and Laroche 2012; Ostrom and Lacobucci 1995; Zeithaml 1981).

Although services can be classified into these three types, they generally possess more experience or credence properties than search properties (Lacobucci 1992). Moreover, considering that consumers can evaluate search-based services with ample information available before purchase (Smith and Royne 2010), CSR-related information might not play a significant role in determining consumers' perceptions, emotions, or judgment for these types of services. Thus, in the present research, we will focus on experience and credence services. Experience services

include those provided by amusement parks, airlines, or restaurants, whereas credence services primarily include professional services such as credit card services or accounting services by financial firms, legal services by law firms, consulting services by consulting firms, and treatments or surgery by hospitals (Moorthi 2002). We propose that the type of service (experience vs. credence) will moderate the effect of perceived CSR on customer happiness through perceived warmth and competence.

For experience services, consumers can evaluate the quality of the service after delivery by comparing their pre-purchase expectations with their post-purchase experiences (Galetzka, Verhoeven, and Pruyn 2006). Compared with credence services, experience ones have more tangible elements and lower perceived risks (Moorthi 2002). For example, when consumers visit an amusement park, they can experience the thrilling rides, colorful parades, and friendly service workers. After experiencing these services, customers can easily evaluate the quality of the services based on their satisfaction and the extent to which the services successfully delighted them. Assessing the quality of experience services is not risky because these services have tangible elements that customers can see and touch, and they do not require specialized knowledge. Therefore, these tangible customer experiences can be important factors, influencing customer's impressions on warmth and competence of firms offering experience services, thereby affecting customer happiness.

On the other hand, credence services such as financial or medical services are challenging for consumers to evaluate even after repeated purchase or usage. These services are considered professional, and consumers without specialized experiences or knowledge lack physical evidence, information cues, or quality evaluation standards (Bebko 2000; Darby and Karni 1973; Zeithaml 1981). For example, even though consumers repeatedly use credit cards, they do not fully understand terms, restrictions, and devastating influence of card debt (Wang 2010). Despite these inherent risks, customers accept credence services based on faith because of information asymmetry between customers and companies (Smith and Royne 2010). Since credence services are related to customers' crucial possessions, such as money or property (Moorthi 2002), customers need information about the intentions and capabilities of firms to judge whether these firms are suitable partners for safeguarding their important assets.

Based on the differences between experience and credence services, we propose that the effect of perceived CSR on customer happiness through warmth and competence will be stronger for credence services

than for experience services. Due to the relatively higher difficulty in evaluating the quality of credence services compared with experience services, customers would seek more information about the service providers. If customers perceive that credence service firms engage in CSR activities, they may use this perception to make inferences about the firm's intentions (warmth) and abilities (competence). In the process of making such inferences, the halo effect is more likely to occur when expertise is low compared to high (Chernev and Blair 2015). Specifically, customers tend to make inferences about a firm's performance or other properties based on the firm's prosocial behavior when they lack well-defined preferences or expertise (Broniarczyk and Alba 1994). Building on these previous findings, we propose that perceptions of CSR will enhance both perceived warmth and competence, thereby increasing customer happiness to a greater extent for credence services than for experience services. In other words, the difference in the difficulty of evaluating the two types of services will lead to a difference in the effect of perceived CSR on customer happiness through warmth and competence.

**H3.** *Service types (experience vs. credence) will moderate the effect of perceived CSR on customer happiness through perceived warmth and competence, such that the indirect effects would be stronger for credence services than for experience services.*

### 3. Study 1

#### 3.1. Data collection

The purpose of Study 1 was to test H1 and H2. We conducted a survey in South Korea and recruited 374 customers who visited convenience stores and made purchase more than twice a week. The data collection was supported by the Korean Standards Association, a research institute specializing in industrial standardization and quality management. The participants were composed of 32.4% individuals aged 21–30 years, 36.6% aged 31–40 years, 22.5% aged 41–50 years, and 8.6% aged over 51 years. Among them, 52.4% were female. The convenience stores predominantly used by respondents were Seven-Eleven (31.3%), CU (33.4%), and GS25 (35.3%).

#### 3.2. Measurement

We adapted items from previous literature to suit the context of this study. Perceived corporate social responsibility activity was measured using three items from Bianchi, Bruno, and Sarabia-Sanchez (2019) and

Table 1. Measurements, correlations, reliabilities, and validities in Study 1.

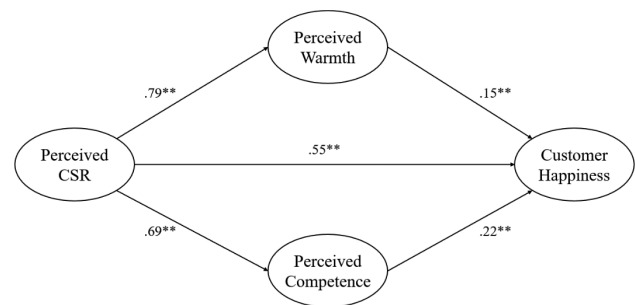
Variables	Measurement	Correlation				Cronbach alpha	CR	AVE
		PCSR	PW	PC	CH			
Perceived CSR (PCSR)	XYZ is an ethical company. XYZ strives for the well-being of society. XYZ strives to fulfill its social responsibility.	1				.932	.933	.822
Perceived warmth (PW)	The service of XYZ is warm to customers. The service of XYZ is kind. XYZ treats me sincerely.	.800	1			.874	.890	.730
Perceived competence (PC)	The service of XYZ is excellent. The service of XYZ is intelligent. The service of XYZ is capable.	.797	.809	1		.879	.880	.709
Customer happiness (CH)	XYZ makes me happy. My quality of life has improved through XYZ.	.833	.753	.759	1	.887	.889	.801

Menon and Kahn (2003). Perceived warmth and competence were measured using three items adapted from Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner (2010) and Fiske et al. (2002). Finally, customer happiness was measured using two items, adapted from Gong and Yi (2018) and Sweeney, Danaher, and McColl-Kennedy (2015). All items used in Study 1 were measured by 9-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 9 = *strongly agree*). The measurement scales for all variables are summarized in Table 1.

Reliability analysis confirmed the internal consistency of the measures, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding .8 for all variables. To assess construct validity, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed. All factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values were above .7, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also confirmed, as all AVE values exceeded the square of correlation coefficient between variables (Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Fornell and Larcker 1981; Suh and Yi 2012).

### 3.3. Results

To test the research model, we first examined the effect of perceived CSR activities on customer happiness using regression analysis. The results indicated a positive effect of perceived CSR on customer happiness, supporting H1 ( $b = .84, t = 45.06, p < .01$ ). H2 proposed that perceived warmth and competence mediate the relationship between perceived CSR and customer happiness. To investigate these proposed mechanisms, we performed a mediation analysis using Model 4 of Hayes (2017)'s PROCESS macro (Fig. 2). As predicted in H2, perceived warmth was found to be a significant mediator (indirect effect  $b = .12, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.0065, .2307]$ ). Specifically, perceived CSR had a positive effect on perceived warmth ( $b = .79, p < .01$ ), which, in turn, positively influenced customer happiness ( $b = .15, p < .01$ ). Additionally,

Fig. 2. Analysis results in Study 1. Note: \*\* $p < .01$ .

perceived competence emerged as a significant mediator, with the confidence interval for the indirect effect ( $b = .15, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.0495, .2569]$ ) excluding zero. Specifically, perceived CSR had a significantly positive effect on perceived competence ( $b = .69, p < .01$ ), which, in turn, had a significantly positive effect on customer happiness ( $b = .22, p < .01$ ). In addition, the direct effect of CSR on customer happiness was positively significant ( $b = .55, p < .01$ ).

### 3.4. Discussion

In Study 1, we examined the effect of customers' perceptions of CSR activities by convenience store companies on customer happiness. As expected, the perception of CSR activities was found to increase customer happiness, supporting H1. Moreover, we confirmed the mediating roles of perceived warmth and competence in the relationship between CSR activities and customer happiness, supporting H2. In other words, perceptions of CSR activities enhance customers' perceptions of the company's warmth and competence, thereby increasing customer happiness. Study 1 focused on a single industry, namely convenience stores. To enhance the external validity of the results, it is important to test whether similar effects are observed in other industries as well.

Table 2. Demographic distributions of respondents in Study 2.

		Theme parks	Credit cards
Gender	Male	151(52.4%)	172(52.6%)
	Female	137(47.6%)	155(47.4%)
Age	10–19	15(5.2%)	—
	20–29	81(28.1%)	26(8.0%)
	30–39	106(36.8%)	104(31.8%)
	40–49	54(18.8%)	88(26.9%)
	50+	32(11.1%)	130(33.3%)

## 4. Study 2

The aim of Study 2 was twofold. First, we aimed to replicate the effects observed in Study 1 in other service industries. Second, we investigated the moderating role of service types on the mediation effects found in Study 1. To determine the service types, we employed the method proposed by Zhang et al. (2014), which involves asking respondents to categorize services into experience and credence types. Ten undergraduate students majoring in business administration participated in the classification test for eight services: theme parks, credit cards, mobile communications, convenience stores, bookstores, fast food restaurants, coffee shops, and department stores. As a result, among the respondents, nine students classified credit card services as credence-based, while eight students categorized theme parks as experience-based. Based on the majority responses, we designated theme parks as an experience-based service and credit cards as a credence-based service.

### 4.1. Data collection

We conducted a survey in South Korea, recruiting 288 customers who had visited a theme park at least twice within the past 6 months for the experience-based service, and 327 customers who used a specific credit card more than twice a week for the credence-based service. The demographic information of the respondents is provided in Table 2.

### 4.2. Measurement

In Study 2, we used the same measurements for perceived CSR, customer happiness, perceived warmth,

and perceived competence as used in Study 1. All items used in Study 2 were measured by 9-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 9 = *strongly agree*). Reliability and validity analyses were conducted, and the results are presented in Table 3. Reliability analysis demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding .8 for all variables. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed (Bagozzi and Yi 2012), and all factor loadings exceeded .7. Composite reliability (CR) values were above .8, and all average variance extracted (AVE) values were above .6, indicating satisfactory convergent validity (Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Fornell and Larcker 1981). Discriminant validity was also confirmed, as all AVE values exceeded the square of correlation coefficient between variables (Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Fornell and Larcker 1981).

### 4.3. Results

To examine the moderating effect of service types on the relationship between perceived CSR and the two mediators (perceived warmth and perceived competence), a moderated mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS macro Model 8 (Hayes 2017). Confidence intervals (CIs) were estimated with 5,000 resamples. As summarized in Table 4, there was a significant interaction effect between CSR and service types on perceived warmth ( $b = -.16$ , 95% CI =  $[-.2440, -.0711]$ ). Specifically, the conditional indirect effect of perceived warmth was significant for both theme parks ( $b = .16$ , 95% CI =  $[.0773, .2415]$ ) and credit cards ( $b = .20$ , 95% CI =  $[.0998, .3107]$ ). The index of moderated mediation was significant ( $b = -.05$ , 95% CI =  $[-.0922, -.0114]$ ). The effect of CSR on warmth was found to be greater in credence-based service than in experience-based service (Fig. 3-a).

In addition, a significant interaction effect between CSR and service types (1 = theme park, 0 = credit card) on competence was observed ( $b = -.22$ ), with 95% confidence intervals excluding zero (95% CI =  $[-.3131, -.1300]$ ). The conditional indirect effect of perceived competence was significant for both theme parks ( $b = .15$ , 95% CI =  $[.0914, .2330]$ ) and credit cards ( $b = .22$ , 95% CI =  $[.1299, .3141]$ ). The index of moderated mediation was significant negatively

Table 3. Correlations, reliabilities, and validities in Study 2.

Variables	Correlation				Cronbach alpha	CR	AVE
	PCSR	PW	PC	CH			
Perceived CSR	1				.901	.901	.753
Perceived warmth	.750	1			.854	.866	.684
Perceived competence	.737	.825	1		.883	.885	.719
Customer happiness	.780	.780	.756	1	.905	.905	.827



Table 4. Results of Study 2.

No.	Independent variables	Dependent variables	$\beta$	$t$	$R^2$	$F$
1	Perceived CSR (A)	Perceived warmth	.6903	21.9135	.562	261.407
	Service type (B)		1.0268	3.2867		
	A*B		-.1575	-3.5774		
2	Perceived CSR (A)	Perceived competence	.7688	23.0592	.5713	271.427
	Service type (B)		1.6245	4.9132		
	A*B		-.2215	-4.7535		
3	Perceived CSR (A)	Customer happiness	.4837	11.0669	.7130	302.624
	Service type (B)		1.1395	3.6787		
	Perceived warmth		.2951	5.9978		
	Perceived competence		.2828	6.0826		
	A*B		-.1558	-3.5703		

Conditional indirect effect (perceived CSR → perceived warmth → customer happiness)

Service type	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot UCLI
0 (credence-based service)	.2037	.0533	.0998	.3107
1 (experience-based service)	.1572	.0426	.0773	.2415
Index of moderated mediation	-.0465	.0207	-.0922	-.0114

Conditional indirect effect (perceived CSR → perceived competence → customer happiness)

Service type	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot UCLI
0	.2174	.0471	.1299	.3141
1	.1548	.0357	.0914	.2330
Index of moderated mediation	-.0627	.0222	-.1111	-.0243

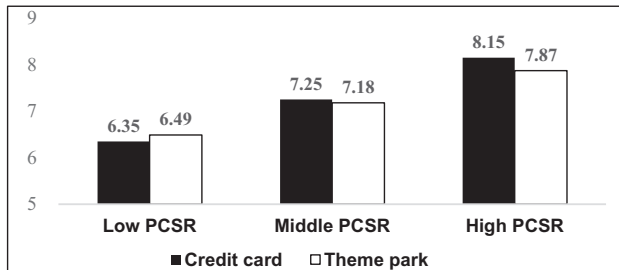


Fig. 3-a. The interaction effect of service types and perceived CSR on warmth.

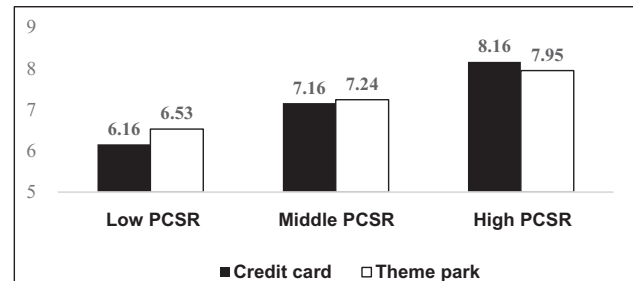


Fig. 3-b. The interaction effect of service types and perceived CSR on competence.

( $b = -.06$ , 95% CI =  $[-.1111, -.0243]$ ), indicating that the effect of perceived CSR on perceived competence was higher for credit card services compared to theme parks (Fig. 3-b). These findings support H3. Additionally, H1 and H2 were supported, as CSR was found to have a positive and significant effect on customer happiness directly and indirectly.

#### 4.4. Discussion

In Study 2, we replicated the findings from Study 1, demonstrating that perceived CSR increases customer happiness, and this effect is mediated by perceived warmth and competence. Moreover, we discovered that service types moderate the indirect effects of perceived CSR on customer happiness through the proposed mediators. Specifically, the indirect effects of perceived CSR on happiness were stronger for the

credence-based service (credit cards) compared with the experience-based service (theme parks). These results indicate that customers' perceptions of CSR play a more significant role in perceiving warmth and competence of a company and experiencing happiness when evaluating credence services compared to experience services.

#### 5. General discussion

In the present research, we investigated the impact of customers' perceptions of CSR on their impressions of corporate warmth and competence, and how these perceptions are ultimately linked to customer happiness. In Study 1, we found that perceived CSR enhanced customer happiness through perceptions of both warmth and competence, providing support for

the mediating roles of these variables. In Study 2, we further explored the moderating role of service types (experience vs. credence) and discovered that the indirect effects of perceived CSR on customer happiness through the aforementioned mediators were stronger for credence services compared to experience services.

### 5.1. Theoretical contributions

This research makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, it adds to the CSR literature by confirming the effect of CSR on customers' perceptions of corporate competence. While previous studies primarily focused on the impact of CSR on corporate warmth, neglecting its effect on competence-related impressions (Gidaković and Zabkar 2022), our research demonstrates that CSR activities can enhance both warmth and competence perceptions. This finding suggests that CSR can be a valuable tool for companies aiming to strengthen their image in terms of performance and capabilities. Thus, our research highlights the importance of investigating CSR beyond its role in creating a warm and friendly image.

Second, the current research contributes to the literature by examining customer happiness as an important outcome of CSR. While previous CSR research predominantly focused on its effect on various corporate outcomes, such as reputation, consumer evaluations, choices, and loyalty (Maignan, Ferrell, and Hult 1999; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001), it is equally important to examine how CSR affects societal well-being, particularly the well-being of customers who are key partners in value co-creation (Yi 2014). By establishing the link between CSR and customer happiness and identifying the mediating roles of perceived warmth and competence, our research demonstrates that CSR has positive consequences not only for companies but also for customers.

Third, this research contributes to the service literature by revealing that the mediation effects of perceived warmth and competence in the relationship between perceived CSR and customer happiness vary depending on service types. Although the mechanisms operate in both experience-based and credence-based services, the mediation effects were stronger for the latter. Our findings emphasize that customers' perceptions of CSR play a more important role in forming positive impressions on a firm's intentions and capabilities when customers face greater difficulty in evaluating service quality. Therefore, our research highlights the importance of considering the differential impact of CSR across different service industries. It underscores the significance of corporate

activities that enhance customers' beliefs about CSR, particularly in service industries where customers may lack expertise or knowledge to evaluate service quality effectively.

### 5.2. Practical implications

The current research provides valuable practical insights that can be applied to marketing tactics. First, CSR activities serve as an effective means of communicating, conveying not only a company's good-hearted intentions (warmth) but also its capabilities (competence). By strengthening customers' perceptions of CSR, companies can be viewed as both warm and competent, leading to customer happiness. Considering that warm and competent companies are admired (Fiske et al. 2002) and that customers can derive happiness from such companies, CSR can serve as a catalyst for fostering faithful, long-term relationship between customers and companies.

Second, the present research underscores the importance of monitoring how consumers perceive a company's CSR activities. Rather than focusing solely on the activities themselves, it is crucial for companies to understand how customers perceive CSR, as these perceptions are directly linked to their attitudes, emotions, or behaviors toward the corporation. Therefore, companies should make a concerted effort to assess the impact of their CSR activities on customer perceptions by regularly conducting customer surveys. This proactive approach can be instrumental in predicting the beneficial outcomes of CSR for customers, surpassing a mere examination of current statistics or budget allocation for CSR activities.

Third, the research findings have practical implications for corporate budget allocation. Given that corporate budget is often limited, decision-makers need to determine the most effective allocation of resources that will yield the best outcome for their firms. In Study 2, we discovered that the effects of perceived CSR on customer happiness through warmth and competence were more pronounced in credence services compared with experience services. In other words, customers' perceptions of CSR hold greater significance when evaluating service qualities becomes challenging for them. Consequently, allocating budget toward CSR activities becomes more crucial for service providers offering credence services, as opposed to other service types that are relatively easier for customers to evaluate. Overall, the present research provides practical insights for marketing communication strategies, monitoring the effects of CSR, and making informed decisions regarding budget allocation.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research

Although the current research makes meaningful contributions to the literature and marketing practice, it also has several limitations that warrant further investigations in future studies. First, although we examined the relationship between perceived CSR and customer happiness, we did not explore the antecedents that influence customers' perceptions of CSR. It is evident that not all CSR activities capture the attention of customers. Some activities may impress customers, while others may go unnoticed. Therefore, future research can investigate the factors that play a role in connecting CSR activities to customers' perceptions. For example, based on expectancy violation theory (Jussim, Coleman, and Lerch 1987), the type of CSR activities, such as time- versus money-based actions, may have differential effects on customers' perceptions depending on brand positioning (e.g., topdog vs. underdog brands). Consumers may have different expectations regarding the monetary resources by topdog brands, whereas volunteer events involving employees of topdog brands may be perceived as more exceptional and impactful.

Second, although we tested perceived warmth and competence as parallel mechanisms in our study, we did not differentiate the relative strength of their mediating effects or explore factors that influence them. Previous literature has shown that warmth tends to have a stronger effect on emotional value compared with competence (Kolbl et al. 2020). However, there could be various factors that determine the relative effects of competence and warmth on customer happiness. For instance, agency and communion are two psychological forces introduced by Bakan (1966), and individuals may use different levels of these forces depending on situations. Agency reflects an individual's desire for independence, competence, and accomplishment, whereas communion represents one's desire for social connections, warmth, and interpersonal harmony (Rucker and Galinsky 2016). Therefore, it is possible that communion-oriented individuals may experience greater happiness when perceiving warmth from a firm, whereas agency-oriented individuals may derive more happiness when perceiving competence. Situational factors can affect the relative effects of competence and warmth on happiness.

Third, future research could delve into boundary conditions that may influence the link between perceived CSR and warmth or competence, as well as the relationship between warmth or competence and happiness. For example, the former link may be affected by individual loneliness. Lonely individuals may lack warm connections with others and someone to rely on, leading them to perceive greater

warmth and competence from firms engaging in CSR activities. In addition, it is possible that loneliness also affects the latter relationship, whereby perceived warmth and competence have a stronger positive impact on happiness among lonely individuals compared with those who are not lonely. Given that lonely individuals may have limited warm interactions or reassuring relationships, they may place greater value on warmth and competence displayed by firms. Future studies can explore both possibilities.

Finally, in the current research, we focused on customer happiness as the outcome variable. However, within the happiness or well-being literature, there are various constructs related to happiness. For instance, subjective well-being can be categorized as hedonic or eudaimonic well-being. Hedonic well-being is defined in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance, whereas eudaimonic well-being emphasizes living in accordance with one's true self and feeling authentic and alive (Ryan and Deci 2001; Waterman 1993). Although our study focused on hedonic happiness, it would be meaningful to examine whether the socially valuable activities of firms also contribute to individuals' sense of meaning and eudaimonic happiness.

In the present research, we investigated how customers' perceptions of CSR influence their happiness through perceived warmth and competence of firms, and how this effect can be moderated by service types. While previous studies examining the consequences of CSR for firms have provided valuable insights, they have often provided a narrow scope of knowledge regarding the benefits of conducting CSR. We believe that our research can inspire scholars to investigate CSR from a more balanced perspective, returning to the original purpose of CSR, which is to enhance social well-being and acknowledge the important role that customers play as co-creators of services.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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