

## The Effect of Digital Social Responsibility on Consumer Behaviour in the Mobile Telecom Industry

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**Abstract:** This research aims to examine the relationship between perceived digital social responsibility (DSR) and consumer selection by mobile telecom companies in Saudi Arabia, considering purchase intention (PI) and consumer loyalty (CL), with the mediating role of brand preference (BP). This study found digital social responsibility to be a powerful marketing tool that can reach customers and increase sales volume, which is a significant addition for corporate social responsibility officers and marketing managers. Therefore, using social media platforms as a medium is important for influencing consumers' attitudes toward and social responsibility for social media. Telecom companies need to focus on digital social responsibility strategies since there is high competition with similar services and products, making it difficult to earn consumer loyalty. The research strategy employed a positivist approach with a quantitative methodology, utilizing an online questionnaire. The data were collected from 375 Saudi participants and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v.23 for hypothesis testing. The theoretical framework was tested using AMOS v.23 and structural equation modelling (SEM). Weak relationships were observed between perceived digital social responsibility and both PI and CL. However, a significant relationship existed between perceived DSR and BP. The most significant relationships were found between BP and both PI and CL. Thus, BP was identified as a partial mediator between perceived DSR and PI, as well as CL. This study highlights the importance of fostering long-term relationships between consumers and mobile telecom companies. Cultural differences may explain the contradictory findings of previous studies. There are several limitations in terms of the perception of digital social responsibility. In the Saudi context, participants seemed unfamiliar with the term. However, the use of a cross-sectional method prevented the research from measuring the change in participants' perceptions of digital social responsibility over time, making it difficult to measure purchase intentions and consumer loyalty. Additionally, no specific digital platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, were used in this research, making it difficult to analyse each post and its impact. Moreover, future research should investigate small mobile telecom companies in Saudi Arabia.

**Keywords:** brand preference; consumer loyalty; digital social responsibility; corporate social responsibility; purchase intent.

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**1. Introduction.** With the growth of the internet and other digital technologies, businesses worldwide use social media for effective communication with all stakeholders, the most important of which are customers (AlMamun et al., 2020). With the advent of foreign direct investment and government assistance, Saudi Arabia has built a competitive telecommunications industry that is increasing. In the dynamic world, there is a for ethics, which appears in its social responsibility. This social responsibility has dimensions in the workplace, the market, the environment, and society. These dimensions will affect the ability of the marketing of telecommunications services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to retain the loyalty of customers for a long time (Ahmad et al, 2022); therefore, the dimensions of social responsibility will affect the marketing mix or marketing strategy. Digitally, it is important to understand digital social responsibility (Basuliman & Devaraj, 2021), which impacts the Saudi market to increase customer loyalty (Al-Sahli, 2022). However, the dimensions of social responsibility may be similar to those of other countries or may increase depending on the difference between Saudi Arabia's environment and that of other countries. Knowing the factors influencing digital social responsibility for marketing strategies and marketing mixes is important (Saeed, 2023), and researchers are attempting to identify these factors. For example, the offering price for telecommunications services to suit the segments of society and reduce the costs of transferring from telecommunications companies to other telecommunications companies (Alam & Salim, 2012). Additionally, there are product variety, convenience, payment methods, and trust (Al Hamli & Sobaih, 2023), while new factors arise because of the use of blockchain as a means of protection (Ltfi & Mesfar, 2022).

In Saudi Arabia, companies are aware that social media is a new platform for displaying their business, using Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and various other applications (Trad & Dabbagh, 2020). In recent decades, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a topic of particular interest among business practitioners and academics. In American economics, Bowen offers the original concept of CSR, which is the essential molarity of the method a company uses to behave toward the community (Schnepp & Bowen, 1954). To date, different stakeholders, namely, consumers, competitors, governments, and investors, have discussed CSR from different perspectives. The Saudi mobile telecommunications industry emerged after the 2003 modernization, and government support for the Saudi environment has created an intensely competitive telecommunications industry. Currently, the mobile sector is provided by three companies with unified licences: Saudi Telecom Company (STC), Saudi Mobile Telecommunications Service (Zain Saudi), and Etihad Etisalat 2 (Mobily). Furthermore, many companies provide internet Service Providers (ISPs), Mobile Virtual Network Operators (MVNOs), and fixed-line services that focus on 4G long-term evolution (LTE) and 5G networks that align with Vision 2030 (Mordor Intelligence, 2021). In Saudi Arabia, few studies have investigated awareness of digital social responsibility (DSR), which is the extent of CSR using digital tools, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. This platform is also considered an important channel for marketing communication and the development of internet marketing strategies for brand preference, purchase intentions, and consumer loyalty. Unfortunately, although DSR offers significant benefits to companies, it may also jeopardize their reputation, which immediately affects their brand image and consumer behavior.

Therefore, DSR in Saudi Arabia is an important tool for building and predicting consumer brand preference, purchase intention, and consumer loyalty. This research aims to examine the relationship between perceived DSR and consumer selection between mobile telecom companies in Saudi Arabia in terms of purchase intention and consumer loyalty because CSR is important for businesses and other stakeholders to understand the factors that influence consumer behavior to increase purchase intention and consumer loyalty by mediating brand preference. Furthermore, this research aims to develop a framework that explains the structural relationships between the variables that affect consumer selection across mobile telecom companies. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between perceived DSR and purchase intention, consumer loyalty, and brand preference in mobile telecom?
2. What is the relationship between brand preference and purchase intention and consumer loyalty in mobile telecom?

The research generally contributes to the fact that CSR has been a condition for the success of the Saudi transformation plan. According to Vision 2030, the boards and CEOs of Saudi companies have become more aware of managing their reputation's strategic value according to international practices. Surprisingly, the statistics in Saudi Arabia are considered the most extensive national markets for Twitter and Facebook worldwide (Global Media Insight, 2021). Additionally, CSR is highly important throughout companies and is based on ethical practices, a sustainable environment, and human rights.

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This paper comprises six major sections. This section begins by introducing the research in detail and identifying the research aim and objectives with the research questions. Section 2 is the literature review. Section 3 presents the methodology, including the research method, procedures, and data collection instruments. The results are then presented in section 4. Section 5 discusses the results. Finally, section 6 presents the conclusions and research limitations and provides recommendations for future research.

## **2. Literature Review.**

### *2.1. Digital Social Responsibility (DSR) Overview*

The DSR is considered a new strategic movement for businesses. The benefits of social responsibility may positively affect company performance, customer behaviors, and brand image (Barnett et al., 2020). Therefore, DSR is a digital transformation tool that may be used to increase the benefits of CSR. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are new ways to implement CSR for customers and stakeholders (Khattak & Yousaf, 2021). Unfortunately, CSR research on consumer behavior, such as customer loyalty and purchase intentions with consumer emotional brand preference, has been ignored (Shao et al., 2022). Accordingly, recent research has aimed to test the relationships between perceived DSR and purchase intentions and between perceived DSR and customer loyalty, with a mediating effect on brand preference. CSR activity initiatives are environmental, human rights, philanthropic, and economic responsibilities, which are implemented differently according to the business field. Ultimately, two types of CSR perceived value are important to customers and employees. Zeithaml (1988) described that a consumer's perceived value can be assessed by product use based on perceptions of what is received by a given. The cultural roots of Saudi society lie in social responsibilities, but there is a general lack of awareness of CSR, its strategies, and systematic work with sustainable development impact (Khan et al., 2013). Laghouag et al. (2021) assessed the maturity of CSR practices in telecom companies in Saudi Arabia according to Carroll's CSR pyramid. The researchers found that legal responsibility practices were more commonly used. After this, the ethical and economic responsibility practices are better than average. Finally, there is a low level of CSR practices in telecom companies in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, there are three major telecom companies—STC, Mobily, and Zain—all of which compete with one another to implement CSR activities. In 2021, according to the Telecom Review Summit Excellence Awards, Zain was awarded the 'best brand' in the Middle East based on corporate sustainability, initiatives, social media campaigns, and customer experience (Zain, 2021).

Many researchers have studied the relationship between the Saudi Arabian communications sector and social responsibility. Alam & Salim (2012) researched the best marketing methods for retaining customers and increasing customer loyalty for a long time in the communications sector, and the results showed that price offers and low conversion costs affect consumer loyalty. Khizindar et al. (2015) investigated the impact of price, service quality, brand image and trends, as they directly affect customer loyalty to the service provider. Baabdullah et al. (2017) investigated the factors that affect customer behavior, namely, performance expectations, effort expectations, pleasure motives, and awareness, and found that all of these factors have a significant impact on customers' intentions to adopt mobile internet services. Alalwan et al. (2018), by investigating the impact of the mobile internet on the loyalty of Saudi customers, showed that the mobile internet was not an important means of selling mobile phones. At that time, Abed (2020) discussed the importance of small and medium-sized companies entering social commerce to sell their products. There is a possibility to increase competitive advantages, but senior management support and the availability of technology are needed. Kankam-Kwarteng et al. (2022) reported that blockchain-based corporate services in Ltifi & Mesfar (2022) influence consumer behavior in the use of telecommunications in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and that marketing capabilities that serve social responsibility help the relationship between corporate social responsibility and consumer responses in the telecommunications industry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Alfalah et al. (2022) reported that there is a positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and investment in information technology and between corporate social responsibility and the performance of telecommunications companies in emerging markets in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Almuhanha & Alharbi (2023) identified factors influencing efficiency and satisfaction with diverse communication services: product, package, price, promotion, place, people, and public relations. Al Hamli & Sobaih (2023) studied online shopping factors such as product variety, convenience, payment method, trust, and psychological factors in the Saudi Arabian market. They identified product variety, the payment method, and psychological factors. Convenience and trust factors have failed to significantly influence consumers' online shopping decisions during the coronavirus crisis. Khan et al. (2023) found that CSR activities are a way for customers to not worry about price and quality and to increase brand recognition. Saeed (2023) examined the impact of security based on factors such as password management, infrastructure security

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management, email management, organizational security policy, organizational support and training, and the perception of the level of security. The results showed that employees did not consider all factors that could lead to security vulnerabilities that pose potential threats.

### 2.2. *Brand Preference*

Brand preference refers to the degree to which a consumer tends to use a particular brand's product rather than a competitor's product and provides significant brand equity. It is an important tool and goal for companies to measure brand preferences that reflect their position in the market (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995). Recent studies have shown that digital social responsibility has a significant impact on consumers' preferences and purchase intentions in Thailand and that DSR has a significant impact on brand preference and consumers' purchase intentions when brand preference is mediated (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021). BP, which is based on consumer commitments to a brand with the best value, is an important stage in reaching CL. Hence, according to norm reciprocity theory, a recent study revealed that CSR on social media positively impacts CL and brand admiration (Ahmad et al., 2021). Likewise, studies in different countries show the influence of DSR on BP and brand admiration, and differences in nationality have no effect on DSR, unlike for PI (Modyop et al., 2022).

### 2.3. *Purchase Intention*

Consumers' purchase intentions are understood as consumers' psychological probability of purchasing a product (Dodd & Supa, 2011). There has been a series of studies intended to detect the power of media to affect corporate reputation and customer behavior; according to the most recent research, as mentioned before, DSR has a significant impact on brand preference and consumers' purchase intentions (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021). Khattak and Yousaf (2021) studied the role of DSR in CSR and the strategic performance of Hi-Tech in small and medium companies in Pakistan banks. Specifically, researchers have focused on critical points such as how DSR helps to achieve strategic performance and CSR performance, and the results show that DSR plays an essential role in affecting strategic and CSR performance through customer engagement. Additionally, to assess the effect of CSR engagement on electronic word of mouth on social media, the results identify companies and increase e-WOM intentions (Cheng et al., 2021). In 2021, Gupta et al. (2021) studied the relationship between CSR communication on social media and consumer purchase intentions and brand admiration and revealed that the CSR-S positively impacts purchase intentions and partially impacts brand admiration.

### 2.4. *Consumer Loyalty*

Consumer loyalty is an important intangible asset for many companies (Jiang & Zhang, 2016). Loyalty is considered a marketing tool that telecom companies use to influence customers (Imbug et al., 2018). However, in Malaysia, a study on the effect of CSR practices on customer satisfaction on the corporate image of mobile service providers revealed that CSR and customer satisfaction are positively related to the corporate image of mobile service providers (Zhang et al., 2020). In Korea, researchers have examined the effects of the tone and format of CSR messages through social media. The main findings are that CSR messages have a negative impact on consumer engagement and are more engaging when using emotional writing, longer texts, and a hashtag (Chae, 2020). Moreover, Mohammed & Al-Swidi (2019) elaborate on how CSR related to the environment has direct and indirect impacts on customer loyalty. In line with attribution theory, when consumers perceive DSR, they feel the cost value of CSR, and the attribution process will lead to consumer loyalty (Mercadé-Melé et al., 2018; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019; Osakwe & Yusuf, 2020).

### 2.5. *CSR Theories*

This research is based on prior literature that confirms Carroll's theory, attribution theory, and norm reciprocity theory (Carroll, 1991; Gouldner, 1960; Heider, 1958). Two psychological theories may be employed, namely, attribution theory and norm reciprocity theory. First, attribution theory describes the inference process used to understand different events and behaviors. To explore specific consumer behaviors, researchers have used attribution theory (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2017; Jackson, 2019; Sharma, 2021). This research advances attribution theory because of benefits such as helping consumers evaluate brand practices as socially responsible. Second, normative reciprocity theory is a social norm that urges people to turn back direct and indirect actions to business (Gouldner, 1960).

Moreover, recent studies have shown that DSR's impact on preferences and purchase intentions in Thailand is significant when brand preference is mediated (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021). Brand preference, which is based on consumer commitments to a brand with positive value, is an important stage in reaching customer loyalty. Hence, according to norm reciprocity theory, a recent study revealed that CSR on social media positively impacts customer loyalty and brand admiration (Ahmad et al., 2021). Similarly, other studies

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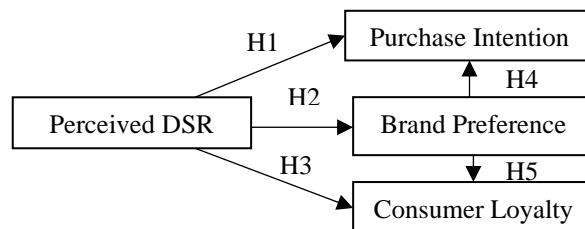
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across other countries have shown the influence of DSR on brand preference and brand admiration, with differences in nationality having no effect on DSR, unlike on purchase intentions (Modyop et al., 2022). Gupta et al. (2021) studied the relationship between CSR communication and social media with respect to consumer purchase intentions and brand admiration and found that CSR-S positively impacted purchase intentions and partially impacted brand admiration.

**3. Methodology and research methods.** The research used a positivist philosophy and deductive approach based on the research question (Quinlan, 2011). The research approach was quantitative, a cross-sectional survey study was carried out, and quantitative data were collected.

### 3.1. Research Framework

The proposed research model or conceptual framework provides an operational relationship between variables. The current framework is considered a continuation of that of Gupta et al. (2021), who employed attribution theory and norm reciprocity theory. The conceptual framework investigates the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variables. where perceived DSR and BP are independent variables and BP, PI, and CL are dependent variables. The relationship between digital social responsibility and purchase intentions, with consumer loyalty mediating brand preference, is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The Conceptual Framework

Sources: developed by the authors.

Hypothesis (H1): There is a relationship between perceived DSR and purchase intention in mobile telecom.

Hypothesis (H2): There is a relationship between perceived DSR and brand preference in mobile telecom.

Hypothesis (H3): There is a relationship between perceived DSR and consumer loyalty in mobile telecom.

Hypothesis (H4): There is a relationship between brand preference and purchase intentions for mobile telecom.

Hypothesis (H5): There is a relationship between brand preference and consumer loyalty in mobile telecom.

### 3.2. Population and Target Sample

This study focuses on individuals who use digital social media platforms that use at least one telecom mobile service, such as STC, Zain, or Mobily, to test purchase intentions and customer loyalty across companies in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the target population in the research is focused on those who use or favour at least one telecom mobile service, such as STC, Zain, or Mobily, and who has access to any digital platform. According to a recent report, there are 29.50 million people with social media access in Saudi Arabia (GMI Blogger, 2022). In this research, to find an appropriate sample size, the researcher used the formula of Yamane (1967), and it was necessary to identify the minimum number of respondents. The appropriate sample size was close to 400, with a 95% confidence level, creating a sampling error of 5%. The research hypotheses were based on data collected from 375 participants after approximately 25 participants were excluded.

### 3.3. Data collection instruments

This questionnaire was adopted from previous literature by existing scales used to measure the variables of hypotheses, following which the instrument's reliability and validity were established. In this regard, the questionnaire was divided into three sections: 1. a pre-screening question; 2. general information about respondents' demographic characteristics; and 3. observed variables. Furthermore, the scale is measured on a five-point Likert scale from strongly agree =5 to strongly disagree =1. In the proposed conceptual framework, perceived DSR is an independent variable; this scale includes five items adopted from Kang & Hustvedt (2013) and Lichtenstein et al. (2004). The brand preference scale comprises four items (Chen & Chang, 2008; Chinomona et al., 2013). Purchase intentions were adopted from (Chen et al., 2015; Putrevu & Lord, 1994) and were measured with three items. Finally, consumer loyalty was measured with four items adopted from

(Wong, 2004), as shown in Table 3. All variables were measured by a five-point Likert scale, as shown in the actual questionnaire.

**Table 1.** Questionnaire constructs and variables

Constructs Coding	Observed Variables	References
Perceived DSR	DSR1 Telecom brand is interested in corporate donations via social media platforms.	(Lichtenstein et al., 2004) And (Kang & Hustvedt, 2013)
	DSR2 My chosen telecom brand is committed to provide nonprofit work to charitable organizations via social media platform.	
	DSR3 During the COVID-19 pandemic, my favourite telecom brand is giving back to the societies that operate on social media platforms.	
	DSR4 Social media platforms facilitate brand donations to individuals and communities via telecom companies.	
	DSR5 Telcom brand integrates digital charitable contributions into its business activities.	
Brand preference	BP1 I feel reverence for the telecom brand that gives back to the community via social media platforms.	(Chen & Chang, 2008) And (Chinomona et al., 2013)
	BP2 I prefer to consume this telecom brand over any other.	
	BP3 I prefer to purchase products or services from this telecom brand rather than other brands that apply the DSR concept.	
	BP4 Overall, I will not change my preferred telecom brand despite the charitable contributions of other companies	
Purchase intention	PI1 I will purchase service from my favourite telecom brand, especially from a brand that applies the digital social responsibilities concept.	(Putrevu & Lord, 1994) And (Chen et al., 2015)
	PI2 I repeatedly consumed services offered by the telecom brand that enhance society and the environment via the social media platform.	
	PI3 Of course, I will purchase some services from that telecom brand.	
Consumer loyalty	CL1 I say positive things about this telecom company to other people.	(Wong, 2004)
	CL2 I recommend my favourite telecom company to others that applies the concept of digital social responsibility	
	CL3 I encourage friends and family to purchase services from a favourite telecom company.	
	CL4 I consider this telecom company as my first choice to purchase services.	

Sources: developed by the authors.

### 3.4. Reliability Analysis

Reliability refers to the consistency of the scale or the extent to which a procedure can lead to the same results repeatedly. The Cronbach's alpha test is a famous test used to measure tool reliability (internal consistency) for each dimension. According to Gliem & Gliem (2013), the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient tends to fall between 0 and 1. Table 2 shows that the "consumer loyalty" dimension has the highest Cronbach's alpha value (0.958), while the "brand preference" dimension has the lowest Cronbach's alpha value (0.721). Statistical techniques for data analysis Statistical Package for Social Science software SPSS v.23 were used to analyse the data collected, and the research hypotheses were tested. Several descriptive and inferential statistics, such as the means and standard deviations, were used.

**Table 2.** Cronbach's alpha reliability test

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	Internal consistency
Perceived DSR	0.843	Good
Brand preference	0.721	Acceptable
Purchase intention	0.824	Good
Consumer loyalty	0.958	Excellent
Overall reliability	0.925	Excellent

Sources: developed by the authors based on the results of the reliability analysis.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. AMOS v.23 with SEM (structural equation modelling) was used to analyse and test the data.

**4. Results.** In this section, we present the results of our study examining the relationship between DSR and purchase intent, with consumer loyalty and brand preference serving as mediating variables. Our analysis aims to shed light on the influence of a consumer's intent to purchase and how this relationship is further mediated by the consumer's loyalty to the brand and their preference for it over others. We employed rigorous statistical methods to ensure the validity of our findings. The results are organized as follows. First, we provide general information about the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Next, we delve into testing the relationships between the study variables and test the effect of the mediator variable "brand preference" in the model by checking the research hypothesis and structural equation model (SEM) technique used through AMOS v.23 software. For data collection, ethical considerations were specified through a consent form, and participants were informed of an anonymous response to the researcher, who would treat them confidentially for scientific research purposes only. Table 3 describes the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents, including their gender, nationality, age, educational level, occupation, and location.

**Table 3.** Respondents' general information

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	156	38.9
	Female	245	61.1
Nationality	Saudi	382	95.3
	Non-Saudi	19	4.7
Age	18 - 24	262	65.3
	25 - 34	83	20.7
	35 - 44	19	4.7
	45 - 54	22	5.5
	55 - 64	14	3.5
	+64	1	.2
Education level	High School Degree	66	16.5
	Bachelor Degree	273	68.1
	Master Degree	48	12.0
	Doctoral Degree	14	3.5
Occupation	Unemployed	272	67.8
	Worker	99	24.7
	Self-employed	30	7.5
Location	Makkah	116	28.9
	Hail	24	6.0
	Al-Baha	2	.5
	Riyadh	114	28.4
	Al-Medina	10	2.5
	Tabouk	17	4.2
	Qassim	37	9.2
	Aseer	24	6.0
	Jazan	9	2.2
	Eastern	37	9.2
	Al-Jouf	3	.7
	Najran	4	1.0
	Northern Borders	4	1.0

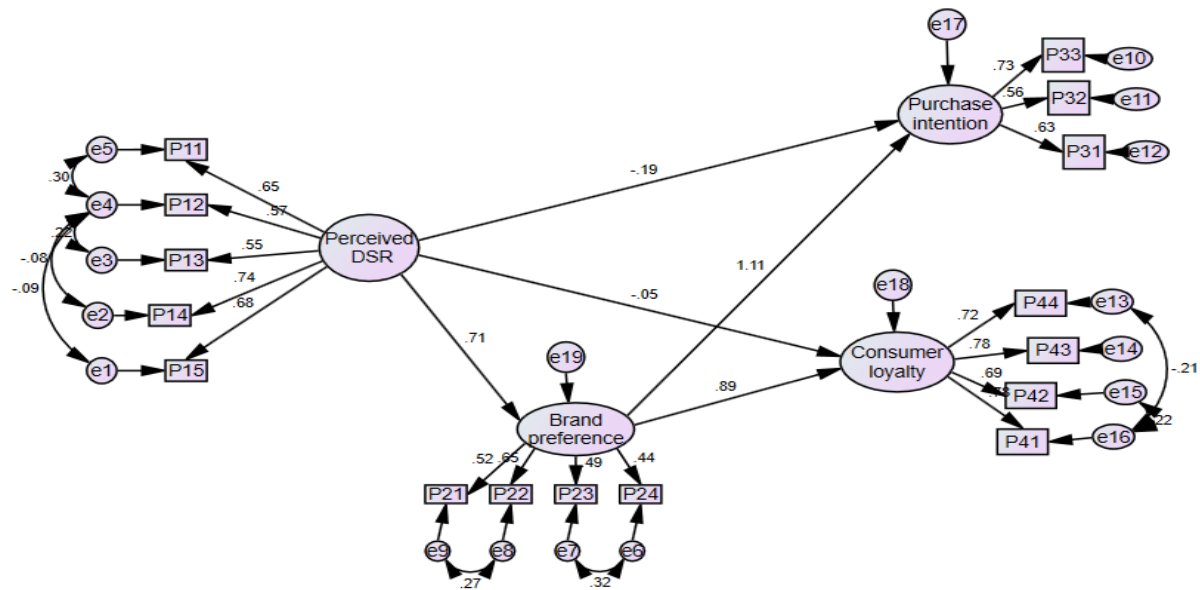
Sources: developed by the authors.

According to the data collected from 375 participants, there were more female participants (38.9%) than male participants (38.9%). In terms of age, the majority of respondents were between 18 and 24 years old, representing 65.3% of the total survey sample. The proportions of the remaining age groups were 25-34 (20.7%), 35-44 (4.7%), and >45 (9%). In terms of education level, 16.5% had a high school degree, 68.1% had a bachelor's degree or a bachelor's degree, 12% had a master's degree, and 3.5% held doctoral qualifications. The breakdown of the respondents' occupations was as follows: 67.8% were unemployed, 24.7% were employed workers, and the smallest portion (7.5%) were self-employed. Finally, for the location respondents, the two largest portions of respondents were from the Makkah region (28.9%) and the Riyadh region (28.4%), with the remaining respondents spreading across other parts of the country.

To test the relationships between the study variables and to test the effect of the mediating variable "brand preference" in the model, the structural equation model (SEM) technique was used with AMOS v.23 software.

AMOS v.23 evaluates the direct and indirect effects of research variables. The most important reason for using SEM is that the direct and indirect relationships among causal variables can be measured with a single model (Meydan et al., 2011).

AMOS v.23 was used to perform confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Arbuckle, 2009). An acceptable CFA model fit was defined as meeting the following criteria (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Field et al., 2004):  $\chi^2/df < 3.0$ , RMSEA  $< 0.08$ , and IFI, CFI  $> 0.90$ . The CFA results showed that the model had good fit statistics, with  $\chi^2/df=2.53$ , an RMSEA of 0.062, a CFI of 0.94, and an IFI of 0.94. According to Awang (2012), a good factor loading must be  $> 0.5$ , and Table 5 also shows that the Cronbach's alpha for all variables is above 0.70, which illustrates that the study variables had good reliability.



**Figure 2.** Structural Model

Sources: developed by the authors

**Table 5.** Structural model factor loading and reliability

Variables/Constructs	Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Reliability
Perceived DSR	P11	0.65	0.795	Acceptable
	P12	0.57		
	P13	0.55		
	P14	0.74		
	P15	0.68		
Brand preference	P21	0.52	0.716	Acceptable
	P22	0.95		
	P23	0.49		
	P24	0.44		
Purchase intention	P31	0.73	0.78	Acceptable
	P32	0.56		
	P33	0.63		
Consumer loyalty	P41	0.72	0.833	Good
	P42	0.78		
	P43	0.69		
	P44	0.72		

Sources: developed by the authors.

To examine the effect of perceived DSR and brand preference on purchase intention and consumer loyalty, path analysis was used. As part of hypothesis testing, brand preferences were found to be a potential mediator. The analysis in Table 6 shows that perceived DSR is negatively but nonsignificantly associated with purchase intention ( $\beta=-0.198$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). Perceived DSR is positively and significantly associated with brand preferences ( $\beta=0.514$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Perceived DSR is negatively but nonsignificantly associated with consumer loyalty ( $\beta=-$



0.057,  $P > 0.05$ ). Brand preferences are positively and significantly associated with purchase intentions ( $\beta = 1.617$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Brand preferences are positively and significantly associated with consumer loyalty ( $\beta = 1.515$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ).

**Table 6.** Regression Weights

H. No.	Paths	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Remarks
H <sub>1</sub>	Perceived DSR > Purchase intention	-0.198	0.129	-1.539	0.124	H <sub>1</sub> not supported
H <sub>2</sub>	Perceived DSR > Brand preferences	0.514	0.078	6.598	***	H <sub>2</sub> supported
H <sub>3</sub>	Perceived DSR > Consumer loyalty	-0.057	0.121	-0.472	0.637	H <sub>3</sub> not supported
H <sub>4</sub>	Brand preferences > Purchase intention	1.617	0.253	6.401	***	H <sub>4</sub> supported
H <sub>5</sub>	Brand preferences > Consumer loyalty	1.515	0.235	6.453	***	H <sub>5</sub> supported

Note: Model Fitness:  $\chi^2 = 230.475$ ,  $df = 91$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.532$ ,  $RMSEA = .062$ ,  $RMR = .071$ ,  $GFI = .931$ ,  $CFI = .94$ , \*\*\* =  $P$  value < 0.001

Sources: developed by the authors.

The mediation analysis is conducted by treating perceived DSR as an independent variable. Purchase intention and consumer loyalty are the dependent variables, and brand preferences are the mediator. The mediation analysis is based on the analysis of indirect effects based on the classical approach of Baron & Kenny (1986). The researcher performed mediation analysis by using direct and indirect effects based on bootstrap procedures (2000 samples) and bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (95%). The results are provided in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Mediation Variable Analysis

Path	Total Effects	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Remarks
Perceived DSR > Brand preferences > Purchase intention	0.001	0.001	0.001***	Brand preferences is full mediates the relationship between Perceived DSR and Purchase intention
Perceived DSR > Brand preferences > Consumer loyalty	0.001	0.001	0.001***	Brand preferences is full mediates the relationship between Perceived DSR and Consumer loyalty

Note: \* < .05, \*\* < .01, \*\*\* < .001

Sources: developed by the authors.

From an economic perspective, Saudi Arabia has built a competitive telecommunications industry that is increasing with foreign direct investment and government assistance. In a dynamic world, there is a need for ethical considerations, which appear in social responsibility. According to our respondents, 90% are aged between 18 and 34, so the prominence of social responsibility across these various dimensions is likely amplified for millennial and Gen Z consumers, who make up the majority of the respondent base. In this regard, the telecom industry's social responsibility has important dimensions in the workplace, the market, the environment, and society. These dimensions will affect the ability of the marketing of telecom services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to retain customer loyalty for a long time (Ahmad et al, 2022). In 2022, the digital economy will contribute approximately 14.0% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Saudi Arabia. The contribution of the digital economy to Saudi Arabia's GDP is expected to increase further as the economy continues to undergo digitalization (General Authority for Statistics, 2022). Under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, the telecom industry is expected to play a crucial role in supporting the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and promoting the growth of the nonoil sector. This aligns with the principles of DSR, which emphasize the need for businesses to operate responsibly in the digital space (Chaaben et al., 2022). However, Saudi Arabia is the largest technology market in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, valued at more than \$40 billion, and has been attracting new investments to drive its transformation into an innovation-based economy (Telecom Review, 2020).

**5. Discussion.** The first question sought to determine the relationship between the perceived DSR and purchase intention, consumer loyalty, and brand preference in mobile telecom. The results suggest a weak relationship between perceived DSR and purchase intention and consumer loyalty. Therefore, H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>3</sub> are rejected. However, these results differ from those of several published studies (Ahmad et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2021; Modyop et al., 2022; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021), which have shown that DSR is significantly related to purchase intentions and consumer loyalty. The reason for the contradictory results may be due to differences in cultural dimensions. On the other hand, H<sub>2</sub> is accepted because there is a significant relationship between the perceived DSR and brand preference. This result is supported by

attribution theory, in which the attribution process helps participants assess feelings about a brand as a result of DSR activities (Cheng et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2021; Modyop et al., 2022; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021). The second research question focused on the relationship between brand preference and purchase intention and consumer loyalty in mobile telecom. The study revealed a positive relationship between brand preference and purchase intention and consumer loyalty. As such, H2, H4, and H5 are accepted. A comparison of these findings with those of other studies confirms that brand preference is positively and significantly associated with purchase intention and consumer loyalty (Ahmad et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2021; Modyop et al., 2022; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021), sometimes referred to as brand preference or brand admiration. Therefore, this result may be explained by norm reciprocity theory, which states that loyal consumers see DSR activities of their telecom companies expecting to reciprocate positively. Similarly, consumers feel reverence for telecom brands that give back to the community via social media platforms, which is expected to increase consumer purchase likelihood. Surprisingly, brand preference was found to partially mediate the relationship between perceived DSR and purchase intention, and the indirect effects of consumer loyalty were significant. These relationships may be partly explained by previous studies, as the emotional aspect of consumer behavior is a long-term relationship between consumers and telecom companies (Ahmad et al., 2021; Gupta et al., 2021; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021).

**6. Conclusions.** The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the relationships between telecom companies' perceived digital social responsibility (DSR), brand preferences, purchase intentions, and consumer loyalty. The analysis of the survey data offers a deeper understanding of how these factors interact with and influence consumer behaviour within the Saudi Arabian telecom market. The results indicate that while perceived DSR does not have a direct or significant impact on purchase intentions or consumer loyalty, it plays an important role in shaping consumers' brand preferences. Specifically, the telecom company's perceived DSR was found to have a positive and significant association with brand preferences. In turn, brand preferences emerged as a strong predictor of both purchase intention and consumer loyalty. The results highlight the central role that brand preference plays in the telecom company's ability to translate its perceived DSR efforts into tangible business outcomes. According to the existing theories of our studies under the norm reciprocity framework, the indirect effect of perceived DSR on purchase intentions and loyalty through brand preference implies that the reciprocal relationship between the company and consumers is a long-term process (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021).

Based on the study outcomes, there are several important policy implications and recommendations for the telecom company to consider in the context of the Saudi Arabian market. In this regard, the Saudi government's Vision 2030 emphasizes the importance of sustainability, digital transformation, and social responsibility (Digital Government Authority, 2022). Therefore, telecom companies should ensure that their CSR initiatives are closely aligned with and contribute to the overarching national development goals. Saudi Arabian consumers are heavily influenced by Islamic values and cultural traditions, and the company has to incorporate some elements into its CSR and branding strategies to resonate more effectively with the local consumer base (Almatrudi et al., 2023). In addition, to make access a key priority in Saudi Arabia's digital transformation agenda, the telecom company's CSR efforts should focus on bridging the digital divide and empowering underserved communities to demonstrate its commitment to social progress (GOV. SA, n.d.). While perceived DSR may not directly impact purchase intentions, the indirect effect through brand preferences highlights the importance of taking a long-term view.

On the other hand, the results have practical implications for telecom companies operating in the Saudi Arabian market. First, telecom companies should prioritize DSR, investing resources in digital infrastructure development, digital literacy programs, and other socially responsible digital initiatives. Second, the partial mediating effect of brand preference suggests that telecom companies should closely integrate their CSR efforts, particularly DSR, into their overall branding and marketing strategies (Lopez-Rodríguez & Smith, 2020). Third, telecom companies could establish strategic partnerships with government and nonprofit organizations to amplify their social impact and strengthen their reputation as socially responsible corporate citizens. The results suggest that tailoring customer engagement and loyalty programs to reflect local cultural preferences and communication styles can increase brand loyalty. Hence, telecom companies should invest in localized customer engagement and loyalty programs to foster long-term relationships with their customers. Finally, the study highlights the need to regularly monitor changes in consumer preferences, market trends, and government priorities in Saudi Arabia. Telecom companies should adapt their CSR, branding, and customer engagement strategies to ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness in the rapidly evolving Saudi Arabian market. All the research studies, regardless of the field or topic, have some inherent limitations, and

there are several limitations. The current research has focused primarily on the Saudi Arabian market, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region or the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) context. Additionally, the focus on the telecom sector, while providing valuable industry-specific insights, may overlook the potential differences and unique dynamics across other sectors, such as e-commerce, finance, healthcare, and manufacturing. In the Saudi context, participants seemed unfamiliar with the term. A sample size of 375, while providing a foundation, may not capture the full complexity and diversity of the Saudi context, potentially limiting the depth of understanding. Explaining the terms and giving examples was time-consuming and involved asking the researcher by email. The use of the cross-sectional method prevented the research from measuring the change in participants' perceptions of DSR over time, making it difficult to measure purchase intentions and consumer loyalty. Moreover, no specific digital platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, were used in this research, making it difficult to analyse each post and its impact.

To conclude, after identifying the limitations of studies in the Saudi context, the next step is to provide further directions for the investigation. First, the scope of the sample should be broadened by significantly increasing the overall number of participants and ensuring that the sample is more representative of the Saudi population, considering demographic characteristics, geographical distribution, and industry sectors. Adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative techniques, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, can provide deeper insights. Additionally, incorporating longitudinal analyses can provide insights into the dynamic nature of DSR and how it may be influenced by market changes, regulatory updates, and emerging technological trends. Importantly, future studies should also focus on the impact of DSR on employees across different sectors. This can help provide a more holistic understanding of how DSR initiatives are received and implemented within organizations. The role of government and regulatory frameworks is explored by assessing the impact of existing regulations and policies on corporate DSR practices.

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**Вплив цифрової соціальної відповідальності на поведінку споживачів у мобільній телекомунікаційній галузі**

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Метою статті є дослідження взаємозв'язків між сприйманням цифрової соціальної відповідальності (DSR) та вибором споживачів мобільних телекомунікаційних компаній у Саудівській Аравії, враховуючи намір покупки (PI) та лояльність споживачів (CL), із врахуванням посередницької ролі переваги бренду (BP). У дослідженні було встановлено, що цифрова соціальна відповідальність є потужним маркетинговим інструментом, який формує лояльність споживачів і збільшує обсяг продажів, що є важливим для корпоративної соціальної відповідальності та директорів з маркетингу. Використання соціальних медіа як середовища важливе для впливу на ставлення споживачів до соціальної відповідальності. Телекомунікаційні компанії повинні зосередитися на стратегіях цифрової соціальної відповідальності, оскільки існує висока конкуренція зі схожими послугами та продуктами, що ускладнює завоювання лояльності споживачів. У статті авторами використано позитивістський підхід з кількісною методологією, застосовуючи онлайн-опитувальник. Дані були зібрані від 375 саудівських респондентів та проаналізовані за допомогою пакету статистичного аналізу для соціальних наук (SPSS) v.23 для тестування гіпотез. Теоретичну структуру було протестовано за допомогою AMOS v.23 та моделювання структурних рівнянь (SEM). Було виявлено слабкі зв'язки між сприйманою цифровою соціальною відповідальністю та як PI, так і CL. Проте, існував значний зв'язок між сприйманою DSR та BP. Найбільш значні зв'язки були знайдені між BP та як PI, так і CL. Таким чином, BP було визначено як частковий посередник між сприйманою DSR та PI, а також CL. Це дослідження підкреслює важливість розбудови довгострокових взаємовідносин між споживачами та мобільними телекомунікаційними компаніями. Культурні відмінності можуть пояснити суперечливі результати попередніх досліджень. Авторами наголошено, що існує кілька обмежень щодо сприйняття цифрової соціальної відповідальності. У контексті Саудівської Аравії учасники здавалися незнайомими з цим терміном. Використання перехресного методу завадило дослідженню виміряти зміну сприйняття учасниками цифрової соціальної відповідальності з часом, що ускладнює вимірювання намірів покупки та лояльності споживачів. Крім того, у цьому дослідженні не використовувались конкретні цифрові платформи, такі як Facebook, Twitter або Instagram, що ускладнює аналіз кожного поста та його впливу. Майбутні дослідження повинні досліджувати малі мобільні телекомунікаційні компанії в Саудівській Аравії.

**Ключові слова:** перевага бренду; лояльність споживачів; цифрова соціальна відповідальність; корпоративна соціальна відповідальність; намір покупки.