

# **CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT ON GEN Z COMMUNICATION AND PURCHASING DECISION IN INDIA**

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## DECLARATION

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I certify that the dissertation entitled: Corporate Social Responsibility: understanding the impact on Gen Z Communication Purchasing Decision in India submitted for the degree of MSc in International Business Management is result of my own work and that where reference is made of others, due acknowledgement is given.

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## Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility is an idea that a business adopts to act socially and environmentally positively towards the consumers. It is also seen as a strategic indicator that contributes to brand reputation. This qualitative study investigates the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on Gen Z in India. Generation Z one of the most technologically advanced generations now. These digital humans have access to extensive information with just a click. However, it has been showcased that Generation Z whilst relying on word-of-mouth, prefer to check ratings and reviews online rather than understanding companies' values. This cuts off the relationship between humans and the companies and becomes a threat for firms that want to connect with the younger generation with their ideas and initiatives towards the environment. CSR not only creates a brand image but promotes consumer satisfaction.

The research takes a phenomenological approach, gathering primary data from six semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis uncovered seven themes underpinning the findings of this study.

Broadly speaking, this study finds that Gen Z buying behavior is multifaceted and that whilst Gen Z desire to purchase products and services from companies that have high CSR standards, the actual buying decision is a factor of 1) Access to information and 2) Income levels and 3) Education levels.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

A corporation's social responsibility (CSR) is defined as its moral responsibility to behave ethically in accordance with society's expectations and standards (Beal, 2014). Due to unethical social issues, environmental issues (such as the depletion of natural resources), and corporate scandals over the past few decades, corporate social responsibility has gained substantial traction in both the business and academic sectors (Amram et al., 2017; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). It was well known before Enron that society and business had a damaged relationship; as a consequence, people's purchasing behaviour was affected by those sever relationships (Mohr & Webb, 2005). A response to these challenges was the realization that managers needed to devote additional resources to CSR. There were several philanthropic practices adopted and socially responsible manufacturing practices implemented (Auger & Devinney, 2007; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

As Baby Boomers experienced the development of television and Generation X witnessed the growth of the personal computer, businesses must alter their approach to consumers. Millennials, those born between 1980 and 1995, grew up with the Internet and cell phones, while Gen Zs, those born between 1996 and 2012, can't remember a time before these. Because of the rapid changes in technology usage between generations, executives are having to evaluate which CSR marketing tactics offer the most significant benefits to these new clients (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020). Because Gen Zs are new clients, CEOs have had limited opportunities to assess their true interest in CSR and how a company's marketing strategy influences their purchasing behaviours.

According to previous generations' study, the advantages of effective CSR marketing include increased community goodwill, customer loyalty, improved brand positioning, and corporate respect (Kotler & Lee, 2005). According to Anderson et al. (2018), millennials care twice as much about a company's CSR initiatives as they do about the quality of its products. In this qualitative instrumental case study, the researcher studied how Gen Z buyers decide if an organization matches their views and how CSR influences their purchase.

Although a few studies have focused on Gen Z consumers, not much is known about their purchasing habits and the distinctive features, preferences, and attributes that differentiate them from previous generations (Dimock, 2019). This lack of research is attributable to Generation Z's current transition into adult customers who are just beginning to spend their own money on items and services (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

The study relied heavily on interviews, which were guided by research questions on how CSR influenced Gen Zs' purchasing behavior and how they knew about businesses' CSR initiatives. This chapter provides context for the research subject and technique used in the study, as well as the nature of the problem, its objective, and its significance. It also describes key terms that the reader may not be acquainted with, as well as the theoretical background and how this study will add to previous research.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND

As a result, corporations began to prioritize social responsibility over profits and shareholder value in the second half of the twentieth century, concentrating on all stakeholders through CSR initiatives. Many of the programs targeted customers because of all the stakeholders; consumers are "particularly susceptible to a

company's CSR initiatives" (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004, p. 9), influencing how they perceive a corporation and subsequently affecting their purchasing patterns.

Finally, if consumer purchasing habits lead to greater patronage and loyalty for a CSR-practicing business, earnings will grow, helping to justify CSR to the "financial guardians" (corporate boards and top management) who are ultimately accountable for CSR's influence on the bottom line. Carroll and Shabana, p. 92. Some options include Establishing a code of conduct, appointing an ethics officer, or including CSR on their website are some options. These activities will be ineffective unless they are linked to doing business or producing value (Parmar et al., 2010).

Although Gen Zs are too young to be impacted by the same corporate scandals as their predecessors, they have specific features and unfettered access to information that enable them to judge the sincerity of a company's socially oriented activities. The need for truth and transparency is central to Gen Zs' purchasing habits, and they want an organization's behaviour to be ethical and to permeate across all its stakeholders (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

For this study, the researcher chose a qualitative method over a quantitative one since a quantitative analysis answers whether or not, how much, or to what extent CSR influences customer behaviour. On the other hand, this study sought a more in-depth understanding of how Gen Zs evaluate enterprises' socially responsible acts, how it influences their purchasing habits, and how they discover firms' CSR initiatives.

### 1.3 PURPOSE OF STUDY:

This research will help develop a relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and consumer behaviour associated. A good strategy for CSR can only be developed when there is adequate knowledge about the expectations and perspective of the consumer.

According to a study by Cone (2019), almost 9 in 10 Gen Zs expressed that they are concerned about the planet and societal and environmental issues. With widely differing traits and preferences, Gen Zs have varying levels of knowledge available via technology. Gen Z is a hypercognitive generation that could process and analyse knowledge from an array of sources, including in-person interactions (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). If they share favourable or adverse feedback about an organization online, their message can make a quick impact on friends and families.

Another primary reason to study was to know how Gen Z receive messages from companies regarding CSR. As a group most of the Gen Z state that the environment and social issues are the reason that they are concerned about this. Whereas 69% of the people state that they need research to understand if they are socially responsible (Cone, 2017, 2019)

Therefore firms can use online-based marketing to communicate and make people aware of CSR because there is a need to make consumer purchasing behaviour as much more understandable (Puiu, 2016).

### 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION:

This study aims to find how Gen Z in India assess whether a company's actions are aligned with Gen Z values and does it have any impact on purchasing behaviour.

According to a study, a positive correlation exists between CSR activities and financial results for businesses (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). Therefore, it is one thing for Gen Z to state that they care about CSR; however, “consumer's awareness of a company is also an integral prerequisite to their positive reactions to such actions (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004, p. 14).

Therefore the research will address how CSR influences Gen Z purchasing behaviour, how they know about the company addressing and communicating about CSR and whether they align with the values they claim.

1. How does CSR influence Indian Gen Z purchasing behaviour, how do they communicate with companies and do they align with their values?
2. How do Indian Gen Z validate company CSR Claims?

### 1.5 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Consumers are often regarded as essential stakeholders, they contribute to a company's values by purchasing its products. And studies suggest that a great deal of heterogeneity in consumer awareness that a firm is socially responsible can be a hurdle for any firm trying to benefit by introducing CSR practices. (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Therefore some people will be evaluating a firm's CSR commitments, whereas on the contrary, others are not even aware of whether a company is demonstrating ethical or unethical practices.

Therefore, a business that is willing to grow based on the CSR values attached to their business would seek to proactively communicate about the CSR commitments if they expect it to influence consumer behaviour. The key element is how to communicate with the younger generations and this can be done by technology that they use for shopping and communicating “ As most consumers are eager to know about the products they are going to consume what is the source

of that, the advertising of CSR becomes important and salient stimulus for the consumer” ( Fagerstrom et al., 2015 , p. 198).

Some research also indicates that there are false CSR statements made by organizations which are responsible for actions Gen Z takes in their purchasing decisions, highlighting a disparity between what companies say and do (Auger & Devinney, 2007).

This research focuses on Gen Z as to date, there is a dearth of research on how CSR influences their buying behaviour. Even though millennials are close in age, a report by MNI Targeted Media Insight Lab (2020) states that millennials are unlike Gen Z , i.e. a generation surrounded by digital influence and values, identity and purpose.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 HISTORY AND DEFINITION OF CSR

CSR originated in the 1800s but eventually became a real-world concept in the early 1950s (Carroll, 2008). William C. Frederick (1960), one of the early pioneers, described the collapse of Laissez-Faire business philosophy, which was later said to be the foundation of free competition in the 1950s. According to Fedrick (1960), when businesses act in the self-interest and interest of the people, they benefit from it automatically. In that way, an unregulated industry would benefit from the democratic society because business interests would naturally align with societal interests.

According to Milton Friedman, (Cadbury, 2006), a company's social responsibility is to maximise stakeholder profits. This deceptively simple definition has several flaws. Companies are a part of society, and their business decisions inevitably have social consequences. Companies' role is to provide goods and services to society legally, efficiently, and profitably. To fulfil their primary purpose, they can engage in social activities that they believe are in their corporate interest and have their shareholders' interest and support. Such actions are not always detrimental to shareholders, who value corporate reputation.

As CSR expanded during the 1990s, new topics, such as stakeholder and corporate ethics theories, arose, particularly in response to unethical company practices. (Carroll, 1999). Corrupt corporate scandals prompted the collapse of corporate titans like Enron and WorldCom in the early twenty-first century, creating significant antipathy between the American people and industry (Mohr and Webb, 2005).

If these corporate scandals, which resulted in the Sarbanes-Oxley rules, aided in igniting a fire of unfavourable opinion of Corporate America, the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC0 fuelled the flames. The Great Financial Crisis was an economic crisis that led to the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers (one of the oldest and largest US investment banks), the implosion of the US real estate bubble, and the collapse of the global financial system.

## 2.2 CARROLL'S THEORY :

According to Carroll (1991), CSR can further be depicted as a pyramid that includes: legal, ethical, philanthropic and financial obligations. These components provide an outline of what should be included in a company's CSR plan. The economic aspect of the pyramid states that there is an economic expectation from the businesses. They indeed need a profitable market to have enough resources in operation. Therefore, financial responsibility is a baseline requirement for any competitive business organisation. Society wants businesses to operate and function under specific laws and regulations in codified ethics. With ethical responsibilities comes embracing activities, standards, policies, and practices that society expects or prohibits, even though they are not codified into law. The philanthropic component focuses on having a good quality of life within any organisation. CSR is important when implementing public relations because it can influence consumers' perception and reputation of a brand and their purchasing decision.



Figure 1: Carroll's' Theory of CSR ((Carroll, 2016)

### 2.3 STAKEHOLDER THEORY

All tasks of CSR entail the necessity of external stakeholder communication and understanding the values and requirements of stakeholders, including workers, customers, suppliers and community members in which the firms operate. According to (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), qualitative research concepts are developed inductively rather than deductively, as in quantitative research. Consequently, a theoretical framework was designed to serve as a study's foundation and stakeholder theory, which has lately emerged as the dominant paradigm in CSR. It was utilised to drive the research. (McWilliams et al., 2006).

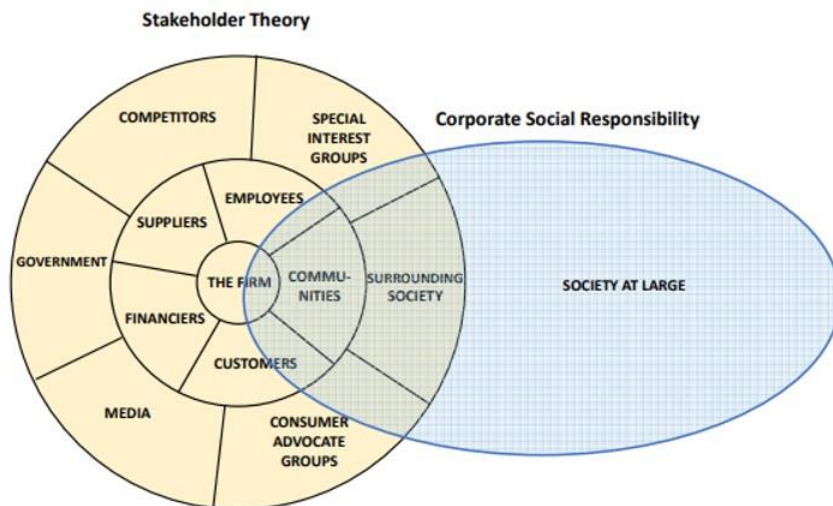


Figure 2: interrelationship between stakeholders' (Freeman and Dmytriiev, 2017) theory and CSR

The idea of theory emphasises the need for managers to be held accountable to diverse stakeholders to protect stakeholders' interests. For a business, it operates from three perspectives: stakeholders who influence the firm's business operations; how such linkages affect vital stakeholders and the organisation; and how essential stakeholder perspectives could jeopardise the achievement of the firm's strategic measures (Bonnafous-Boucher& Rendtorff,2016).

There has been an interrelationship between stakeholder theory and CSR. Organisations would fail to achieve their CSR goals without their stakeholders' participation, expertise and loyalty. Although the two concepts are different, they can align to work for the betterment of the company and society. Stakeholders' theory focuses on stakeholders within reach of the company's initiatives, such as the local community.

From a sustainability perspective, CSR is linked to stakeholder theory since it focuses on the demands of the firm's stakeholders while optimising profitability (Calabrese et al., 2013).

Focusing on stakeholders produces an iterative loop in which, if employees are pleased, they treat their customers well. If customers are content, they return to purchase more products and services, earnings rise, and management expands operations and adds employment, ultimately benefiting communities and society as a whole.

## 2.4 CSR BENEFITS

The concept of CSR has been paradoxical to most business models. As Milton Friedman suggested in his seminal article proposed in 1970, the company's primary function is to produce profits for shareholders. Researchers are being driven to investigate the link between CSR and financial performance, to test the truthfulness of worries regarding a trade-off between investment in CSR and profitability. Many studies have explored techniques and marketing of CSR activities such as attracting and retaining employee talent; boosting employee loyalty, engagement and productivity; and building brand loyalty with stakeholders (Bernardino, 2021)

Employee confidence in the business is an advantage that might result from a firm committed to CSR. Employees are likelier to feel that a firm that engages in high levels of CSR with other stakeholders would treat them ethically, improving employee loyalty (Yadav et al.,2018). Therefore, to maximise the likelihood that practising CSR will boost employee loyalty, the organisation must undertake CSR efforts are regarded as genuine endeavours to behave socially responsibly rather than just executing a marketing gimmick (Stojanvic et al., 2020)

Another way that CSR benefits employees is by increasing their inventiveness. According to a study conducted by Hur et al. (2018), CSR positively influences employees' creativity through compassion and intrinsic motivation, which ties employees' CSR views to employee creativity.

Hur et al. (2018) go on to say that socially responsible businesses frequently foster an environment for their employees that encourages an innovative and creative work environment, favourably affecting their creativity in generating new goods and services. The positive image from practising CSR also helps give the company a competitive advantage (Davis et al., 2018).

Previous research indicates that CSR has a favourable influence on customer satisfaction in both large and small businesses. (Luu,2019). According to Luo and Bhattacharya (2006), CSR may considerably impact a firm's market value through customer satisfaction. On the other hand, SMEs are typically disadvantaged in reaping CSR advantages since they are less likely to have the manpower to designate people to pursue CSR initiatives. It is challenging to replicate CSR initiatives because of the limited resources available to SMEs. Furthermore, corporations in established sectors are expected to engage more in CSR since product diversification is greater and consumers have more sophisticated preferences and information.

## 2.5 CSR LIMITATIONS

CSR is founded on the assumption that adopting CSR generates considerable revenue and value for businesses (Beal,2014). Conversely, companies can suffer significant brand harm if knowledgeable stakeholders discover that organisations claiming to be socially responsible are presenting a misleading image of operating socially responsibly (Bashir et al.,2016). This deceit is a typical criticism levelled at CSR opponents, who allege that businesses frequently employ CSR to conceal unethical or selfish business activities (Freeman & Smith, 2016 ).

Some of the vulnerable areas of stakeholder theory are when resources are allocated to one stakeholder at the expense of another. For example, suppose a company is willing to decrease the prices of the products to provide benefits to

customers or provide compensation for employee profitability. In that case, innovation may suffer in the long term. Although these discounts and compensation may benefit customers, they would be detrimental to shareholders, whom many leaders feel are essential stakeholders (Danielson et al., 2008). According to Freeman and Dmytriiev (2017), this argument is a false dichotomy because stakeholders are interconnected and providing value for one helps the overall value of others. According to Bhattacharya et al. (2009), the key is to create connections among stakeholders by providing them with all advantages.

Another issue is that businesses do not always have all the resources to promote CSR, and CEOs lack the ability to deal with social issues and seek all the clinical and technological knowledge (Kotler & Lee, 2005). This dearth of expertise is especially prevalent in smaller businesses with limited resources; many roles are cross-functional, so people must be knowledgeable in many areas and are frequently overburdened and have a more informal operating framework (Sendlhofer, 2020)

CSR incurs additional expenses, frequently passed on to consumers through price hikes, making firms less competitive worldwide (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). These increased expenses are particularly prominent when new initiatives are not founded on the firm's core strengths, resulting in more significant expenditures for creating, disseminating and monitoring CSR operations. When CSR efforts are linked to a company's core capabilities, they emerge from its knowledge, reducing all expenses related to the initiatives because all activities do not need to be established (Webb, 2014). Similarly, Bhattacharya and Luo (2006) discovered that the performance of CSR programs is strongly dependent on corporate capabilities, which might result in negative results for some firms.

## 2.6 CSR COMMUNICATION AND STRATEGIES

Organisations' marketing tactics continually change as CSR advances into the twenty-first century. It is no longer sufficient for a company to say that it is socially responsible only in its marketing activities or annual reports (Wilburn & Wilburn, 2014). Prior to the internet age, CSR activities were communicated through official papers (annual reports or news releases), marketing (TV, radio, billboards), or product packaging (Du et al., 2010). Organisations have lately begun using the internet and online media to convey their CSR strategies (Eberle & Berens, 2013). Businesses must learn how to use this new communication medium successfully, as evidenced by research by Clarkson et al. (2020) which found that how CSR is conveyed is critical in shaping stakeholders' perspectives.

Companies must examine the following factors to communicate with Gen Z (Cone, 2019) effectively:

- Keeping the message upbeat, as Gen Z are weary of negative messaging and want to be stimulated.
- Communicate in their language. Companies that address current topics and are discussed on social media platforms are appealing to Gen Z.
- Energise by inspiring others and showing how a group effort may result in concrete change.
- Use social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram to find target consumers where they are most active.
- Use their motivators to persuade them to spread a company's message through their internet network.

Businesses are also beginning to recognise the value of word-of-mouth advertising, which many younger generations prefer and trust over communications from a company. According to Francis and Hoefel (2018), Gen Z are highly inclusive and do not differentiate between what they hear online and

their real-world peers. According to Du et al. (2010), customers react favourably when they learn about CSR initiatives via informal sources rather than corporate ones (TV advertisements, annual reports, or product packaging). According to O'Donnell et al. (2002), the power of word of mouth should be regarded as one of the key drivers of competitive advantages for businesses since, in today's internet age, social media plays an essential part in how Gen Z learn (Cone,2019).

Social media to communicate CSR messaging is relatively new, with very few studies (Gupta et al., 2021). Even though businesses have been using social media to engage consumers with their brands and products. This emphasis on social media communication with today's customers must be taken seriously because any company's socially irresponsible behaviour can be quickly disseminated through social media platforms and reach stakeholders who have become increasingly concerned about ethical issues (Groza et al., 2011).

Younger customers who are more likely to stop purchasing from a business that engages in unethical practices require this immediate dissemination of information. Consumers punish businesses that are not socially responsible, and unethical corporate behaviour can cause significant damage, just as CSR can build a positive brand identity. Due to the prevalence of social media, blogs and chat rooms amongst younger consumers, this response to word-of-mouth communication is becoming increasingly widespread online (Due et al., 2010). Social media's word-of-mouth marketing significantly impacts small and medium-sized businesses because it allows leaders to emphasise their commitment to CSR (Resnick et al., 2016; Stokes and Lomax, 2002).

Social media users who have a large number of followers are becoming increasingly popular as influencers. According to a study by Jiang and Park (2021), businesses are encouraged to promote their corporate social responsibility

(CSR) messages on social media as an excellent way to build a positive brand image. Companies that collaborate with an influencer to promote their CSR strategies, businesses must exercise caution. This is because consumers, particularly Generation Z, are full of scepticism and may question the authenticity of the influencer's message because they may believe that the influencer is a paid sponsor and does not provide an objective perspective (Jiang & Park, 2021).

According to Becker-Olsen et al. (2005), CSR communication from businesses with poor reputations can backfire because customers perceive them as dishonest and lose faith in those businesses. As a result, companies with reputable reputation ought to incorporate their CSR activities into their marketing communications like how a car manufacturer promotes its safety rating contend that the stakeholder's interpretation of the company's motivation for CSR activities as either intrinsic, based on genuine concern, or extrinsic, based solely on increasing profits, is the determining factor.

In the end, according to Kotler & Lee (2005), corporate social responsibility (CSR) can ultimately result in increased traffic, improved brand positioning and, most importantly, customer loyalty. As a result, to take advantage of CSR's appeal to key consumer market segments, more and more businesses are incorporating CSR into their marketing communication (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). However, consumers must first know how much companies care about being socially responsible before CSR can influence purchasing decisions (Mohr et al., 2001). Research proposes that organisations are not, in every case, satisfactorily imparting CSR, suggesting a lost opportunity for organisations. Kotler & Lee (2005) claim benefits for firms with good CSR credentials include increased traffic, brand positioning, and, most notably, customer loyalty

Therefore, many organisations have incorporated CSR into their marketing communication to exploit CSR's appeal to key consumer market segments (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). However, before CSR can impact purchasing behaviour, consumers must first be aware of to what degree firms care about being socially responsible (Mohr et al., 2001). Research suggests that firms are not always adequately communicating CSR initiatives. In fact, "consumers' ability to accurately identify the CSR activities of the firms they consume from is, in general, quite low" (Sen et al., 2006, p. 159).

## 2.7 CSR IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

With the worldwide development and growth of the CSR idea, developing countries such as India would see an increase in the number of companies participating in CSR activities ( Shiva Kumar and Satyanarayana,2019). Historically, Indian businesses have been engaged in societal issues as part of the country's development (Gautam and Singh,2010). Because CSR was typically voluntary, so performance was neither measured nor recorded.

However, there has been an increasing realisation in recent years to better the immediate environment by adding to global societal activities. The globally accepted fact that consumers favour and prefer socially responsible companies has fuelled the interest in CSR in India (Gautam and Singh,2010). The state-mandated CSR spending is a distinctive and important trait in the Indian CSR setting ((Jammulamadaka, 2018). The Companies Act of 2013 made it obligatory for certain businesses to invest 2% of their profits on CSR. The intention was to stress corporate charity while limiting the use of strategic CSR (Gupta and Gupta,2019). Consequently, the number of companies engaged in CSR has considerably increased. The difficulties of quantifying, replicating and accelerating CSR are also increasing (Gupta and Gupta,2019). As a result, the idea of CSR has considerably evolved in recent years.

## 2.8 GENERATION Z

Generation Z is progressively entering the workplace for the first time and lives in a world where the border between the actual and digital world is becoming increasingly blurred. According to (Parker & Igielnik,2020), Gen Z is expected to have the highest level of education of any generation. They are most ethnically diverse than any other group. In comparison to Millennials.

Generation Z is known as the generation of the digital era and is also known as the "I-generation" and digital natives ((Agati, 2012): Tulgan,2013). Although Gen Z are like Millennials, they are more likely to express their concern about the future and choose to live with all comforts and luxury in urban rather than rural areas. (LeDuc,2019). Gen Z has almost \$29- \$143 billion of spending power and controlling power over their families, with 93% purchasing decisions (Fromm,2018).

Gen Z is the only generation which has grown up in this digital era throughout their lives, and this is the only reason it is said to be the most open-minded generation (Grace & Seemiller ,2016). Gen Z has shown a lot of innovations and advancements due to the perk of having tablets and mobile phones throughout their adolescences. They have the tendency to change the world because of their diversity , technological literacy and conversative attitude towards money that will have an economic meaning and deep society. However, conversely some research says that Gen Z is less civically engaged than any generation (Addor,2011).

Generation Z members are the most multicultural and global generation, born and raised in an era of internationalism, gender equality and climate change awareness (Sparks & Honey 2015). Globalisation has influenced Gen Z's awareness of global issues. More than any previous generation, Gen Z understands that education needs to be proactive rather than passive and that

unemployment is a high risk. This generation is more concerned about social issues and desires to advocate for a better world; it seems Gen Z will make new demands on brands to gain sympathy.

Gen Z has emerged as a trendsetter group influencing millennials in all aspects, from entertainment and fashion to consumption. Gen Z has become more independent and the trendsetter for their generation rather than being influenced by the older generation. Although Millennials are the most researched generation in history ( US Chamber of Commerce Foundation 2012), market researchers need to analyse the youngest generation of consumers as Gen Z is very different from the previous generation regarding personality traits and consumption patterns.

However, Gen Z in India's second and third-tier cities exhibit distinct differences in self-expression due to the convergence of two opposing influences that make them particularly distinctive. It is essential to remember that Gen Z in India is like global schema of Gen Z to comprehend the difference between them. All Gen Z exhibit vertical defiance and horizontal conformity.

This indicates that they all desire to reject apparency, gender expression, racism and caste-based discrimination as societal and parental norms. This "Net Generation" is described as digitally literate because of the speed of information processing, experiential in a way that they prefer learning by doing, and social thanks to their changes in modern life ( Oblinger &Oblinger 2005,2 )

## 2.9 GENERATION Z AND CSR

CSR has been widely accepted in the world. It seemed that young people were more concerned and inclined to CSR activities' values and practices. Their purchase intention would be affected by the CSR initiatives of the corporation (Leong & Mariadass,2019).

However, there has been very little literature on how CSR affected Gen Z purchase decision and how businesses align to the values they claim. Thus, this paper is going to fill in the gap.

Customers' purchase intentions would be reflected by various components, including understanding customer behaviour that can be seen if they are willing to pay more for sustainable products (Creyer,1997; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Thus, when businesses implement CSR initiatives aligned with the customers' requirements, the customers would be willing to pay more and promote the product to others.

According to Cones communication industry report in 2016, 92% of generation Z cared about social and environmental issues. They are dissatisfied with the current state of affairs and believe that brands possess the power to promote positive change for society and should address current environmental issues. Gen Z is willing to pay more for any product if they feel the firm is expressing its initiatives in distinctive and inventive ways.

In addition to environmental problems, Gen Z is growing interested in economic growth, hunger and poverty and human issues such as female equality, racial equality and immigrants. Although some studies were conducted on Gen Z in education, science and agriculture, the number of studies on Corporate Social Responsibility remains restricted ( Uche 2018).

## 2.10 CSR IMPACT ON GEN Z PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR

According to Davis et al. (2018) significant connection exists between customers' perception of a company's societal concern and consumer purchasing behaviour. Along with unparalleled technological and globalisation developments, this relationship pressures businesses to distinguish their goods and services by

considering nebulous aspects of a corporate image to obtain a competitive edge (Lai et al., 2010).

With generational changes comes social change because this new generation will have different preferences and technologies. Some research states that forty-nine percent of Gen Z is more likely to stop using products or services that do not align with the values they claim they are associated with (Miller & Washington,2019). Now there is competition between businesses to promote their CSR initiatives and use it as a strong marketing tool to win the business of younger consumers who tends to show sensitivity to an organisation's ethics (Newell,2014) (Wolch *et al.*, 2014)

Finally, an organisation in order to develop CSR strategies in the market, must progress it based on industry and target market. A study analysing the effect of CSR marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour found that there has been a different marketing strategy rather than communicating about the company's broader cause (Fagerstron et al.,2015).

A company's size can influence a CSR initiative's effectiveness. CSR strategies with a personal issue aligned to CSR initiatives will most likely have a powerful impact on consumers. When infused in a company's value, a unique problem increases the likelihood that consumers will perceive their actions as genuine. Gen Z anticipates that an organisation's reason for supporting a cause is to make sense for the business (Francis & Hoefel,2018).

Consumers want the organisation to know whether its intentions align with its value and not just use it as a marketing tactic or just to appear good (Parmar et al., 2010). As a result, communicating managers must speak Gen Z vernacular and grasp what and where to invest in CSR to reap the strategic benefit.

## 2.11 CSR AND THE INDIAN CONSUMER

There have been few studies on CSR in this setting (Gupta and Wadera, 2019). However, the available literature suggests comparable findings to those obtained worldwide, namely a positive relationship between the two factors. Similarly, Planken, Sahu, and Nickerson (2010) discovered that a CSR-based marketing engagement would likely impact an Indian consumer purchasing behaviour favourably. Other research found that Indian consumers have higher CSR awareness than their American peers (Gupta, 2011). Although further research suggested the beneficial impact of CSR on purchase intent did not back the claim of elevated awareness (Gupta and Hodges, 2012). However, most studies showed that customers' knowledge of CSR is growing (Gupta and Wadera, 2019). As a result, the effectiveness of any CSR effort is determined by the degree of CSR awareness (Lee and Shin,2010).

## CONCLUSION

A review of pertinent CSR literature shows that CSR is a complicated and evolving idea. To begin with, there is no universally accepted meaning of CSR. Those that do exist, emphasise a company's intrinsic economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic obligations to society and stockholders.

This literature review identifies a number of complexities that business leaders should consider when developing CSR strategies. Younger generations are enthusiastic about improving the world, as they introduce new interests and desires for goods and services.

As the youngest group, Gen Z base their purchasing decision and allegiance on this value system, and they prefer to work with businesses that they believe are good corporate citizens (MNI Target Media, 2020). According to Lai et al. (2010), while there are considerable quantifiable studies evaluating the effects of CSR on brand reputation, there is a void in understanding the origins of brand

reputation and the influence CSR has on brand equity, finally there has been little study into how this younger generation make purchasing decision considering CSR as one of the factor.

## 2.12 Conceptual Framework

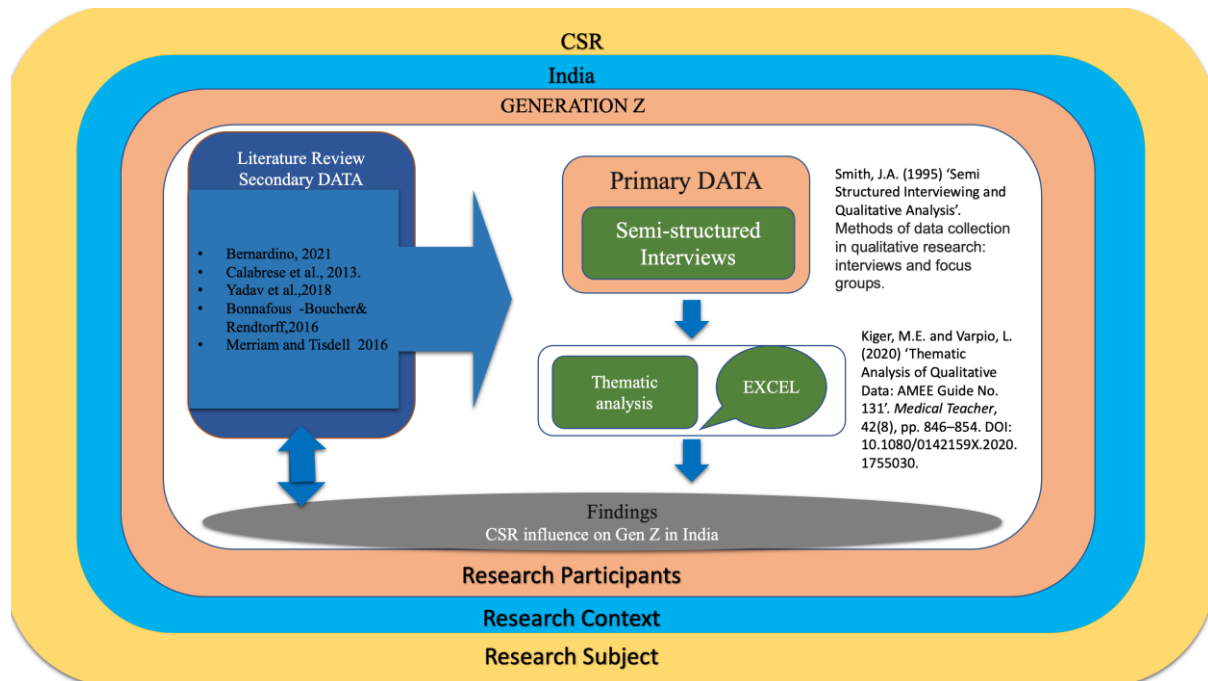


Figure 4 : Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework above further explains that for this study Research subject was understanding the purchasing decision of the Research context in terms of Gen Z Indian Research participants. The Literature informing this study draws from a blend of CSR theory, context based and empirical studies. Furthermore, the framework shows the literature review as informing the design of the data gathering instrument (Semi-structured interviews). The data undergoes Thematical analysis, using Microsoft Excel as a data repository and colour coding tool. The findings are a function of the comparison of the secondary data.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to examine the various forms of research, exploring each from an ontological and epistemological philosophical point of view. Ontology can be defined as "study of being "and the nature of reality. In other words, the researcher assumes that the investigation is done on human beings with thoughts, interpretations and meaning. On the other hand, epistemology is concerned with understanding, knowledge claims and the nature of reality (Saunders et al., 2009)

#### 3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Maykut & Morehouse (1994) tabulate the various philosophical views and contrasting postulates of positivist and phenomenological research approaches.

<b>Questions</b>		<b>Postulates of the positivist approach</b>	<b>Postulates of the phenomenological approach</b>
Ontology	How does the world work?	Reality is one. By carefully dividing and studying its parts the whole can be understood.	There are multiple realities. These realities are socio-psychological constructions forming an interconnected whole. These realities can only be understood as such.
Epistemology	What is the relationship between knower and the known?	The knower can stand outside of what is to be known. True objectivity is possible.	The knower and known are interdependent.

Epistemology	What role do values play in understanding the world?	Values can be suspended in order to understand.	Values mediate and shape what is understood
Logic	Are casual linkages possible?	One event comes before another event and can be said to cause that event.	Events shape each other. Multidirectional relationships can be discovered
Logic	What is the possibility of generalisation?	Explanation from one time and place can be generalised to other times and places.	Only tentative explanations for one time and place are possible
Teleology	What does research contribute to knowledge?	Generally, the positivist seeks verification or proof of propositions	Generally, the phenomenologist seek to discover or uncover propositions.

Source: Maykut, P and Morehouse, R (1994, p.12) Qualitative Research,

**Table 1**

Traditional positivism proposes that reality is Out There and that research methods used by the natural sciences can be incorporated into the social sciences (Blaikie, 1993).

However, Stenhouse (1982) argues that applying this methodology to situations involving behaviour requires a more holistic view; consequently, a qualitative approach is needed. Clearly, the researcher needs to examine their philosophical position before engaging in research as it will significantly influence the choice of research method.

As an aid to the researcher, Saunders et al. (2009) developed the "Research Onion" (Figure 3.1), which shows the research method as being a series of

choices, beginning with philosophy on the outer layer of the onion and ending with data collection and analysis.

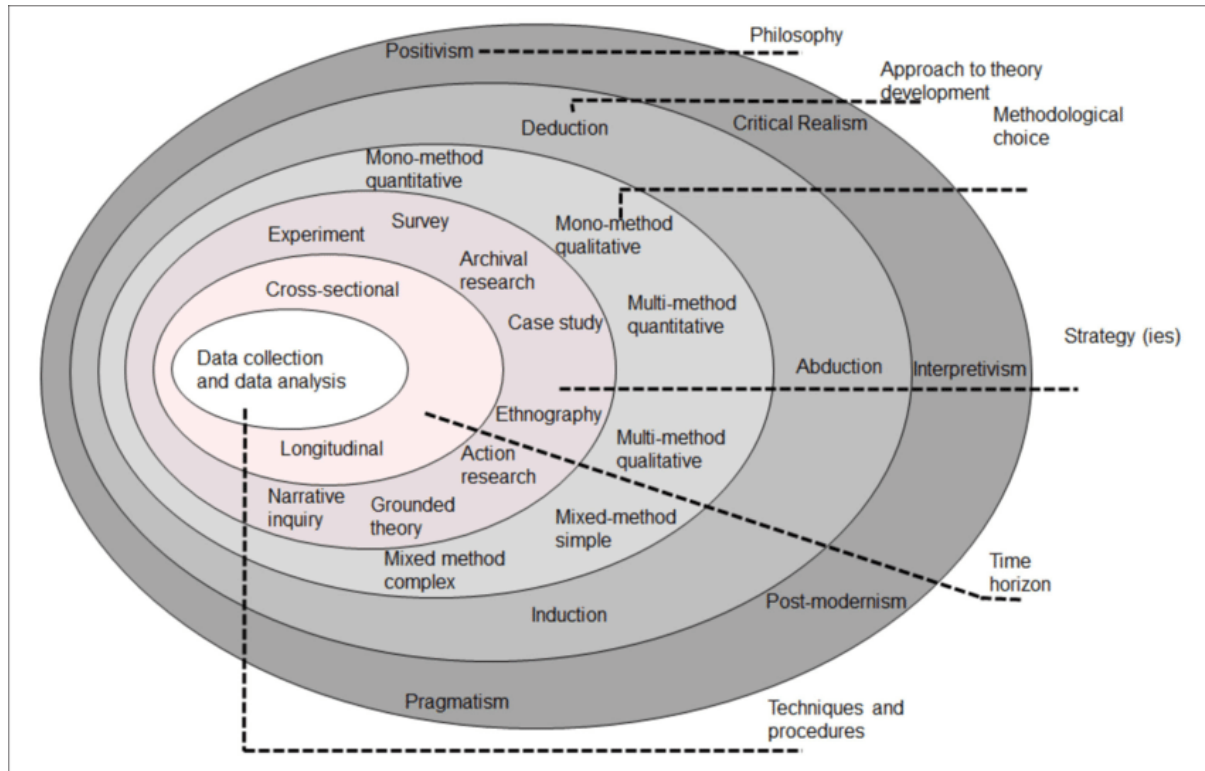


Figure 3 : Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2009)

### 3.2 RESEARCH METHODS

There are three research approaches, Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods. Quantitative research typically involves the collection and analysis of numerical data. The outcomes of this method often involve hypothesis testing and generalisation of findings based on proven facts.

Qualitative methods are concerned with the presentation of meanings and understanding and not the establishment of proven facts and typically involve collecting data in the form of participant observation, interviews or focus groups. Analysis involves interpreting qualitative data to gain deep insights into a particular phenomenon.

Qualitative and Quantitative research methods are aligned with distinct research paradigms. A research paradigm can be described as a school of thought as to how best to conduct research (Bassegy 1999). The most common research paradigms include: positivist, post-positivist, constructivist, interpretivist, transformative, emancipator, critical pragmatism, and deconstructivism (Mackenzie and Knipe 2006).

Mixed Methods research combines qualitative and quantitative data in one study to establish a depth and breadth of outcome that may not be achieved with a singular method and is closely aligned with the pragmatist paradigm. Patton (1990) proposes that paradigmatic choice centres on two fundamentally competing paradigms:

*1. Logical-positivism, which uses quantitative and experimental methods to test hypothetical-deductive generalisations, versus 2. Phenomenological inquiry, using qualitative and naturalistic approaches to inductively and holistically understand human experience in context-specific settings.*

(Patton 1990, p.37)

### 3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGMS

In relation to this research endeavour, the following paradigms are explored in further detail as they have particular relevance to the choice of research method.

- Positivism
- Post-Positivism
- Constructivism

## **Positivism**

Quantitative research, also known as the "scientific method", is most closely aligned with the positivist paradigm and empirical science (Creswell 2003). Quantitative approaches to research dominated the social sciences from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Creswell 2009) and were an attempt to apply methods of natural science to social phenomena.

In simple terms, quantitative approaches to research, which stem from the positivist paradigm, seek to explain human behavior by gathering factual information about such behavior. The evidence from such inquiries finds rigor in repeatability, validity, predictability, and reliability measurements. Objectivity claims are justified as a function of the quantitative research method. In practical terms, the quantitative researcher does not need direct contact with research subjects. This objective approach claims to raise the research outcome above any suspicion of researcher bias (Carr 1994). Quantitative research is synonymous with using tools such as the quantitative survey to gather data from large populations. Large data sets of this type lend themselves readily to empirical testing, supporting claims to the generalisability of research outcomes.

## **Post-Positivism**

Post-positivism challenges the positivist view claiming that a singular objective reality is not possible in social research. Ontologically speaking, post-positivism espouses the belief that there are multiple realities as how humans experience the world is a function of unique characteristics such as Race, Religion, Education and past experience. Consequently, researchers must have a deep understanding of their research subjects to produce rigorous, ethical research. This deep understanding is achieved by adopting fewer objective modes of social inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

## **Constructivism**

Lincoln and Guba (2000) see constructivism as having a relativist ontology, transactional epistemology, and a hermeneutic, dialectical methodology. Ontologically speaking, relativism implies that although we live in the same world, multiple realities exist as a function of an individual's value system, which can be considered a lens for how they experience the world. Essentially as human experiences and or values change, their reality is constructed each time.

### **3.4 CHOICE OF RESEARCH METHOD**

This research has two objectives: firstly, it will explore how CSR influences Gen Z purchasing behaviour and, secondly, how companies validate their CSR claims. The very name CSR includes the words social and responsibility. The author believes that responsibility is a value-laden word and, therefore, a social construct.

Furthermore, the word social means that responsibility relates to society for which there is no objective description. This research is not concerned with making generalisations but is concerned with developing a deep understanding of how Gen Z experience CSR and its effects on their buying decisions. In addition, the research seeks to uncover not only what purchasing choices Gen Z consumers make but, more importantly, why they make them.

Given the above, this research study takes the form of a phenomenological inductive approach aligned to qualitative research, underpinned by the constructivist paradigm.

Some of the key features of Qualitative research as outlined as below : (Forman *et al.*, 2008)

- Oriented and Holistic: the researcher strives to comprehend the subject under investigation from several perspectives in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomena under investigation.
- Sampling is purposeful: participant choice centres on recruiting participants that will most likely result in deep, data-rich findings.
- Data Collection: Data will be collected using semi-structured interviews best suited to gathering rich data and uncovering hidden meanings and motivations.
- Data analysis: An inductive approach; most suitable for identifying themes and relationships in the data, which is most closely aligned with thematic analysis.

### 3.4.1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANT SELECTION

There is a dilemma about qualitative research's ideal and appropriate sample size. A large sample size is not required for qualitative research. When the research reaches saturation point, and enough data is established to provide an in-depth understanding of an issue; further interviews can be halted as they are not likely to yield new data (Mason, 2010). However, this research is limited by time so the author recognises that the true saturation point may not be reached. Given the timing constraints and sample size of six Gen Z participant is selected,

### 3.4.2 DATA COLLECTION

#### Interviews

According to (Weiss, 1995), qualitative interview studies are complex since they contain dense information. Bell (2005) sites Aron & Wiseman (1972) analogy to describe the interview.

*"Liken interviewing to a fishing expedition and, pursuing this analogy, Cohen (1976,82) adds like fishing interviewing is an activity requiring careful preparation, much patience, and considerable practice if the eventual reward is to be a worthwhile catch"*

Bell (2005 p.157)

The above advises that all interviews will yield data but it will take careful planning and questioning to deliver rich data likely to answer the research question. Interviews typically take two forms; structured and semi-structured. Structured interviews refer to a list of open-ended questions that are rigidly applied to each participant. Semi-structured typically involve having a list of open-ended questions to guide the interview but allow the interviewer to ask additional questions and is more aligned with the natural flow of conversation (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). For this research purpose, the semi-structured interview is the chosen data-gathering instrument because of the additional flexibility afforded to the researcher.

The first step of the interview process was to contact the participant and inform them of the nature of the research and their rights as participants by providing them with a Plain and Language Statement and Informed Consent Form to make a comfortable environment for the interview. The intention is to ensure the complete transparency of the research process as an antecedent to participation and gathering of rich data.

### 3.4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is a technique used in qualitative research that identifies recurring patterns in the data. It is a method of describing data that involves interpretation. (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). Verbal data such as interviews, must be transcribed into written form in order to conduct a thematic analysis (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). The audio recordings for this study were transcribed using Otter, a web-based transcription service (Temi, n.d)

Data analysis in qualitative research has three core elements: coding the data, combining the data into themes, and presenting the data into a spiral by making margin notes and developing codes. Codes are brief words and phrases that are allocated to information in order to identify patterns. While analysing interview data, the codes were inductive with no prior assumptions, allowing the themes to emerge from the data rather than the researcher creating them deductively. (Saldana, 2016).

During this investigation, the author used themes and categories to tell the story of this research. Documents in the form of secondary were used to add context to the primary data by offering background information and historical context. (Bowen, 2009) .

### 3.5 RESEARCH ETHICS

Ethical norms and guidelines are essential while doing research. Above all researcher must respect the interviewee, put them at ease and respect their values and needs. The researcher addresses ethical concerns and develops specific standards guiding the study procedure (Oliver, 2010). The World Health Organisation advise that research ethics govern the standards of conduct for scientific researchers. It is important to adhere to ethical principles to protect research participants' dignity, rights and welfare. As such, all research involving human beings should be reviewed by an ethics committee to ensure that the appropriate ethical standards are being upheld. Discussion of the ethical principles of beneficence, justice and autonomy are central to ethical review (Anon, n.d.).

This research's ethics are operationalised in the Plain Language Statement and Informed Consent Form. Apart from being given these documents, understanding regarding participation and rights was reconfirmed for each participant at the interviews.

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

The author represented the overview of ontological and epistemological viewpoints. The most common research strategies, approaches and philosophy have been set out, followed by a closer examination of the qualitative research method and key characteristics. Concerning the various methodological approaches, research questions, and context, the reader is presented with an explanation for the chosen research method and a detailed description of the data analysis approach. Regarding ethics, the substantive issues were examined and linked to the context of the inquiry.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.0 INTRODUCTION TO DATA ANALYSIS

According to Thomas (2006), inductive analysis assists researchers in developing themes and concepts. This process is considered a valuable analysis since it can develop themes and patterns without any attached biases.

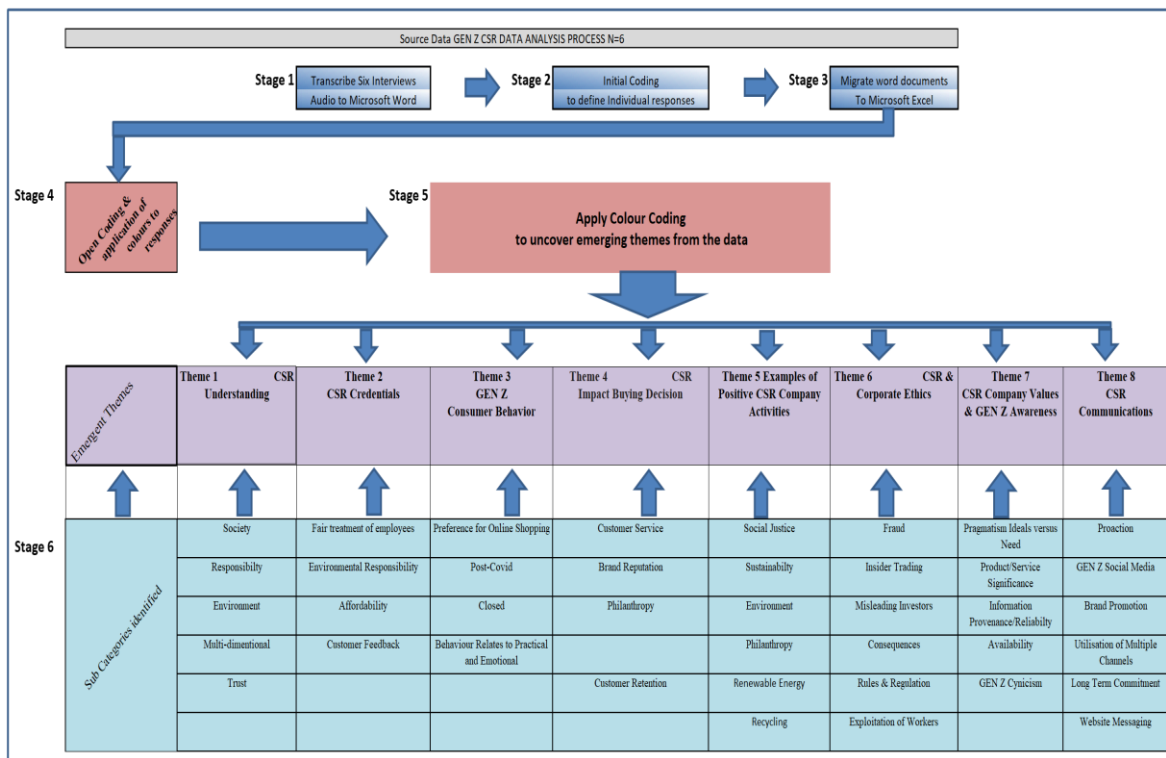


Figure 5 : The data analysis and theme development follows a 6 stage process as set out in the above figure:

- Stage One: Transcription of audio files into Microsoft Word
- Stage Two: Delineation of interviews by participant and coding of participant names

- Stage Three: Migration of Word transcripts to Microsoft Excel
- Stage Four: Open Coding of participant data
- Stage Five: Colour Coding & Grouping of colour patterns
- Stage Six: Development of themes.

#### 4.1 VALIDATION OF DATA

To check the themes, the original transcripts were evaluated to find experiences or instances provided by the participants. The researcher then split the topics by participant in order to recalibrate the data, and numerous people were involved. contacted to offer input on themes data analysis. Transcripts and raw data were made available to participants. According to Creswell (2018), this member-checking approach allows a participant to have a role in the study and guarantees valid data interpretation.

#### 4.2 EMERGENT THEMES

This qualitative study investigated the impact of CSR on Gen Z purchasing habits and how they learn about organizations' CSR activities.

Data was collected from six in-depth interviews with Gen Z's and contrasted and compared to the literature review. This section summarizes the data and discusses participant views according to the themes discovered when examining the data.

Descriptive quotes illustrating the general participant sentiments are included to add rigour to the findings. Quotes are not corrected for grammar or edited in any way to preserve the qualitative nature of responses.

The interview questions had two sections : the first consisted of knowing how well the participant understands CSR and how it is associated with businesses.

The second was to understand how CSR influence the participants purchasing decision of the participant and how CSR can be further communicated effectively amongst the Gen Z consumers and businesses.

What would be the most important activity a company should be doing in order to determine whether it is acting socially responsibly towards its customer?	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
That a company can undertake to determine whether it is acting socially responsible towards its customer is to gather feedback from them through various channels	Red	Yellow			Dark Blue	
Taking feedback from these different sort of mediums, can help companies to understand how their products or services are perceived by customers, and their needs, their needs and expectations. The company should also ensure that it is transparent and honest, in its communication with customers, and that it provides them an accurate and complete information	Red	Yellow			Dark Blue	
I think the most important thing is being honest with your customers about your CSR practices. And the second thing is, you know, if you know, you are a b2c company, if your focus your customer oriented, you know, how are you reducing your plastic waste? And, you know, are you focusing on, you know, environment friendly packaging, and you know, being transparent about your initiatives with your customers.			Green	Orange		Purple
company must not harm the environment, treat their employees fairly, but personally I feel that I consider that a few people does not always have the luxury of searching the CSR activities for forms of course, price and affordability is often the I would say driver behind the products and the services they purchase. The level of income or the level of income matters to CSRS, when when making a purchasing decision, and does not care about like test data, it does care about what happens to the environment. So, if you say like the price is the deciding factor in the purchase decision, but due to the present income level			Green	Orange		Purple
Providing low quality products may result in the negative customer experience damaging the company's company can also be damaged products are not previously paid to support that CSR has a positive impact on the customers appreciation.						
it would be, ensuring customer satisfaction, and product safety, and engaging with customers through feedback.	Red	Yellow			Dark Blue	
CSR can be taken into consideration while purchasing product but price is still an deciding factor in a purchase decision due to the present income of the people.					Dark Blue	Purple

Figure 6 : Thematic analysis

#### 4.2.1 UNDERSTANDING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

All participants were aware of the term Corporate Social Responsibility. Participants described CSR as a business approach in which a company takes responsibility for their impact on society and the environment. For example, participant two spoke about implementing sustainable business practices and using an example of carbon emissions.

*"This could be maybe reducing carbon emissions, supporting local communities, as I mentioned earlier, promoting employee well-being I think mental health is a big thing in my generation, which is gaining more awareness and campaigning (Participant Two).*

Participant Four added that CSR is a process that has external and internal dimensions.

*"External factors of a company may be political, environmental and social that can affect the company. Internally it is often within the company like treating employees, their feedback, work culture, so people are happy working". (Participant Four)*

Whereas Participant Six spoke about CSR in terms of trust and transparency. Claiming that:

*"CSR begins with the company being always honest, in which consumer does not need to know all ins and outs of the organization but also develop trust.*

*It is not always necessary to know about the product history how it is made, but that it is a good quality and safe to use and not harming animals and environment when it is made" (Participant Four)*

The literature also states that external and internal stakeholder relationships will improve financial performance, transparency, and trustworthiness. Overall, participants agree that CSR is related to integrating environmental and social concerns in the business.

#### 4.2.2 CRITERIA TO DETERMINE COMPANY CSR CREDENTIALS

Participants came up with common responses but altogether they had personal viewpoints on whether companies are acting socially responsible. Issues such as: the fair treatment of employees, environmental responsibility, affordability and customer feedback emerged. The following quotes exemplify participant sentiments. Participant Four, emphasized that companies must treat their employees fairly and not harm the environment, but also advised that purchasing based on CSR credentials may be a luxury many may not be able to afford. They claimed that:

*"Personally, I feel that I consider that a few people does not always have the luxury of searching the CSR activities for forms of course, price and affordability is often the I would say driver behind the products and the services they purchase."*

*(Participant Four)*

Participants spoke about income levels, suggesting that purchasing based on CSR actions may be confined to the upper levels of society that can afford CSR. This implies that CSR activities increase the cost of products and services. Participant 5 surmised that:

*"Income matters to CSR, when making a purchasing decision, and consumer does not care about like test data, it does care about what happens to the environment. So, if you say like the price is the deciding factor in the purchase decision, but that is due to the present income level."*

*(Participant 5)*

One downside of CSR is that higher costs are not affordable for everyone. The use of sustainable materials can drive higher costs making CSR-based purchases expensive. The literature, however, supports that consumers who value CSR are willing to pay higher prices for socially responsible products (Leandro Nardi, 2022).

Participant One added, taking feedback from these different sources, can help companies to understand how their products or services are perceived by customers, and their needs and expectations. The company should also ensure that it is transparent and honest in its communication with customers and provides accurate and complete information.

Moreover, participant Five emphasized that Providing low-quality products may result in a negative customer experience damaging the company's company can also be damaged products are not previously paid to support that CSR has a positive impact on the customer's appreciation.

#### 4.2.2 GEN Z CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Except for expensive technical products, where participants prefer to visit the shopfloor, GEN Z prefers shopping online. This preference for online shopping is multifaceted. In part, the preference for online shopping is a post-COVID-19 hangover when consumers were confined to their homes due to the Global Pandemic. Furthermore, Gen Z enjoys the convenience of shopping online. Conversely, participants also spoke about the nature of products advising that some products are drive emotional responses resulting in a preference to visit the store to touch and feel products to determine suitability or quality.

For example. Participant One added that:

*"There are two sides to a purchase: Emotional and practical purchases, but they can also complement each other. So, for example, if I want to buy a carpet or a rug for my house, I would rather do it in person, you know, feel the fabric material, etc, which is an experience that online shopping can't really mimic, this would be an emotional purchase. But then on the other hand, if I want to buy a computer or a computer hardware, then the equation shifts more towards a practical purchase. And now it is more geared towards facts and figures rather than the touch and feel of the product"*

*(Participant One)*

Participant Five expressed that:

*"Ever since covid, most of the shopping is done online, but due to fast fashion, people are now switching to buying it from thrifted stores and support these small businesses.*

(Participant Five)

In summary, the pattern derived from this is that mostly Gen Z prefer to shop online rather than go to the shop floor unless there is something technical and expensive or there is a large item that isn't available online or the clothes size they are unsure of the sizing guide(Son *et al.*, 2021)

#### 4.2.3 POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACT OF CSR ON PURCHASE DECISION

It was evident while conducting the interviews that participants, when considering CSR, could provide examples of socially responsible companies and gave some insights into what they expect from brands regarding CSR and what actions are likely to retain them as customers. Participants spoke about the importance of customer service and how philanthropic actions influence how they feel about a brand or company. They also spoke about the effects of post-purchase CSR-related reviews on buying decisions.

*Participant One speaks about brand reputation he adds*

*"So a company with a strong brand reputation can attract and retain customers. Now, good companies can sell good products and services, but I think great companies sell your piece of themselves. For example, you know, Nike made roughly \$60 million with Jordan, Michael Jordan Brand, their first year after signing Michael Jordan, because it was a great product. But more importantly, it gave people a piece of Michael Jordan's*

*greatness. I think brand reputation would be number one. Number two would be customer service. For me. A company that provides excellent customer service can sort of differentiate itself from its competitors and build customer loyalty" (Participant One)*

While participants Two and Four spoke about Patagonia, a luxury brand whose products are highly-priced, but they aim to protect the environment. Patagonia is considered a famous brand regarding sustainability because they donate to environmental initiatives and raise awareness of environmental issues (Rattalino, 2018).

Participant 3 adds:

*"When the company is using the money, they take from us to a good cause to help the society and planet. For example: TATA group the first instalment of money that they gave as donation was half a billion dollars, which is not a small amount. And that was for the purpose of getting people hospital beds, because you know, what the situation was during COVID-19 in March 2020, when people were struggling to get oxygen cylinders, and there were no beds as well in the hospital. So yeah, a lot. I would like to respect them a lot in this case."*

*(Participant Three)*

Conversely, there were specific organizations that have made a negative impact on the consumers. Most participants had common reasons; reviews play an important part while they are about to purchase and therefore expect the company to be honest and transparent about their products.

Participant One talks about Nike as one of the companies that produce products by recycling the materials and even customized shoes on the special needs of

individuals; however, they also mention that: "Nike had a bad reputation because of outsourcing manufacturing overseas" (Participant One)

Participant Two explains that reviews make an impact on purchasing decisions; she states that:

*"Poor online reviewer writing, you wouldn't want to go watch a movie that has bad reviews. And same goes for buying products or services. Before you buy anything, you are going to want to look at the reviews and ratings on that product. And if they're getting a lot of negative verbatim, then, it's just going to deter customers from making a purchase. And customers often rely, at least in my generation, on online reviews and ratings to make informed purchasing decisions" (Participant Two)*

According to Participant Five, *"bad quality of a previously purchased products sets me off and if someone gives bad negative reviews about a certain company product, I will refrain from buying that product" (Participant Five).*

#### 4.2.4 POSITIVE EXAMPLES OF COMPANIES ACTING RESPONSIBLE TOWARDS CITIZENS

Participants mention specific companies that are acting socially responsible towards the environment and society. It was evident that participants acknowledged the CSR initiatives a company is taking towards society. Discussion centred around issues such as Social Justice, Sustainability, Carbon Emissions, Renewable Energy and Recycling.

For Example, Participant One talks about the positive, socially responsible actions of Ben and Jerry's ice cream. He claims that:

*"Ben and Jerry's ice cream company that is committed to social justice and environmental sustainability is something that I found recently about them. And I've thought a bit interesting about them. So, it's the company's sources, their ingredients, from organic sources, and donates a portion of the profit to multiple social or environmental causes*

*Gen Z sort of dynamic we have gone through a big change in how people used to communicate, or, you know, utilize technology, or the relationship in general with technology is, is different in the previous two decades, from 2000s to the present times, it's a drastically different environment. So, I would say, you know, Microsoft, the company that have set ambitious goals to reduce carbon emissions and achieve carbon neutrality, and they've also invested in renewable energy sources. I think that's also the whole race towards renewable resources, also very positive and a competitive race, which is good. And then the big development of AI practices."*

*(Participant One).*

Whereas Participant Two talks about Starbucks since taking steps towards sustainability, especially the initiatives it took to bring in reusable cups.

*"Those cups are 100% recyclable, and because of the innovative material they do not require a cardboard as well which further reduces waste. All this will reduce the environmental footprints" (Participant Two)*

Participant Four advises of the TATA group's CSR initiatives and how this single company has been actively participating in CSR in every possible sector. By catering help in every domain for ST and SC communities in India.

*"The company is talking about CSR on a large scale, so more people are educated that will help them understand about the importance of sustainability since mostly people are not even aware of CSR in India and typically the SC and ST how they didn't get the privilege to further education. Moreover, initiative towards the climate we might not see this today but if we look to the closer picture like how endangered animals, there have been so many indigenous animals that we don't know, we just seen pictures, but once they live, why they died, because somewhere or the other the environment that we need, not support them to live. I think that is also in the climate. So, climate action is also there for data because the climate is important" (Participant Four*

According to financial express India , India is expected to have heat waves beyond human survivability therefore there is a need for the businesses to come up with businesses with initiatives to promote sustainability. With CSR funding directly to climatic solutions. ) (Hayat *et al.*, 2022)

#### 4.2.5 DEFINITION OF UNETHICAL BEHAVIOUR BY ORGANIZATIONS:

All the participants came to a common understanding of ethical means. When questioned, they described ethics in terms of principles, values, rules, or regulations. They illustrated their understanding with examples of infamous failures of ethics in the cooperate World.

Participant One states that the definition of ethics in this context would be a set of principles or values that guide an organization in determining what is right or wrong and the morally justified actions.

He also explains with an example:

*"So, for the specific organizations that have behaved unethically, which I had seen, or my generation has seen would, number one would be Enron, I think Enron takes. It's one of the biggest frauds ever uncovered. think there was somewhere around \$100 billion, which is a lot. But just to give a bit of a context, Enron was an American energy, commodities and services company. They engaged in fraudulent accounting practices, and they were hiding their debt. They're inflating earnings. And they've pretty much just misled their investors just to boost their own stock price"*

*(Participant One)*

While participant 2 speaks about SAIC Capital, a group of hedge funds founded by Steven Cohen.

*"He engaged in probably what is known as the worst form of crime in capital markets, which is insider trading. So, to common people, insider trading is trading equities or any other financial product in public markets based on information that is not public. Insider trading is a crime that is punishable by fines and possibly even prison time. So overall, I'd say ethical behaviour involves acting with honesty, transparency, integrity, and but most importantly, respect for other people"*

*(Participant Two)*

Participant Four emphasizes ethics in the corporate World;

*I would say it's like the rules and regulation that a firm has like this is how the working condition should be. This is how safety procedures should be and this is what the timing like this is their nine to five jobs. Just these are ethical rules and ethical rules and regulations for the company, and it*

*comes late internally and externally, again, not following these rules and regulations and not taking care of your employees, I will say, for our company is a big turnoff for the company.*

*(Participant Four)*

He also gave the example of Apple company where employees in the manufacturing department in China were worked day and night.

*"And that led to a lot of people jumping off the buildings and society. So just imagine like this scenario, like people are ending their life because, firstly, money is important in life. And money is important if you have responsibilities, if you have a family and everything like that. And on top of them, the working conditions on the manufacturing of its ongoing 24 hours and stuff like that would be mentally torturing for the employees."*

*(Participant Four)*

Participant 6 also states that she is aware of companies like SHEIN, which manufactures everything cheaply and has minimal regulations in China. They have a bad reputation of keeping the employees on meagre wages, due to which costs are lowered, and people prefer to buy products from these apps online.

Participants clearly understand ethical behaviour and could define the boundaries between ethical and unethical companies. Some had in-depth knowledge about the companies performing ethically towards their employees and citizens.

#### 4.2.6 ACKNOWLEDGING VALUES WHILE PURCHASING

It could be concluded that none of the participants proactively researched the values that companies claim. Typically they spoke in a pragmatic way about purchasing products and services that fulfil their needs in terms of functionality and cost. In addition, they mention the significance of the product or service, suggesting that everyday items of low significance would not stimulate them to investigate a manufacturer or service provider's values. The issue of information reliability or provenance is also mentioned, suggesting that instances of "Greenwashing" has contributed to a level of cynicism among GEN Z consumers. The cost issue also re-emerged, meaning that even where GEN Z consumers were aware of poor values, that would not prevent them from purchasing if their income gated the affordability of products and services with higher CSR values. The following quotes illustrate the sentiments of participants. Participant One explains he investigates its implications beyond the product itself and looks for company values as a whole:

*"You got to understand that it is people behind businesses, and you want to do good business with good people. So, if, it is about buying a detergent, then no, I don't look at the company values because I just, I just want to get my product and it doesn't serve me, well, I just wanted to serve the purpose and be done with it"*

*But the thing is, when you know, some negative publicity comes out on maybe news outlets. What I would say, what truly prevents me from researching is purely based on a bias towards what I like and don't like, and the amount of significance, it probably has my life. then yes, that is going to hinder that experience of purchasing that product and next time around. However, once again, if it's an area of my interest, and yes, I'd dig*

*a bit deeper and investigate external extra stuff like company values and stuff. (Participant One)*

Several participants stated that they rarely investigate CSR. That doesn't mean that they don't know anything about the company but may not research the values they claim. Participant Six responded:

*"We don't research about the information on CSR, but the truth is we are cynical about the information that is all over the internet. Nowadays companies have come up with CSR commitments, but they misguide us put up information which we want to hear, which can be not the truth."*

*(Participant Six)*

Participant Two added:

*"Our generation can be aware about the CSR because of the environmental concerns but somehow, we are caught up with the price factor that is attached to it. Not all can afford organic food or sustainable clothes that are expensive that normal clothes therefore to target us they should have competitively priced products".*

*(Participant Two)*

#### 4.2.7 CSR COMMUNICATION

The most common pattern from the participants was that there is a need for the companies to proactively spread their message of CSR. They need to use multiple communications channels to get their CSR message out to consumers but specifically utilize Social Media as GEN Z are particularly active on social media platforms. They also mention the importance of CSR in developing a strong Brand. Participant One advised that when CSR messages align with their core

values and business strategy. This can help build a strong, consistent brand and demonstrate a commitment to long-term sustainability.

*"You always got to remember that people are the real ones that give a value to the business. Apart from that, I would say use multiple channels. Companies should use multiple channels to communicate CSR messages to stakeholders. Once again, this, you know, social media is the big one, big on social media and email that advertises in person events, that's another one. So, I'd say like, number one, probably social media number two in person events, would be good places to gain more attention about CSR policies. This will help reach a broader audience and provide different types of information in various formats"*

*(Participant One)*

However, the literature cautions firms with a bad reputation against communication as it could backfire if consumers have trust with such companies. (Becker- Olsen et al., 2005; Yoon et al., 2016) Participant Four notes that Gen Z are active on social media websites and these media sites can be an effective way to communicate their firm's CSR message.

Participant 6 added that companies passionate about being socially responsible should include their message clearly on their websites for online shoppers.

### 4.3 SUMMARY

CSR is a multifaceted and complex issue. The data analysis resulted in the development of seven themes. The participant data was contrasted and compared to the literature review so that a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter could be presented. The analysis has shown that whilst GEN Z participant opinion generally concurs on CSR. Companies have some way to go to keep pace

with GEN Z desires for accountability and transparency. Having said that, even though GEN Z want higher CSR standards from companies purchasing decision remain gated by practical issues such as product significance and affordability.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 INTRODUCTION

Although CSR research is evolving, there are very few studies done on Gen Z and their attitudes to CSR. This inquiry investigated the influence CSR has on Gen Z customers in their purchasing behaviour in today digital world. This chapter summarizes the research findings, interprets the facts into a conclusion, and provides relevant suggestions for practitioners and the further development of CSR research.

The research took the form of a qualitative study, using semi-structured interviews to gather data from six India-based GEN Z participants. The interview questions were further divided into two categories: the first sought to elicit GEN Z perspectives on CSR and, in particular, their views on socially responsible activities. The second category of questions aimed at understanding how CSR influences GEN Z purchasing activities.

The participant responses were interrogated using a thematic analysis strategy and Microsoft Excel as a data repository and code application tool. This chapter reflects on the insights gathered from the analysis and correlates with the literature review to present a final set of conclusions.

The research used the following research questions and objectives to structure the inquiry.

1. How does CSR influence Indian Gen Z purchasing decision ; how do they communicate with the values ?
2. Does Indian Gen Z validate company's CSR claim?

Seven themes were developed from the interviews.

1. Understanding Corporate Social Responsibility.
2. Criteria to Determine CSR Company Credentials.
3. GEN Z Consumer Behaviour.
4. Positive and Negative Impacts of CSR on Purchase Decisions.
5. Definition of Ethical and Unethical Behaviour by Organizations.
6. Acknowledging Values While Purchasing.
7. CSR Communication

## 5.1 OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS:

This qualitative investigation into Gen Z's perspectives on and experience with CSR gives the reader a deep understanding of their thoughts and feelings regarding their knowledge of CSR and how it affects consumer behaviour.

### 5.1.1 COMPARISON OF CONCLUSION WITH PREVIOUS STUDIES

All participants had a clear understanding of CSR. Furthermore, participants could identify CSR features and how it relates to them. In the main, they talked about CSR in terms of environmental and social concerns. They also spoke about the importance of transparency for companies in their relations with stakeholders and employees.

All participants prefer to primarily shop online go to the shop floor if they need to buy an expensive product or when touch and feel feature in the buying decision.

Most participants try to associate companies that already promote CSR; however, participants complained that CSR information is generally not readily available for many products and services, suggesting that companies need to work harder to promote their CSR credentials to GEN Z. Understanding customers' perceptions can be a driving factor in developing CSR strategies. (Safeer and Liu, 2022).

Therefore, Organizations must consider that customers have instant and limitless access to knowledge about a firm and may share their thoughts and experiences with a large network of people, including family and friends.

This study indicates that customers share their experiences on social media, give ratings and reviews through which a customer's purchase decision is developed. Customers, therefore, expect businesses to make more effort to promote CSR.

Companies need to develop more CSR-centric strategies to promote their CSR message. Marketing has and is evolving in response to GEN Z'S presence on social media channels and their preference for buying online. When participants were asked how they communicate and create awareness of their values, they all agreed to expand their social media influence since people are blindly following what is trending on the internet. Participants claim that social media influencers highly influence some of their social groups and may purchase a product just because a famous figure recommended it.

According to (Chaudhary et al., 2020), customer loyalty and customer satisfaction are the two important factors for the endurance and expansion of corporate entities. CSR can positively impact consumer loyalty and a positive evaluation of the company. Customers who value CSR are willing to pay higher prices for socially responsible products, such as products made of recycled material. However, this study also indicates that CSR is perceived as price inflationary. GEN Z prefers to purchase products and services that have high CSR credentials. However, on occasion, affordability can override CSR in the hierarchy of buying decisions due to different income levels.

Patagonia is one of the companies that have acted responsibly towards the environment. As quoted by participants two and four, even though Patagonia is an expensive brand, they rely on this brand because Patagonia has a tradition of

being a socially responsible company. According to the review (Cordeiro *et al.*, 2023), CSR takes a long time to establish its presence. Consequently, it may take time for consumers to learn about a company's CSR entity and its commitment to CSR. Participants spoke about building trust with the company. That said, there are contradicting views; for example, the SHEIN brand is a very popular brand because of its affordability. But this company has a bad reputation for unethical practices.

Participants said that GEN Z depends on websites like Amazon for quick delivery and cheaper products. This customer engagement with the intermediaries like Amazon doesn't let the customer create a sense of belonging with the actual manufacturer, keeping them unaware of the company's CSR policies.

Conversely, some participants didn't align with what has been claimed by previous research. Although some might have become aware of CSR before buying a product, they are not "actively" researching companies before making a purchase. No participants claimed to have researched a company's CSR reputation before purchasing. Nevertheless, participants tend to buy products from the company that have already been successful in promoting their CSR policies..

The most commonly discussed behaviour related to the impact on the environment, how transparent a business is to its employees and customers, and treatment of the employees. All participants, irrespective of background or education level, showed a wish to avoid firms that are known to be unethical. However, despite participants recognizing unethical behaviours, none has ever abandoned a corporate entity on ethical grounds. Most participants felt it simpler to identify the immoral behaviours of the companies. Furthermore, individuals who addressed CSR as the essential criterion for purchasing had a more profound knowledge of socially responsible businesses.

The research and the participants' reaction confirm that Gen Z are technologically proficient digital natives who perform most of their everyday activities, such as shopping online. Prior studies confirm that Gen Z was born into the ubiquitous digital era of social media. Gen Z has different requirements and expectations from companies than previous generations and navigates online communities with more sophistication. (Mude and Undale, 2023).

However, word-of-mouth remains important to Gen Z. They value diversity, inclusion and environmental sustainability. If a brand does anything of particular note in that space, it naturally becomes part of the conversation. (Sweet, 2019). Moreover, many participants state that they value anonymous post-purchase ratings rather than spending time researching company CSR messages.

Furthermore, some participants advised of their increasing scepticism of any firm communicating about their CSR policies because they might only communicate what consumers want to hear.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATION WITH PREVIOUS STUDIES

The requirement of this research was to study the purchasing decision of Gen Z, which means people born after (1996). Some of them were still studying, which confines them to a level of bounded rationality when thinking about CSR, which is linked to their lower income level. The study also identified that their education level determined their levels of awareness and concern about CSR. This suggests that future studies need to delineate GEN Z by working status and education level to add greater granularity and deeper insight to the findings of this study.

Some participants claim that despite their desire for improved CSR the issue of affordability emerged. The perception that products and services that have strong CSR credentials add inflationary pricing needs further investigation.

Future research should establish whether increases in price correlate with positive CSR activity or other variables.

This qualitative study understands how CSR has made an impact on India-based Gen Z. However, this study is informed by a limited number of participants (N=6). Further research could employ a mixed methods design to include more participants to add breadth to the findings and use statistics to explore if CSR actions cause price increases and the extent to which issues such as affordability, trust, transparency and ethics influence GEN Z behaviour.

Since it can be concluded from the study that social media is a powerful factor in influencing and promoting products to Gen Z consumers. Research investigating how companies promote their CSR messages to the targeted audience may yield additional insights. Finally, GEN Z research could also expand its geographical regions to include viewpoints from other geographies and cultures.

### 5.3 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

#### 5.3.1 Time Difference:

There has been a significant limitation of this study due to the distance of the author from their targeted audience, Gen Z in India. All the interviews from Dublin via ZOOM. This restriction may have negatively affected the authors ability to exploit the full range of qualitative information such as data gained by personally interviewing and a face-to-face engagement.

#### 5.3.2 Findings Validation:

The Researcher was already advised at the outset that re-interviewing participants to validate findings would not be possible because of the availability and workload.

As a result, the structure of this study was further modified and ensure access to all participants could be made at ease by connecting them virtually and managing time difference, which has been a task throughout.

#### 5.3.3 Income levels:

Although all the participants of this study were Gen Z, all had different income levels and lifestyles that influenced their purchase decisions in comparison to those with higher income levels. This made it challenging when to group data into themes that reflected the sentiments of the research population.

#### 5.3.3 Researcher Experience

As a novice researcher with the little prior experience it is reasonable to conclude that a more experienced researcher may have found additional insights from the same data set and made the findings more rigorous.

#### 5.3.4 Time frame

This research was bounded by a fourteen to sixteen timeframe. Given additional time, the author could have recruited more participants adding breadth to the research. Furthermore, more time devoted to the thematic analysis may have yielded added insights.

#### 5.4 Personal reflection:

Qualitative research is a holistic approach that considers the personal human experience. This greatly explains how and why participants have different attachment levels to CSR policies. This experience has helped me think more critically about the information I consume and the validity of claims to knowledge. Furthermore, given that we live in an era of “Fake News” and the increasing power of Artificial Intelligence completing this research has forced me to think very carefully about the origin of information.

In terms of the topic of CSR, it was something that became of interest to me during the course of my studies. Having completed this research, I realize how CSR will influence my purchasing decisions and perhaps decisions relating to future career choices.

## 5.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This qualitative case study explained how CSR impacts Indian Gen Z purchasing decisions and how they learn about the values that the companies claim. Gen Z is known for being technologically savvy and therefore has great knowledge in the technological sector. They are digital natives born with smartphones in their hands, and since childhood, they have been digitally active, whether it's about learning or using it as a medium of entertainment. As a consequence of COVID -19 everything went online from schools to games, making them experts using this technology.

This study suggests that GEN Z purchasing behaviour as it relates CSR is multifaceted and even though they care about CSR it is not the defining influencing factor . For businesses to gain benefits from the CSR activities they are associated with, they need to reach people on a higher level than just putting those values under their company's name (Conte et al., 2023). Social media does influence Gen Z and is a primary channel for them to receive marketing communication from companies. Consequentially, companies must make more effort to promote their CSR activities using this medium. GEN Z care about CSR; however, given current global economic conditions, the affordability of products and service is a primary concern.

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