Role of CSR in achieving customers' satisfaction and retention during COVID-19 and post-pandemic period: Empirical evidence from emerging nations

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Abstract.
BACKGROUND: COVID-19 is an ongoing virus disease also recognized as a coronavirus pandemic that propelled the world to rethink organizational strategies during this unprecedented challenge. Although research on CSR has broadly been done over the past decades; nonetheless, how CSR can contribute a leading role in engaging the stakeholders such as customers during this pandemic period and post-pandemic is an important research gap that ought to be uncovered.
OBJECTIVES: This study explores the impact of CSR on external stakeholders like customers and how organizations can dramatically sustain the relationships during the COVID-19 period. First, this study investigates the relationships between CSR and customer satisfaction (CS). Second, this study explores the relationships between CSR and customer retention (CR). Finally, the moderating impact of gender and education were examined among the proposed relationships.
METHODS: Using the survey of 500 respondents, this study prospected the linkages among CSR, CS, and CR from China using a convenience sampling approach. The questionnaires were disseminated to Chinese online shoppers between Jan 2020 and March 2020 and explored using SEM model.
RESULTS: It found that customers are more attached and satisfied with those organizations that are socially responsible and value their stakeholders, especially during uncertain situations like COVID-19 since presently revealed a positive relationship between CSR and CS. Second, it is found that there is a positive influence of CSR on CR as well. Finally, the study affirmed the positive nexus of gender and education as the moderators among CSR, CR, and CS.
CONCLUSION: CSR is always on the front line blending social and environmental goals into business operations, especially during uncertain times and challenges. Undeniably, the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a global health emergency but is also leading to a major global challenge that drives organizations to revisit policies to sustain the relationships with their stakeholders. This study concluded the positive nexus of CSR and affirmed the positive role in sustaining relationships with customers during distinct uncertainties like COVID-19.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, COVID-19, stakeholders' engagement, customers' retention, customers' satisfaction

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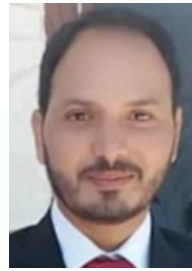
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1. Introduction

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has triggered the pandemic across the world, which has already affected numerous lives and caused serious constraints to both everyday and business life. At the same time, it has also influenced almost every company business in the world in one way or another. It is declared by world health organization on 11th March 2020 that COVID-19 is an exceedingly contagious viral disease that might be a global phenomenon. Now, the situation about such pandemic has been declared as alarming for humans' health which is still spreading across the world. Therefore, higher officials of the nations are endeavoring to take appropriate measures in order to overcome the pandemic situation. For instance, social distance is an important measure taken by the individual which eventually helps to reduce the level of transmission. Owing to a critical situation, several departments such as schools, universities, and other departments were locked down to avoid such situations. Undeniable, it is a huge challenge for businesses to sustain in the market because of such a critical situation. On the other side, sustainability for the business is a key feature of survival

therefore it is immensely needed to overcome uncertainties in order to compete [1–4].

The sustainability of a business is defined as a process by which firms tend to manage environmental, social, and financial risks by comprehending the obligations and opportunities to adhere sustainable development [2, 5]. Research on sustainability still stands on the infancy level therefore scholars are trying to uncover the essentiality of sustainability within different dimensions globally. Many experts advocated the vital role of sustainability and factors that may help to achieve such capabilities such as social aspects, ecology aspects, economic aspects since the report on 'World Commission on Environment and Development' has released in 1987 [3, 6, 7]. In marketing standpoint, a range of innovative methods, tools, and techniques have been considered as the focusing point to understand market uncertainties. Organizations must comprehend the behavior of the stakeholders during different situations like during COVID-19. It is noteworthy; the study to understand the COVID-19 was ignored in order to reveal the role of CSR in order to engage the stakeholders.

The researchers suggested the immense importance of CSR because of its numerous benefits for organizations, society, and consumers [8, 9]. The COVID-19 (Corona Virus Disease 2019) has largely accounted for many psychological consequences such as physical health (e.g., physical discomfort), sleep problems, state well-being, and depressive symptoms because of its unpredictability and uncertain nature. Such psychological consequences not only threaten the mental health (e.g., emotional exhaustion, life satisfaction, and well-being) of individuals but physical too, particularly in terms of emotions and cognition, which will ultimately lead to a higher level of anxiety. Addressing these concerns, corporate should play a critical role to encourage their stakeholders to provide suitable prevention regarding COVID-19, and by providing support in all possible ways during this period.

Nowadays, Chinese organizations are enormously emphasizing overcoming COVID challenge whereas businesses are also rethinking how to overcome such problems and support their stakeholders to sustain them toward organizations. China is the worlds' highest populated country with a 0.39% yearly growth rate [10]. China is regarded as a global market with a leading industrial sector by contributing a key role in the economy of China [11, 12]. As the body of research on CSR practices continues to grow, academic scholars asserted that the companies that adopt CSR practices are more able to establish and maintain long-term relationships with different customers [9, 11–13]. Furthermore, Van der Heijden, Verhagen [14] argued that understating consumers' behavior supports organizational efforts to sell products more productively and promptly. How CSR can perform a role to foster the relationships with their stakeholders especially customers during this hard situation is the main objective of this study.

This study attempts to fill the literature gap by revealing the impact of CSR practices that how its acceptance influences the stakeholders' such as customers from the context of China. First, the objective is to explore the impact of CSR practices on customers' satisfaction during COVID-19. Second, the objective is to explore the impact of CSR practices on customers' engagement during COVID-19. Third, the aim is to reveal the moderating impact of gender between the relationships of CSR practices and customers' engagement during COVID-19. Finally, the aim is to reveal the moderating impact of education between the relationships of CSR practices and customers' engagement during COVID-19. To that end, this study is structured based on different sections as follows. The background, theoretical support, framework, and hypotheses are described subsequently after the introduction part. Thereafter, research methods such as sampling, sample size, measures, and analysis tools have been reported. The section of discussion and findings are accordingly shown after the methods. In the final part, overall study conclusion, limitations, and possibilities within a relevant domain are reported for future researchers, including practitioners, policymakers, and academic scholars.

2. Theoretical background and review of literature

COVID-19 global epidemic was initially treated as the pneumonia case that appeared in one of the China cities known as Wuhan at the end of December 2019. Subsequently, this virus spread all over the country and later appeared to the rest of the world that is still on active stage worldwide. According to the Centre for disease control of China, this virus is a novel coronavirus that is one of the critical viruses that directly affect the human respiratory system. This virus is known with different names such as 2019-nCoV where this name is given by Chinese researchers. Likewise, the international committee has given the name SARS-COV-2. Later, after the worlds'

emergency, the WHO has given name to this virus as coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Institutional theory (IsT) indicates the social perspectives of the firms where such model supports to understand the complexity of the organizations in diverse ways [15, 16]. IsT supports shaping the firms' practices concerning environmental conditions [16]. IsT has defined the extent to which deeper aspects of the social structure are discussed, focused, and adopted such as norms, schemes, rules, and remainder routines to furnish productive guidelines for social behavior [15]. Such a theory encourages understanding the complexities of the organizations concerning environmental issues of the organizations [17, 18]. Moreover, several experts focused on institutional theory in their environment-related studies to furnish theoretical contributions across the nations [17, 19, 20].

Since the experts have advocated that customers are the imperative stakeholders for the organization who are nowadays becoming more conscious about environmental-related green actions of the organizations [29, 21]. It is one of the key objectives of the organizations to satisfy customers' demand and need in more productive and effective ways along with try to sustain relationships with them [22]. The customers' satisfaction (CS) belongs to the inner behavior of the consumers where organizations continuously try to take those actions that can provide better satisfaction [22]. On the other hand, customers' retention has defined the extent to which organizations endeavor to reduce all those deficiencies which eventually keep them loyal to an organization. Customers' retention is important for organizations which could be achieved by performing different activities such as being socially responsible Gustafsson et al. [23]. Hence, in the present instant, the study aims to explore the relationship among CSR practices, customers' satisfaction, and customers' retention to organizations during this COVID-19. To this end, the following research hypotheses are proposed to examine the proposed relationships.

2.1. Hypotheses formation

The CR has defined the extent to which organizations try to engage the existing customers in order to keep achieve their loyalty and their motivation to shop a product being attached to a particular organization [37]. The customers' satisfaction (CS) is another phenomenon in which organizations try to satisfy their customers by adopting different tools

and techniques. A more important tool in this context is to support their customers during hard times [23]. CS eventually has an influence of products, quality, and price [24]. Second, previous academic literature relating to CR has witnessed a growing interest in this topic by paying considerable attention, where several experts also pointed out the importance of customers' retaining. For example, experts reported that CR could minimize costs for organizations and could be a source of the high market share at the same time [37]. However, some scholars [25] recommended that CS, specifically in the telecommunications sector, can play an important role in repurchase intentions and, therefore, will have a high level of use in this particular field in the future. Cronin et al. [26] claimed that service value, satisfaction, and service quality are the sources that direct customers' intentions. Fornell [37] further confirmed that satisfaction is a key factor to retain customers. Over the past few decades, several new technological applications (such as high-end campaign management applications) were introduced that provided extra functional capabilities to the company, particularly to the marketing department to excellence in quantity and quality to satisfy customers. It is the foremost priority of the businesses to satisfy and sustain their customers in order to create long-term relationships and utmost profit for the organization. To this end, organizations adopt several techniques to achieve CS and CR of the customers in different time spans.

In addition, the research on CSR and COVID-19 is ubiquitous and embryonic where the care of stakeholders is also very important for the organizations. From the consumers' perspective, the impact of COVID-19 was ignored previously, especially to affirm how organizations may win over stakeholders during this tough time. Furthermore, Institutional theory (IsT) encourages understanding the complexities of the organizations concerning environmental issues of the organizations [17, 18]. Moreover, several experts focused on institutional theory in their environment-related studies in order to furnish theoretical contributions across the nations [17, 19, 20]. IsT indicates the social perspectives of the firms where such model supports understanding the complexity of the organizations in diverse ways [15, 16]. IsT supports to shape the firms' practices with respect to environmental conditions [16]. Hence, understanding the importance of CSR, customer satisfaction, and customers' retention may perform a critical role in organizational sustainability by influencing

consumers' level of satisfaction and retention. Based on such discussion regarding the significance of CSR, the following relationships are hypothesized to ensure the significance of CSR inter of satisfaction and engagement of stakeholders during the COVID-19 epidemic period.

H_1: CSR practices positively correlated with CS

H_2: CSR practices positively correlated with CR

2.2. Gender as a moderator

Several researchers have been advocated the significance of the moderations which affirms the intensity of the relationship of the core factors [27]. In the past, scholars have examined the influence of distinct variables in order to confirm the connection of gender that how it affects the relationships [28]. Many studies used this factor as a moderator in unlike contexts and dimensions such as within CSR studies and ICT-related studies in order to observe the role of males and females across the nations [29, 30]. For example, Wong, Wei-Han Tan [31] have reached a conclusion that males and females as consumers are not the same therefore their level of thinking is pretty different from each other. According to Yang [32], the behavior of the male and female is different where gender positively influences in terms of buying a particular product as well as service. Likewise, another expert such as Hew, Lee [33] stated that gender has been pointed out as a factor that influences the intentions of the customers in various ways. On the other side, no well-known study has previously explored the nexus of gender within the context of CSR, CS, and CR. Based on précised above discussion and the significance of gender as a factor, we currently attempt to uncover the influence of gender as a moderator among the nexus of CSR, CS, and CR by assuming the following assumptions. By doing so, the study will endeavor to contribute to the existing literature with empirical evidence from a developing nation.

H_3: Gender positively moderating influence between CSR and CS

H_4: Gender positively moderating influence between CSR and CR

2.3. Education as a moderator

Education is another important factor that has been discussed as the moderator by the researcher in various studies within distinct dimensions and contexts. As per Abu-Shanab [34], this factor is vital to affirm the relational intensity between the core variables. Literature is witnessed that studies have not well evaluated the influence of gender as moderato, especially the effect was mainly ignored with respect to CSR and customer-related research work [35, 36]. According to Abu-Shanab [34], there are many well-established studies that have been ignored the influence of gender among the proposed relationships. A few recent works of scholars attempted to uncover the effect of education in their studies [28]. As per Shin [37], the researcher advocated the significance of education within the domain of research by claiming an important role within certain domains. Two different schools of thought have suggested different findings by considering education in their studies. For instance, a few revealed positive consequences of education while others considered it as a less important factor within certain dimensions [38]. Moreover, a study of Hew et al. [33] considered education as the important factor to attain consumers' attention. However, how education could play a key role within the domain of CSR, CS, and CR is another interesting question that the current study attempting to answer. Therefore, based on the above discussion which considered education might be an important factor within the scope of CSR, CS, and CR. To this end and empirical investigations, we proposed the following hypotheses within the market of a developing nation.

H_5: Education positively moderates the relationships between CSR and CS

H_6: Education positively moderates the relationships between CSR and CR

3. Methods

3.1. Collection of data and procedure

The data were collected using a convenience sampling approach which is considered as the more reliable technique for social science work as currently inspired from the past related studies, e.g., [28]. The questionnaires were distributed to almost 700 Chinese online shoppers between Jan 2020 and March 2020 to understand their satisfaction and intention during this critical situation of COVID. A total of 500 questionnaires were finally utilized for further analytical procedures after the removal of improperly or incomplete filled questionnaires. Nevertheless, we took some help from Chinese professors and their students, also conducted some

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

Constructs/ Characteristics	Male Respondents		Female Respondents	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Gender:	350	70.0	150	30.0
Marital Status:				
Married	100	28.50	40.0	26.66
Unmarried	250	71.50	110	73.33
Qualification:				
Bachelor	100	28.57	050	33.33
Master	200	57.14	080	53.33
Ph.D.	050	14.29	020	22.86
Age:				
Less than 20 years	020	05.71	010	06.67
20-25 years	080	22.86	030	20.00
26-30 years	110	31.43	050	33.33
>31 year	140	40.00	060	40.00

Note. $n = 500$.

Table 2
HTMT (Heterotrait–monotrait)

	CSR	CS	CR	GND	Edu.
CSR					
CS	0.421				
CR	0.501	0.341			
Gnd	0.351	0.298	0.401		
Edu	0.224	0.255	0.395	0.355	

meetings in order to gather the data. The questionnaires documents consisted of two parts, where the core part was related to the main investigation being assessed using the seven-point Likert scale as adapted from Van der Heijden, Verhagen [14]. In the second part, we collected some personal information based on respondents' demographic profiles such using nominal and ordinal scales.

3.2. Pre-testing of constructs/scales

Conducting a pilot study is important to understand the reliability of data taking a small size of the target respondents. Therefore, we first conducted a pilot study in order to confirm the feasibility of constructs/items considering the advised cut-off criteria of Padsakoff et al. [39]. A total of fifty responses were gathered and compiled for the purpose of a preliminary study plan. Cronbach's α values should be more than 0.7 to accept the particular variable Podsakoff, MacKenzie [40]. The

results clearly show the over 0.7 values for each latent factor of this study such as CSR, CR, and CS. The value of CSR is α = 0.78, CS α = 0.77, and α = 0.80 for CR. Subsequently, we carried out further survey research to obtain empirical evidence based on a larger sample size in order to affirm the relationships of CSR toward CS and CR during the current pandemic situation of COVID (see Table 1).

3.3. Measures of the constructs

Three types of variables were carried, e.g., corporate social responsibility as the independent variable (IV), customers' satisfaction and customers' retention as the dependent variables (DV), education, and gender as moderating variables to ensure the relationship strength between IVs and DVs. First, corporate social responsibility practices were measured using a 41-items scale as adopted from past studies [41]. Second, customers' satisfaction was measured based on 3-items and adopted from the past study [22]. Third, customers' retention was measured based on 7-items and adopted from the study of Gustafsson et al. [23]. Finally, moderating variables— education and gender— were adopted from the information of demographic characteristics of the respondents. Some of the statements were customized to understand the satisfaction and retention level of the respondents toward CSR-oriented organizations during this epidemic period.

3.4. Data analysis tools and techniques

We use SmartPLS (version 3.3.2) and SPSS (version 21) to examine the dataset. Using SPSS, the items for both IV and DV were coded from 1 to 7 digits. In the past, several experts have been used SmartPLS and SEM methods to calculate the results [21, 42–44]. However, the impact of moderators such as gender and education were examined. The descriptive method was employed to calculate the description of profiles of the participants (see Table 1). Further, to analyze the correlation among constructs, we adopted Pearson's correlation technique. The parameters for interpretation of such technique range from –1 to +1 and can be evaluated in accordance with 'r' values [45], where higher values indicate greater positive impact, while lower values indicate poorer relationships (see Table 2). Next, HTMT validity model was used to examine the validity among constructs.

Subsequently, we applied convergent validity (using AVEs and loadings) and reliability (compos-

ite reliability) to examine the constructs' validity. In addition, the composite reliability (CR) was used to determine the reliability of the constructs/items, while the average extracted variance (AVE), as well as factor loading (FL), were used to measure CV. The results regarding CR should be over 0.7, loading than 0.5, and AVEs over than 0.5 to consider within an acceptable range [46, 47]. Structure equation modeling was major used to ensure the path relationship of the latent's variables and therefore to accept or reject the proposed hypotheses of this study.

We proposed certain hypotheses to explore the relationship from a developing nation in order to reveal the insights about CSR, CS, and CR during the present COVID situation by considering some moderating factors (education and gender). In this regard, the first direct connections among CSR, CS, and CR were explored using certain equations as follows.

$$CS = \beta_1 CSR + \zeta_1 \qquad (1)$$

$$CR = \beta_1 CSR + \zeta_1 \qquad (2)$$

CS = customers satisfaction
CR = customers retention
CSR = corporate social responsibility
Where β has used the unidentified parameter for a particular latent variable which needs to be predictable.

Second, moderating influence of gender and education was independently explored once between CSR and CS and subsequently between CSR and CR using the following equations.

$$CS = \beta\ CSR + \beta\ CSR^*GND + \zeta_1 \qquad (3)$$

$$CR = \beta\ CSR + \beta\ CSR^*EDU + \zeta_1 \qquad (4)$$

CS = customers satisfaction
CR = customers retention
CSR = corporate social responsibility
GND = gender
EDU = education
Where β is used the unidentified parameter for a particular latent variable which needs to be predictable.

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 affirms the characteristics of the participants based on five characteristics. The results exhibited those male respondents are greater than female respondents on the present instant. Moreover, the comprehensive information about the respondent is shown below.

4.2. Common method bias (CMB)

There are several methods to determine the CMB among adopted variables since we currently utilized the method of Podsakoff et al. [39, 40] who recommended the criteria about CMB by comparing the loadings through CLF (common latent factor). Hence, CLF technique was utilized and evaluated by the suggested criteria where outcome values should be < 0.02. All the values are less than 0.02 which affirmed that there is no such bias among the variable. Such CMB technique was inspired by previous studies where experts have utilized CMB and evaluated using CLF methods [e.g., 28, 43].

4.3. HTMT

The values shown in below Table 2 indicate the results of HTMT analysis of the used constructs which are being evaluated using advised criteria of Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt [56]. As per recommendations of Henseler et al. [56], the outcome values for validity existence should be less than 0.9. Hence, based on the current HTMT values, all the values are < 0.9 which is suitable to accept as per the recommendations.

4.4. Reliability and convergent validity

The results for convergent validity and reliability are provided in Table 3, including the values for FL, AVEs, and CR. According to Table 4, the output values for all the above measures are acceptable, normal, and satisfactory in accordance with the recommended criteria [e.g., 40, 48, 49]. As earlier described, such scholars stated that FL and AVEs values should > 0.5, while CR must > 0.7.

4.5. Structural equation modeling (SEM)

Table 4 indicates the summary of SEM results that applied to ensure the overall proposed relationships of hypotheses. All the values in earlier parts are best suited as suggested criteria where values for GFI stand at 0.934, CFI at 0.943, NFI at 0.960, NNFI at 0.939, AGFI at 0.789, RMSEA at 0.059, and Chi-square/df at 2.394.

Table 3
Validity and reliability

	Latent variables' scales/items	Loadings	AVEs	CR
	CSR practices		0.694	0.785
1	CSR1	0.65		
2	CSR2	0.70		
3	CSR3	0.66		
4	CSR4	0.72		
5	CSR5	0.75		
6	CSR6	0.60		
7	CSR7	0.78		
8	CSR8	0.63		
9	CSR9	0.69		
10	CSR10	0.70		
11	CSR11	0.75		
12	CSR12	0.69		
13	CSR13	0.70		
14	CSR14	0.75		
15	CSR15	0.76		
16	CSR16	0.71		
17	CSR17	0.65		
18	CSR18	0.78		
19	CSR19	0.76		
20	CSR20	0.70		
21	CSR21	0.75		
22	CSR22	0.65		
23	CSR23	0.70		
24	CSR24	0.66		
25	CSR30	0.75		
26	CSR31	0.73		
27	CSR36	0.72		
28	CSR38	0.63		
29	CSR40	0.66		
30	CSR41	0.69		
31	CSR42	0.79		
	Customers Retention/commitment (CR)(during COVID period)		0.667	0.801
32	CR1	0.80		
33	CR2	0.75		
34	CR3	0.65		
35	CR4	0.72		
36	CR5	0.65		
37	CR6	0.70		
38	CR7	0.66		
	Customers Satisfaction (CS)(during COVID period)		0.790	0.781
39	CS1	0.76		
40	CS2	0.60		
41	CS3	0.75		

Key to abbreviations: AVE = average extracted variance, CR = composite reliability.

Table 4
Main paths using SEM

Proposed Paths	ES	TE	DE	Hypotheses
H_1: CSR⟶CS	±	0.265*	–	Supporting
H_2: CSR⟶CR	±	0.280*	–	Supporting

*Sig at 0.05.

Table 5
Fisher's Z-transformation analysis

CSR⟶CS and CR	Values after Z-transformation coefficients (Sig < 1.96)	
	CS	CR
Gender	1.024	1.035
Education	1.086	1.353

Note. * Sample size is significant at < 0.05.

4.6. Fisher's Z-transformation analysis

We applied Fisher's Z-transformation statistical technique to check the effect of our proposed moderating variables (for example, demographic variables) among the correlation of CSR, CS, and CR (see Table 5). Following this technique, a simple regression was implemented to produce. The value for "R" before transformation from "R" to Fisher's "z" value using z' = 0.5 [ln (1 + r) – ln (1-r)]. Thus, the results from this analysis reveal that Fisher's Z-value is lower than the suggested 1.96 value, indicating that a notable difference was observed at $p < 0.05$ as suggested criteria by Baron and Kenny [50]. Thus, according to the outcomes from this analysis, the moderating effect of gender and education among the CSR, CS, and CR is found to be insignificant. This method of study, adopted by several previous scholars across different domains [50].

4.7. Graphical representation of the relationships

Figure 1 shows the interrelationships among entire items/latent variables of the study by showing β values for all items of CSR, CS, CR, gender, and education at sig. 0.05.

5. Implications

CSR is always on the front line integrating social and environmental goals into business operations,

especially during uncertain times and challenges. Undeniably, the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a global health emergency but is also leading to a major global challenge that pushes organizations to rethink policies in order to sustain the relationships with their stakeholders. Organizations need to perform social activities to encourage the internal and external stakeholders particularly customers of the organizations. Organizational may inform the customers about adopted measures regarding COVID-19 and may encourage stakeholders to take proper prevention measures during this period. By doing so, stakeholders would be motivated and satisfied with their organizations because they are caring for their health during this hard situation. Hence, the organization should plan such activities, seminars, or meetings in order to encourage, motivate, and inform their stakeholders about the criticality of COVID-19. Furthermore, this study proposed the following implications both theoretical and managerial.

From theoretical standpoints, this study contributes to the related literature of CSR, CS, CR, and COVID-19 epidemic by exploring the nexus of CSR toward CS and CR on how organizations may effectively foster and sustain relationships with stakeholders during this COVID-19 period. Furthermore, this study spotlights important insights by investigating the positive influence of CSR with respect to COVID-19 in which organizations may encourage the stakeholders to adopt necessary prevention to stay healthy. By doing so, they will show care about their stakeholders that ultimately will help to sustain long-term relationships toward organizations. This study further provides empirical evidence in the respective literature and research field from the contextualization of China.

From a managerial standpoint, the study furnishes several insights for policymakers, practitioners, and strategic managers to embrace CSR practices in order to stimulate stakeholders especially in terms of customers' satisfaction and customers' retention toward particular organizations in today's COVID-19 global pandemic era. The concerned management further is encouraged to focus on certain implications as follows. First, the customers are the important stakeholders of the organizations who keep interested in the organizational activities therefore organizations must develop such plans and strategies which are more acceptable and influential for the stakeholders' interest. Hence, organizations must reshape strategies considering the hard situation of COVID-19 on how to encourage customers so that they are
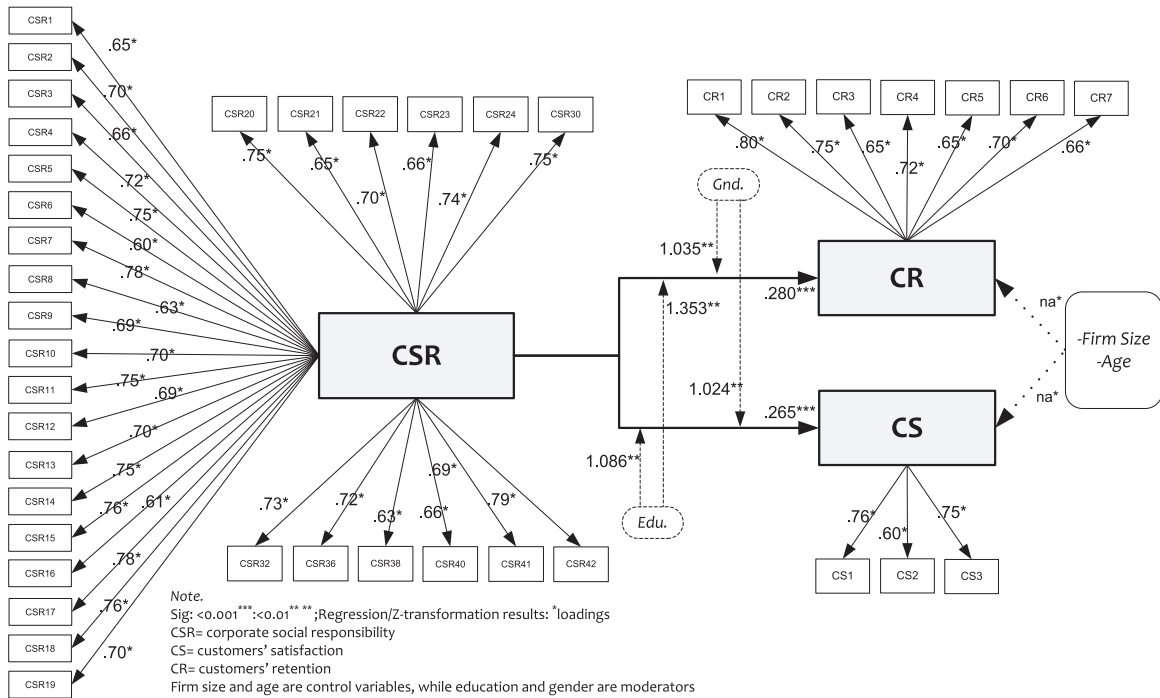
Fig. 1. Structural Model.

able to sustain their satisfaction and retention toward the organization. Second. As customers are more attracted to such organizations that pursue CSR practices since our findings have proven the positive influence of CSR on the customers' satisfaction and retention.

Besides, several studies have proven the positive influence of CSR practices and their adoption on customers' behavior [13, 51]. In this regard, organizations are encouraged to ensure being socially responsible organizations in order to trigger customers' satisfaction and retention more vigorously and energetically. Third, sustainability is a crucial part of the business to stay alive in a fiercely competitive and tough situation [2, 6]. Therefore, to sustain relationships with customers during this COVID-19 period, organizations are suggested to must engage them using prosperous methods or the method which could be more convenient to reach the customers in order to inform and ensure them being with them during this challenge of COVID-19. Finally, organizations are encouraged to reach and compensate the stakeholders, especially those who are suffering COVID-19 because it will immensely help them which ultimately helps them retain the organizations who helped and cared for them during such a hard

situation. In addition, organizations should use certain tools for their stakeholders in order to create awareness regarding COVID-19 and during the post-pandemic for the betterment of the stakeholders and society overall. From a post-pandemic period, organizations should be ready to overcome unexpected challenges in the future that might help their stakeholders to be attached to the organizations. Such challenges could be in any uncertain form as currently the world is confronting COVID-19. To that end, our findings are consistent with some of the previous studies in which worldly experts have suggested the significance of CSR with respect to customers' perspectives within diverse dimensions and contexts [51–55]. Such experts have revealed the positive nexus between different activities of CSR and customers since the present study has assured the insights by assuring the positive connections among CSR, CS, and CR. Some studies also attempted to uncover the influence of COVID-19 in distinct perspectives and dimensions other than marketing outlooks in order to provide insights about such phenomena globally [57–60]. However, more work might be conducted to ensure the insights other than China to validate the current findings on a larger scale within distinct domains, including marketing.

5.1. Limitations and future research opportunities

Aside, the researchers may focus on more work examining and validating the findings as currently presented about CSR, CS, and CR towards other regions of the world using a similar approach to understand the insights about the current pandemic globally. This study has many limitations such as sample size and geography. Since the results are based on 500 participants within the Chinese market considering only two sectors. In contrast, researchers may consider such limitations in their future studies by taking a higher sample size and more sectors to validate the results on a broader scale within the Chinese consumer market and other regions of the world. The study adopted demographics factors as the moderators of this study; however, the rest of the moderators could be admitted in future work to guarantee the connection between an organization and its stakeholders during the COVID-19 period. This study advocates the researchers should estimate well-developed scales of COVID-19 in order to manifest deep analysis among CSR, CS, CR, and remainder factors in the future.

Author contributions

CONCEPTION: Abdul Waheed
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