

Understanding digital social responsibility's impact on purchase intention: insights from consumer engagement, brand loyalty and Generation Y consumers

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Abstract

Purpose – The study specifically seeks to comprehend the impact of online corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on consumer behaviour, with a focus on Generation Y consumers. It also aims to examine how, particularly within Ghanaian manufacturing firms, the views of Generation Y consumers regarding digital social responsibility (DSR), and how it moderates the relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention.

Design/methodology/approach – This study takes a quantitative approach, using information gathered via a survey questionnaire from 611 Generation Y consumers in Ghana. Examining the connections between DSR, customer engagement, brand loyalty and purchase intention is the main goal of the investigation. Structural equation modelling (SEM) methods are used in the study to examine the data gathered and verify the proposed linkages.

Findings – The study reveals a strong positive relationship between corporate social responsibility (DSR) and purchase intention, mediated by consumer engagement and brand loyalty. However, it does not suggest Generation Y's attitudes towards DSR moderating this relationship. The study underscores the importance of DSR for Ghanaian manufacturing businesses.

Originality/value – By studying the relatively unexplored idea of DSR and its effects on consumer behaviour in developing nations – especially in the context of Ghanaian manufacturing enterprises – this study adds to the body of current work. This study sheds light on the ways in which DSR affects Generation Y customers' intentions to buy by examining the mediating roles of brand loyalty and consumer engagement.

Keywords DSR, Consumer engagement, Brand loyalty, Purchase intention, Generation Y consumers

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the years, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been regarded as one of the most important strategic initiatives to improve brand perception, consequently improving customer purchasing intentions (Lee and Lee, 2018). Advances in information technology and



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digital transformation enable corporations to carry out their social duties more affordably and successfully. People can interact by utilizing fully digital technologies in the contemporary digital world, such as social media platforms and other applications (Khattak and Yousaf, 2022). This enables socially responsible actors to swiftly assist individuals in need using digital platforms (Puriwat and Tripopsakul, 2021). They further argued that CSR has evolved into digital social responsibility (DSR), which is the social duty expressed through digital platforms. Due to social exclusion and lockdown measures during the COVID-19 epidemic, several businesses have converted their usual offline CSR into DSR. In this study, DSR is characterized as moral corporate conduct that aims to establish peaceful relationships with its stakeholders using online platforms. Few research studies specifically address how DSR affects consumer perceptions and behaviour. As a result, this study looks at how DSR affects consumer engagement, brand loyalty and purchase intentions, with Generation Y consumer attitude as a moderating variable. According to studies (Luger *et al.*, 2022), Generation Y consumers are more aware of socially and ethically responsible consumption. For this reason, consumers' purchasing decisions are expected to be impacted by an increased predilection for and understanding of sustainable consumption (Yadav *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, according to (Kumar *et al.*, 2018), due to pressure from stakeholders and environmental laws, businesses are emphasizing sustainability initiatives. In this vein, Paul *et al.* (2016) suggested encouraging customers to adopt green products to move towards sustainability. The positive benefits of CSR policies on consumer behaviour outcomes, including product appraisal, are demonstrated by several studies (Abbas *et al.*, 2018; Huo *et al.*, 2022). Customers appreciate companies that exercise social responsibility over some of the least socially responsible ones (Toor *et al.*, 2017).

With the advancement of information and technology, social media has exploded in popularity, fundamentally altering how people engage with one another. Due to its ease of accessibility, people are becoming more involved in this environment, which contributes to social media's enormous popularity (Du and Vieira, 2012; Hancu-Budui *et al.*, 2020). In the contemporary business environment, the digitalization of CSR has gained importance. Direct communication between stakeholders and businesses is made possible by the integration of CSR with digital platforms, promoting the exchange of knowledge and useful feedback (Ahmad *et al.*, 2023). Particularly, the abrupt COVID-19 pandemic breakout has accelerated the digitalization of human connection, with a corresponding rise in social media usage (Lep *et al.*, 2020; Vanko *et al.*, 2021). In addition to strengthening stakeholder ties, it makes businesses more mindful of their online reputations (Martínez-Caro *et al.*, 2020). It enables businesses to react to stakeholder requirements and concerns quicker and more successfully than their rivals. Even with the increased attention that DSR is receiving, there are still few empirical studies that look at how it affects purchase intention directly. Research always concentrates on CSR rather than DSR. As a result, there is a dearth of research on the complex effects of DSR across various generational cohorts, despite the fact that previous studies have shown a positive correlation between DSR and purchase intentions (Puriwat and Tripopsakul, 2021). In particular, the literature is deficient in its comprehension of the ways in which Generation Y consumers – who are recognised for their distinct beliefs and buying habits – interact with DSR programmes (Arachchi and Samarasinghe, 2023). Given Generation Y customers' unique traits and consumption behaviours, an empirical study of how DSR impacts their purchasing intentions is warranted. Determining how DSR resonates differently with different customer categories and investigating potential moderating effects might yield insightful information.

The study focuses on Ghana's manufacturing industry. Manufacturing companies have a substantial negative impact on the environment. According to (Zailani *et al.*, 2012), manufacturing companies create pollution and waste that endanger lives. The environment of competition has accelerated the global evolution of business trends. Along with generating

revenue and creating a competitive advantage, companies must also be responsible for their environmental impact (Kraus *et al.*, 2020). This has made it necessary for us to explore how ethical business practices through digital engagement with stakeholders are impacting consumer behavioural outcomes. Although there is evidence that traditional CSR has a beneficial impact on consumer behaviour outcomes, there has not been much study done in the growing field of digital social responsibility, making it difficult to conclude its influence on consumer behaviour. This study, to the best of our knowledge, will be the first of its kind to explore DSR in Africa. Once more, this study will be the first to look into how attitudes among Generation Y consumers perceive ethical practices and how they influence the link between brand loyalty and purchase intention.

The following are our contributions to the DSR field: Theoretically, by investigating the relationship between DSR, consumer engagement, brand loyalty and purchase intention, the study contributes theoretically by expanding understanding in the field of CSR within the digital realm. It adds to existing literature by elucidating the mechanisms through which DSR influences consumer behaviour. From an empirical perspective, the study provides empirical evidence of the positive correlations between DSR, consumer engagement, brand loyalty and purchase intention. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge by validating theoretical propositions with real-world data, enhancing the credibility and applicability of CSR theories in the digital context. Finally, the research offers actionable insights for businesses, highlighting the importance of integrating DSR into digital strategies to enhance consumer engagement, foster brand loyalty and drive purchase intentions. It underscores the potential competitive advantage for firms that prioritize responsible business practices in the digital age, guiding managerial decision-making and strategic planning.

Literature review

Digital social responsibility (DSR)

DSR lacks a defined definition because it is a growing field. Based on (Irawan *et al.*, 2022) DSR can be defined as the process of bringing CSR implementation online via digital technologies. By this means, organizations can carry out CSR operations and tell stakeholders about their digital CSR initiatives by employing digital tools such as company websites and social media accounts (Parente, 2020). Nowadays, companies see social responsibility as a crucial business endeavour, and this even extends beyond consumers to potential employees. Alhouti and D'Souza (2018) found that job seekers' impressions of a company are improved by social responsibility. The adoption of social responsibility programmes by businesses has been significantly altered by digital transformation. Social networking and digital technology advancements enable firms to create virtual brand communities for customer assistance and knowledge exchange (Elia *et al.*, 2020). Social media platforms like Facebook have proven essential for businesses to involve clients and stakeholders in CSR initiatives like online contributions and the provision of free services. According to a study, it was recommended that traditional CSR activities move digitally (Puriwat and Tripopsakul, 2021). It is important to understand that brick-and-mortar businesses are making way for brick-and-click ones.

Purchase intention

Purchase intention, according to (Beneke *et al.*, 2016), is the possibility that a person would purchase a certain product based on their desires, attitudes and opinions concerning the product. According to Hsu *et al.* (2017), a consumer's conduct is frequently anticipated by their intention; hence, it is crucial to understand their purchase intention. In the digital era, online reviews have an impact on consumers' perceptions of brand equity, which ultimately influences their propensity to buy (Hayes and Carr, 2015). A study by (Boccia and

Sarnacchiaro, 2020) demonstrates a positive association between customers' environmental, social and ethical beliefs and their purchasing behaviour for useful or green goods. Consumers today may be more sophisticated than we have previously observed, and as a result, they may have a different understanding and awareness of CSR. As a result, they may be more receptive to a different style and approach to corporate initiative and communication (Pipatprapa *et al.*, 2017). According to Boccia *et al.* (2018), if this is true, the altered characteristics of consumers may be more obvious and evident when taking into account the variations between older and younger generations or between genders. For this reason, the focus of this study is on how DSR affects Generation Y consumers' purchase intentions.

Consumer engagement in DSR

Through direct or indirect contributions, consumer engagement is a strategy for increasing customer value for a business (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). About this, discussions of consumer participation have started to take centre stage in numerous research. On the other side, consumer engagement is a behaviour that goes beyond the need to purchase something and also involves an emotional or motivational state linked with participation with the firm (Verma, 2021). According to Dwivedi (2015), customer interactions provide a positive consumer perspective with features of vitality, absorption and dedication. De Villiers (2015) further distinguished between passive engagement and active engagement when it comes to consumer product interaction. When a consumer is uninformed or uninterested in a brand, their involvement is considered passive. On the other hand, it may be claimed that customers are actively engaged when they show a high level of behaviour, affect, and cognition towards an offer. A strong emotional connection can also be a sign of high consumer involvement, which encourages customers to build and maintain relationships with the product or service (Zainol *et al.*, 2015). In addition to economic goals, corporations today place a lot of emphasis on consumer engagement, which is seen as a strategic step for the growth of their businesses (Puriwat and Tripopsakul, 2021). Businesses have been including consumers in their socially responsible actions, which go beyond only reaping financial rewards, according to Fatma *et al.* (2020). Researchers have shown that engaging in responsible business practices enables organizations to benefit from a variety of factors, including improved impression management and customer behaviour that is with a greater propensity for favourable word-of-mouth (WOM) (Sharma *et al.*, 2018; Puriwat and Tripopsakul, 2021).

Brand loyalty

According to Aaker (1991), brand loyalty is the essential component that best represents the brand's value. More than 90 years ago, the concept of brand loyalty was first introduced as "brand insistence" (Copeland, 1923). Researchers may focus on elements including customer pleasure, customer trust, brand love, customer commitment, service quality, and brand association that affect brand loyalty (Fatma *et al.*, 2018). Customer involvement (Lim *et al.*, 2015; Aluri *et al.*, 2019), customer interaction (Boateng, 2019), social presence (Fang *et al.*, 2018; Tseng *et al.*, 2019), and social media are new factors that influence brand loyalty. Online technology has transformed the nature of relationships between companies and their clients, transforming one-way communication into two-way communication (Boateng, 2019), this promotes consumers' attachment towards a brand. Along with other consequences, brand loyalty has also been studied in terms of its impact on a company's financial success (Kim *et al.*, 2003), consumers and nonfinancial performance (Choi and Choi, 2014). This idea of brand loyalty has undergone substantial development and has been the subject of much discussion in the literature (Aljarah and Ibrahim, 2020). The influence of ethical business practices and brand loyalty on consumer behaviour is examined in this study.

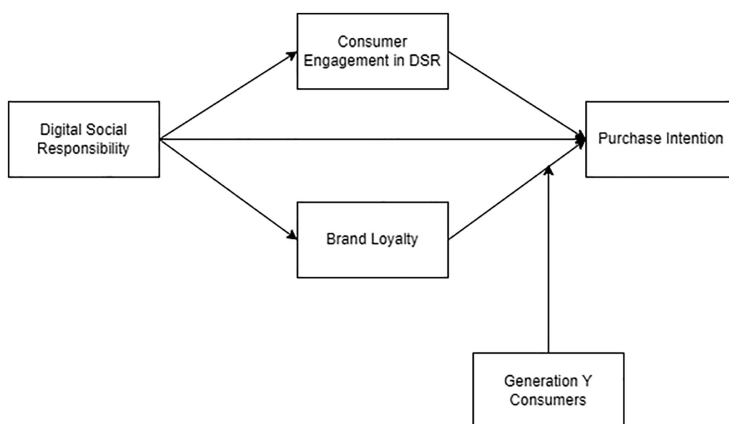
Brand loyalty can be further divided into two categories: cognitive and altitudinal and behavioural. While cognitive and altitudinal brand loyalty increase the propensity to make trustworthy recommendations to others in their surroundings and are essential for attracting new clients, behavioural brand loyalty brings in direct revenue for the company (Bilgin, 2018). According to Jang and Zhang (2016), brand loyalty is a valuable non-material asset for companies. Due to its beneficial effects on business, brand loyalty has been regarded by many companies as one of the major desired outcomes in marketing (Lacap *et al.*, 2021). Digital technology has changed the way that consumers connect with companies, allowing them to do so through a variety of online platforms (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021). According to Reinartz *et al.* (2019), companies have new chances to engage with customers, collect feedback and personalise experiences through social media, e-commerce platforms and mobile applications. These efforts eventually improve brand loyalty.

Theoretical and hypothesis development

The social exchange theory has an impact on the research theoretical framework model in Figure 1. This theory encourages social interactions between businesses and their stakeholders, in this example, their customers. According to Blau (1986), when one party (a corporation) voluntarily offers benefits to the other, it inspires the other party (a consumer) to do the same. Again, in the context of CSR, (Glaveli, 2020) suggested that it is feasible to inspire customers to directly reciprocate these volunteer behaviours through responsible business efforts that enhance their welfare, such as recognizing customers' requirements. Glaveli further stresses that customers are also members of families, communities and nations in addition to being economic entities. As a result, it should be understood that people are aware of acts intended to promote their well-being as well as the well-being of stakeholder groups they are currently or potentially a member of and that they are expected to reciprocate (generalized reciprocity norm). Therefore, DSR initiatives for employees and society/environment are likely to encourage social interaction between a business and its clients.

DSR and purchase intention

Numerous studies have been conducted to support the direct or indirect effects of responsible business practices on consumer behaviour (Amoroso, 2015; Abdeen *et al.*, 2016). According to



Source(s): By authors (2024)

Figure 1.
The theoretical
framework

these researchers, consumer behaviour can be action-oriented, emotional or cognitive, such as the intention to make a purchase (Ramesh *et al.*, 2019). The consumer is a crucial stakeholder who benefits from these DSR actions and evaluates them when making purchasing decisions (Aksak *et al.*, 2016). Relationships with a range of stakeholders may be forged by businesses implementing socially responsible activities (Lai *et al.*, 2010). Consumers tend to identify more with companies that adopt ethical business practices since doing so boosts self-esteem and improves enjoyment (Chung *et al.*, 2015). According to (Bianchi *et al.*, 2019), they demonstrated that the volume and type of disseminated responsible business information affect how consumers rate items, businesses and their intentions to make purchases. Again, a study by Abdeen *et al.* (2016) explains that consumers are more likely to make a purchase when they participate in and are aware of responsible business efforts. Again, consumer decision-making is aided by socially responsible initiatives by firms (Zhang and Ahmad, 2021). Consumers are now more conscious of businesses' impact on the environment. Such effects are caused by global warming, which is a result of environmental problems that the globe is currently experiencing (Javeed *et al.*, 2022). As a result, buyers' intentions to make sustainable purchases also become part of them (Huo *et al.*, 2022). In this situation, ethical business activities assist consumers in planning to make sustainable purchases (Gong *et al.*, 2023). The practice of traditional CSR is evolving, though, as a result of technological innovation and social media's seamless integration. People have started to utilize online reviews to express their thoughts on things as a result of the growing usage of the internet and online social media (Chakraborty, 2019). Even many people consider Internet reviews to be more trustworthy than other, more traditional sources of information (Fang *et al.*, 2016). The digital form of CSR, known as DSR, is used by businesses today to fulfil customer requests and promote consumer purchase intent. On the grounds of the justification previously outlined, we suggested that:

H1. DSR will positively affect consumers' purchase intention.

DSR and brand loyalty

According to Öberseder *et al.* (2013), CSR is crucial for assessing corporate goods and cultivating favourable opinions of companies among consumers. Much research has specifically looked at how brand loyalty is impacted by ethical business practices, attempting to understand the mechanisms underlying this relationship (Moon *et al.*, 2015). The social exchange theory, according to (Blau, 1986), is one theory that might be used to describe why a firm interacts with its stakeholders. According to (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), the foundation of the social exchange theory is that a customer's connection with a business is a social exchange that generates a sense of duty and might ultimately end in a high-quality relationship. The benefits of such responsibility are maximized while the costs are reduced (Blau, 1986). According to the social exchange theory's reciprocity standards, clients (as community members) who get such advantages may react favourably (by exhibiting loyalty behaviour) towards businesses that adopt sustainable business methods. This assertion appears to be supported by empirical data. According to research, consumers' purchasing decisions are thought to be strongly and directly influenced by the information that is readily available about DSR projects. More precisely, a study by (Lin and Chung, 2019) that focused on the hotel sector found that socially responsible business practices have a favourable impact on the growth of consumer loyalty. The study by (Lee, 2019), which collected data from 311 consumers who bought life insurance, found that CSR initiatives directly increase customer loyalty. Considering the current discussion, we proposed that:

H2. DSR activities will positively associate with consumer brand loyalty.

DSR and consumer engagement

Participating in responsible business practices is regarded as being of tremendous importance during this process, among particular programmes to discover potential consumers (Fatma *et al.*, 2020). Companies generally demonstrate their commitment to societal welfare through DSR participation, which increases the likelihood that consumers will feel satisfied with their own needs. In contrast to the traditional interaction environment, the digitization of social life enables people to participate more actively in the operations of organizations rather than just being passive recipients (Chu and Chen, 2019; Fatma *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, theoretically speaking, companies may use expanding social media (such as Twitter, Weibo and WeChat Official Accounts) to successfully increase customer awareness of their DSR activity. According to the general theory behind CSR, business organizations should be able to influence customer behaviour successfully, which can lead to enhanced economic benefits (Sharma *et al.*, 2018; Puriwat and Tripopsakul, 2021).

In the service industry, customers are viewed as the most significant stakeholder group and are essential to a company's success (Gong *et al.*, 2019). Without the customer, the company would be unable to expand, compete or thrive over the long run. Similarly to this, a lot of service-oriented firms use the catchphrase "the customer is always right" to reassure clients that they will receive top-notch care as well as to inspire employees to do the same (Kiffin-Petersen and Soutar, 2020). In the contemporary corporate context, socially responsible practices have been seen as a critical link to forging long-term engagement between stakeholders (Crane *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, we predicted that:

H3. DSR and consumer engagement are positively related.

Consumer engagement in DSR and purchase intention

According to earlier studies (Müller-Stewens *et al.*, 2016), people can be motivated to engage in a wide range of behaviours by their psychological states. The social elements' impact on consumers' behavioural intentions differs depending on how a particular customer views the elements of ethical business practices (Ahn, 2021). Clients who have a strong feeling of autonomy and connectedness, for instance, are more inclined to use the service again and recommend it to others. According to (Eisingerich *et al.*, 2019), such qualities might affect a consumer's engagement by promoting social interaction. Again, according to Glavee-Geo *et al.* (2020), the term "consumer engagement" broadly refers to the existence of a close relationship between a company and its clients. The secret to decision-making is for customers to develop strong emotional relationships with the brand (Abbas *et al.*, 2018). With this in mind, it is reasonable to see consumer participation as a complex concept that consists of cognitive, emotional and/or behavioural components. According to (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014), these elements are crucial for creating durable connections that benefit both businesses and their clientele. Furthermore, according to (Park and Jiang, 2020), there is a favourable correlation between brand engagement and customers' inclinations to use a company's products. Purchase intention is positively influenced by increased consumer interaction, both directly and indirectly (Huerta-Álvarez *et al.*, 2020). Recently, businesses have started including their consumers in their social responsibility programmes. Customers, who are among the different stakeholder groups for a company's most important stakeholders (Park, 2019), reward firms by being more likely to use and purchase their products and services (Karaosmanoglu *et al.*, 2016). Numerous studies have examined the connection between customer engagement and purchase intention; however, few studies have examined customer engagement and purchase intention in the context of DSR. The preceding argument leads us to the following hypotheses:

- H4. the association between consumer engagement and purchase intention is positive in the presence of DSR initiatives.

Brand loyalty and purchase intention

According to [de Villiers \(2015\)](#), brand loyalty is the degree of affection a consumer has for a particular brand and is regarded as an important behavioural outcome variable in the literature. [Akturan \(2018\)](#) found a significant correlation between consumer purchase intent and the equity of the green brand. Attitude-based loyalty has been investigated ([Kressmann et al., 2006](#)) as well as behavioural loyalty, which is determined by the regularity of purchases ([Romaniuk and Nenycz-Thiel, 2013](#)). Our study took into account consumers' attitudes towards a brand. The focus of attitude loyalty is on customers' dedication to the brand. The degree and kind of a customer's purchasing intention determine the loyalty factor ([Panda et al., 2020](#)). Positive purchase intentions are more likely to result in brand loyalty from the consumer. We, therefore, anticipate that brand loyalty and purchasing intent are positively correlated with eco-friendly goods. Brand loyalty strengthens brand attributes, offers the chance to inspire repurchase intent and makes the brand less vulnerable to rivals. Therefore, we proposed that:

- H5. Brand loyalty and purchasing intent have a positive association.

Mediating role of consumer engagement in DSR

Consumer engagement serves as a mediator, defining the link between the relevant factors. The responsible business practices of a firm and consumer attitudes about the firm and its products were found to be positively correlated, as in some research ([Sidek et al., 2017](#)). According to one study on consumer engagement with CSR, CSR directly influences customers' intentions to purchase a company's goods ([Addo et al., 2020](#)). However, during the past 20 years, the use of the internet has fundamentally altered how advertisers and marketers employ CSR and engage with their target markets. Social media's quick uptake has given users the chance to engage with brands directly and start discussions with them. Similar to this, CSR practices are shifting from traditional CSR to DSR as businesses invite customer participation through digital platforms ([de Maya et al., 2016](#)). Customers are routinely encouraged by businesses to join DSR programmes online via social media, email and/or websites, which are commonly used to interact with customers directly regarding ethical business practices ([Saxton et al., 2019](#)). Customers can give feedback and respond to company initiatives when they communicate with the company using online platforms. Companies can also track and monitor customers' actions, which prompts them to take further action in response to customer involvement, allowing two-way dialogue ([Lee et al., 2021](#)). DSR practices, including open communication and charitable contributions, enhance the company's reputation online. These behaviours create consumer trust, credibility and social responsibility. Customers' perception of a "socially responsible" brand, which is essential for driving their purchase intentions and choices, is aided by the firms' CSR interaction with them ([Lecuyer et al., 2017](#); [Chu and Chen, 2019](#)). As a result, we hypothesized that:

- H6. the link between DSR and purchase intention will be mediated by customer engagement.

Mediating role of brand loyalty

According to [Uhlig et al. \(2020\)](#), one of the CSR dimensions – philanthropy – has an impact on consumers' intentions to do business with socially conscious corporations. [Iglesias et al.](#)

(2020) demonstrated how co-creation and customer trust both directly and indirectly affect customer loyalty to the brand. Recent research has shown that an organization's socially responsible efforts help it develop a strong brand image (Ramesh *et al.*, 2019), forge relationships with customers (Overall, 2017) and improve brand repute (Tetrault Sirsly and Lvina, 2019). Additionally (Huo *et al.*, 2022) argued that it is reasonable to predict that brand loyalty will buffer the relationship between DSR and buy intention since responsible business practices promote consumer brand loyalty, which in turn has a favourable effect on purchase intention. Therefore, a business's DSR initiatives would favourably affect brand loyalty, which would favourably affect consumers' intentions to buy its goods or services. For instance, if a company actively supports digital inclusion by providing underrepresented populations with access to its goods and services, customers who value such efforts may become more devoted to that company. As a result of this heightened brand loyalty, customers would be more likely to buy products from that specific business. We hypothesize that:

H7. the association between DSR and purchase intention is mediated by brand loyalty.

The moderation role of Generation Y consumer attitude towards DSR

In the literature, the connection between ethical company practices and customer behaviour outcomes is well established (Vera-Martínez *et al.*, 2022). According to O'Cass and Choy (2008), this relationship works as a chain of cognition (beliefs) and affect (feelings), eventually resulting in Generation Y's purchase intention. The target market for a brand should, according to research, consist of engaged customers who are aware of and support socially conscious efforts in their everyday lives (Luger *et al.*, 2022). Generation Y participates more in product appraisal during the decision-making process than previous generations did (Parment, 2012). According to Ahmad (2019), Generation Y is different from past generations in that they are more accepting of and critical of businesses' CSR. Again (Luger *et al.*, 2022) claim that the significant knowledge of and favourable opinions held by Generation Y customers about ethical business practices are likely to result in more positive brand assessments and positive purchase intentions. In this study, our moderation rationale is based on the knowledge that Millennials' loyalty improves and their purchase intention is positively impacted when they consider a business to be socially and ecologically responsible (Kotler *et al.*, 2016). More specifically, because of online CSR, companies may increase customer loyalty by successfully interacting with Millennials on social media. Constant exposure to brand updates and information can have a beneficial effect on consumers' propensity to buy (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, we arrived at the following presumption:

H8. The association between brand loyalty and purchase intention is positively moderated by the DSR attitude of Gen Y consumers

Research design

This study adopted the quantitative research method because the collection of numerical data are made possible and it offers an impartial means of measuring variables. This facilitates the statistical analysis of data and the examination of correlations among variables by academics, as per Creswell (2009). In order to provide a momentary view of a population's attitudes, behaviours and preferences, cross-sectional studies are frequently employed in business and social science research (Creswell, 2009). They provide a productive and economical way to collect information from various demographic groups and investigate relationships between relevant factors (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

Instruments and questionnaire designing

There are five variables in the suggested model: (1) digital social responsibility (2) consumer engagement, (3) brand loyalty, (4) purchase intent and (5) Generation Y consumer attitude. Based on the aforementioned variables, a questionnaire was developed to investigate the effect of the adapted variables on purchase intention. A five-point Likert scale was used to collect responses to each item in the survey, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 5 indicating “strongly agree” (Hair, 2010).

Sampling and data collection procedures

A brief poll of 25 professionals from businesses and academics who had some experience utilizing digital platforms to promote ethical business and consumer intent was done. The major goals of this survey were to establish the baseline standards for data collection for the model, obtain conceptual inputs and eliminate any typing or language problems. Some minor adjustments were made following pre-testing. The participant who met the below-mentioned requirements was eligible to complete the questionnaire, which was used to gather data. The target population must have been born between 1980 and 1999. Lissitsa and Kol (2016) defined Generation Y (Gen Y) as the demographic cohort born between 1980 and 1999. They must have had a regular and active digital and social media presence and they must frequently comment on business pages about their operations and their effects on societies. The final questionnaire was created and utilized for data collection once the selection criteria were established. Our study team gathered 615 replies utilizing internet networks like Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, etc. From the datasheet, four answer data points were removed. For analysis, the finished data from 611 individuals was used. The same size is suitable for the analysis, in line with earlier investigations (Yong *et al.*, 2020).

Scale and construct

The measurement items used in the study were taken from existing research and then modified for our context. Measurement for DSR was taken from Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2021), consumer engagement was from Carvalho and Fernandes (2018), purchase intention was from Bianchi *et al.* (2019), brand loyalty was from Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) and finally, Generation Y consumer attitudes towards DSR were from (Casidy *et al.*, 2015). The measurement constructs can be found in the Appendix.

Results

The statistics of the respondents' demographics are as follows: the male respondents were 320, representing 52.4% and the females respondents were 291, representing 47.6%. The ages representing the respondents were: 1980–1985 were 140; 22.9%, 1986–1990 were 195; 31.9%, 1991–1995 were 154; 25.2% and 1996–1999 were 122; 20.0%. The education demographics were: Ph.D. 49; 8%, master's degree 239; 39.1%, bachelor degree 213; 34.9%, associate degree 80; 13.1% and high school 30; 4.9%. The above information can be found in Table 1.

Assessing the measurement model

We analyzed our data using SmartPLS version 4. The outer model test consists of individual reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. Our factor loadings range from 0.727 to 0.938, which is >0.50, as proposed by (Hair *et al.*, 2014), as shown in Table 2 and Figure 2, indicating no issues with the study item reliability. We also measure the composite reliability (CR), and from Table 2, the values are higher than 0.60, as suggested by (Hair *et al.*, 2014) which demonstrates the consistency, reliability and homogeneity of all the variables (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1991). We also continue to examine

Variables	Frequency	Per cent
Male	320	52.4
Female	291	47.6
Total	611	100
1980–1985	140	22.9
1986–1990	195	31.9
1991–1995	154	25.2
1996–1999	122	20.0
Total	611	100
Ph.D.	49	8.0
Masters	239	39.1
Bachelor	213	34.9
Associate degree	80	13.1
High school	30	4.9
Total	611	100

Source(s): By authors (2024)

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics

Variables	Constructs	Loadings	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	VIF
Digital social responsibility	DSR1	0.831	0.808	0.887	0.723	1.576
	DSR2	0.874				2.057
	DSR3	0.846				1.861
Purchase intention	PI1	0.800	0.780	0.872	0.695	1.420
	PI2	0.853				1.858
	PI3	0.846				1.791
Consumer engagement	CE1	0.855	0.785	0.875	0.700	1.815
	CE2	0.827				2.595
	CE3	0.827				1.924
Brand loyalty	BLOY1	0.849	0.831	0.899	0.748	1.736
	BLOY2	0.910				1.656
	BLOY3	0.832				1.559
Generation Y consumers	GENY2	0.685	0.841	0.89	0.734	1.643
	GENY3	0.924				2.134
	GENY4	0.938				2.355

Note(s): BLOY = brand loyalty, CE = consumer behaviour, DSR = digital social responsibility, GENY = Generation Y consumers and PI = purchase intention

Source(s): By authors (2024)

Table 2.
Construct reliability and validity

convergent validity, which, according to [Ur Rehman et al. \(2019\)](#), measures the extent to which items of variables are related. In [Table 2](#), the lowest and highest values of AVE are 0.695 and 0.748, respectively, and as a result, the ≥ 0.50 threshold suggested by ([Hair et al., 2014](#)) for convergent validity to be present was met. Finally, discriminant validity was measured, and according to [Ur Rehman et al. \(2019\)](#), discriminant validity states that two indicators must not be statistically identical. The most commonly used discriminant validity tests in various studies are the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. We further tested for the HTMT ratio of correlations, and from [Table 3](#), the test fulfilled the 0.85 criteria that was accepted in [Tackie et al. \(2022\)](#).

Collinearity statistics test

According to [Johnston et al. \(2018\)](#), the collinearity test examines the nexus between the endogenous and exogenous variables. The issue of collinearity exists when the value of VIF is

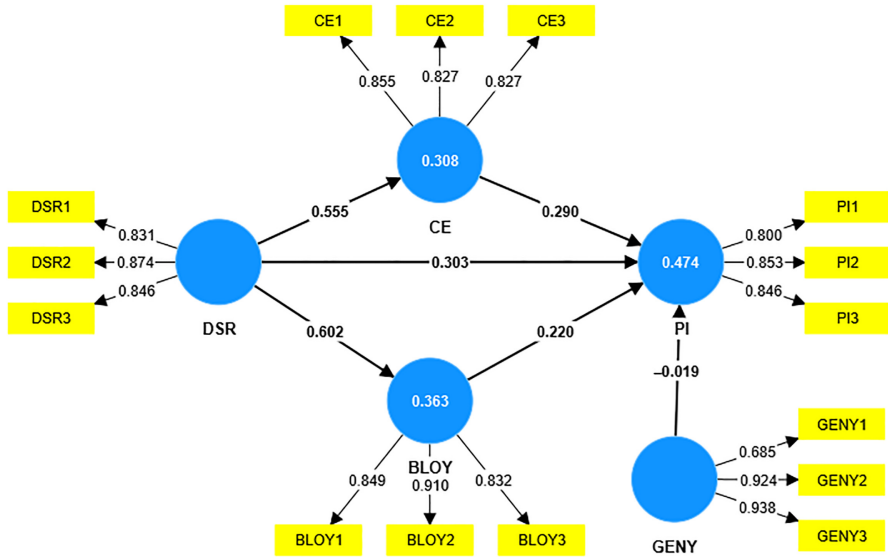


Figure 2.
Measurement model

Source(s): By authors (2024)

	BLOY	CE	DSR	GENY	PI
BLOY					
CE	0.709				
DSR	0.731	0.695			
GENY	0.098	0.113	0.121		
PI	0.703	0.743	0.747	0.07	

Note(s): BLOY = brand loyalty, CE = consumer behaviour, DSR = digital social responsibility, GENY = Generation Y consumers and PI = purchase intention
Source(s): By authors (2024)

Table 3.
Heterotrait-monotrait
ratio of
correlations (HTMT)

>5, as indicated by (Kim, 2019). In this case, if a model has VIF values less than five, it is an indication that the model has no collinearity issues. The results of the VIF for this study show that the values are less than five, indicating no VIF issues, which can be found in Table 2.

Assessing the predictive relevance and power

The coefficient determination (R^2 value) is the method by which structural models are evaluated most frequently. According to (Ameyaw et al., 2022), the R^2 measures the amount of variance in the dependent variables that is explained by all the independent variables. R^2 values range from 0 to 1, with higher numbers indicating better prognostication. R^2 values for endogenous latent variables of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 can be regarded as significant, moderate and weak, respectively (Hair et al., 2017). Researchers could consider Stone-Q² Geisser’s value in addition to the size of the R^2 values as a measure of prediction accuracy (Hair et al., 2017). This metric demonstrates the model’s predictive capability or relevance. The values shown (0.363, 0.308 and 0.474) represent the percentage of variance in the outcome variable that the linear model (R^2) accounts for. It has a moderate level of predictive accuracy. The prediction

value (Q^2 value) of the path model was found using the PLSpredict methodology to be (0.358, 0.305 and 0.347). As long as Q^2 values are larger than 0, the dependent construct's path model is considered predictive validity (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Table 4 contains the relevant data.

Assessing the structural model

We created a hypothesis to determine a link between our variables. The findings corroborate Hypothesis 1 and show that DSR has a positive and substantial influence on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.308, t = 6.194, p < 0.005$), suggesting that, a unit increase in DSR will lead to a 30% increase in purchase intention. Hypothesis 2 is validated since it was shown that DSR has a positive and substantial impact on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.602, t = 19.055, p < 0.005$), indicating that a unit increase in DSR will correspond to a 60% increase in brand loyalty. The third hypothesis is supported by the fact that DSR has a positive and significant effect on consumer engagement ($\beta = 0.555, t = 15.814, p < 0.005$), implying that an increase in DSR will cause a 55% increase in consumer engagement. Additionally, the result supporting hypothesis 4 revealed that consumer engagement had a favourable impact on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.290, t = 6.022, p < 0.005$), suggesting a 29% increase in purchase intention corresponds with a unit change in consumer engagement. Finally, the findings supported hypothesis 5 by showing a positive association between brand loyalty and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.219, t = 4.204, p < 0.005$), also indicating that an increase in brand loyalty will lead to a 21% increase in purchase intention. The above information can be found in Table 5 and Figure 3.

The study examined how consumer engagement and brand loyalty mediate the link between DSR and purchase intention. The finding supports Hypothesis 6 because consumer engagement had a positive and significant mediation impact on the association between DSR and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.161, t = 5.106, p < 0.005$). On the other hand, brand loyalty significantly and favourably mediates the association between DSR and purchase intention

	R^2	Q^2
Brand loyalty	0.363	0.358
Consumer engagement	0.308	0.305
Purchase intention	0.474	0.347

Source(s): By authors (2024)

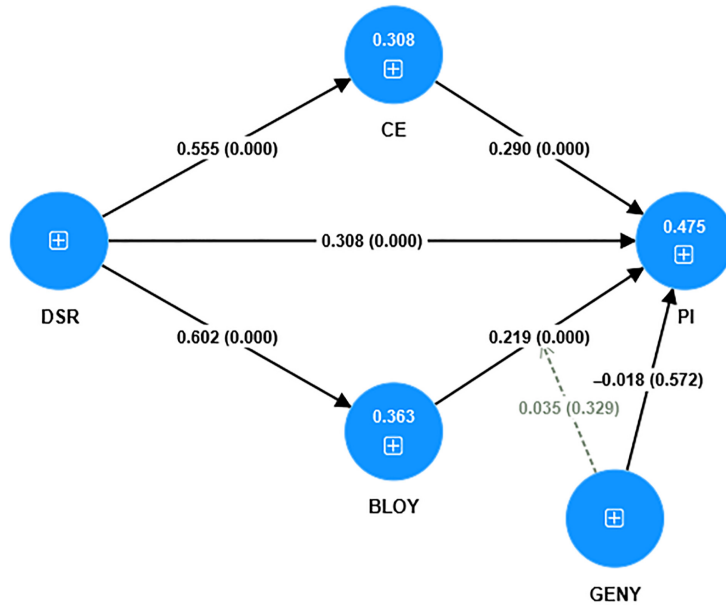
Table 4.
Predictive relevance and power

Relationships	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	STDEV	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
DSR → PI	0.308	0.305	0.050	6.194	0.000
DSR → BLOY	0.602	0.604	0.032	19.055	0.000
DSR → CE	0.555	0.555	0.035	15.814	0.000
CE → PI	0.290	0.290	0.048	6.022	0.000
BLOY → PI	0.219	0.220	0.052	4.204	0.000
DSR → CE → PI	0.161	0.162	0.032	5.106	0.000
DSR → BLOY → PI	0.132	0.133	0.032	4.074	0.000
GENY × BLOY → PI	0.035	0.032	0.036	0.977	0.329

Note(s): BLOY = brand loyalty, CE = consumer behaviour, DSR = digital social responsibility, PI = purchase intention and GENY = Generation Y consumers

Source(s): By authors (2024)

Table 5.
Testing the direct relationship



Note(s): BLOY = brand loyalty, CE = consumer behavior, DSR = digital social responsibility, GENY = Generation Y consumers, PI = purchase intention

Source(s): By authors (2024)

Figure 3.
Structural model

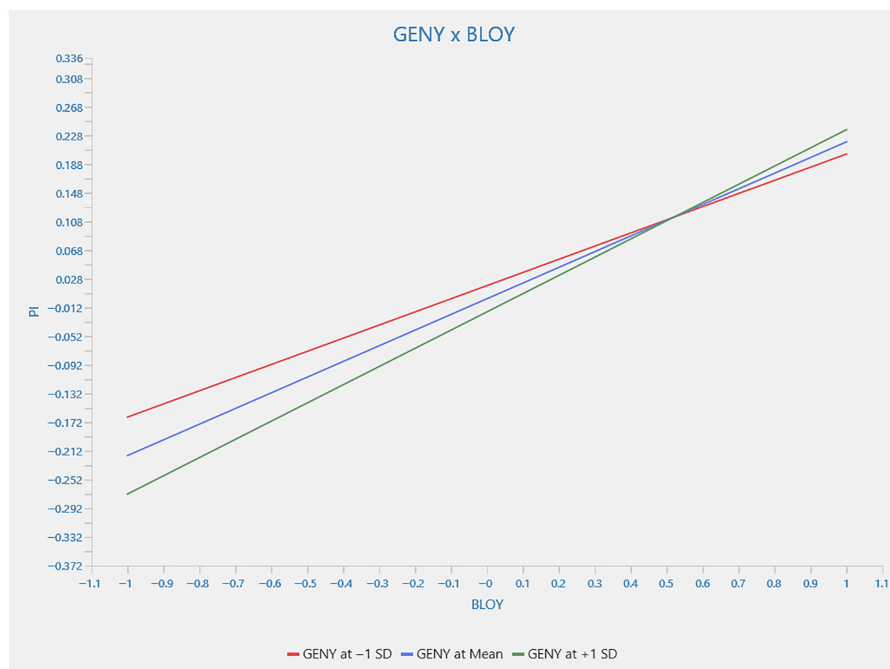
($\beta = 0.132, t = 4.074, p < 0.005$), supporting [hypothesis 7](#). We conclude that the two mediations were partially mediated since there was a positive and significant direct association between DSR and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.308, t = 6.194, p < 0.005$). The above information can be found in [Table 5](#) and the path diagram in [Figure 3](#).

From the analysis, the association between brand loyalty and purchase intention was positively but insignificantly moderated by Generation Y consumer attitude towards DSR ($\beta = 0.035, t = 0.977, p > 0.005$), showing that this relationship is not moderated by Generation Y consumer attitude towards DSR. This information can be found in [Table 5](#) and [Figure 3](#). From the simple slope, which can be found in [Figure 4](#), the interaction effect of Generation Y consumer attitude towards DSR negatively weakens the positive association between brand loyalty and purchase intention.

Discussion

The objective of the study is to find out how corporate responsibility initiated and performed digitally impacted consumer decisions. In this study, consumer engagement and brand loyalty served as mediators between the effects of DSR on purchase intention. The results of this study have ramifications for business and research in this period of fast technological growth on both a theoretical and practical level. Additionally, because there haven't been many studies in the field of DSR, this research lays the foundation for more.

To identify the links between the various research variables, the study explored numerous hypotheses. According to [hypothesis 2](#), there is a substantial correlation between DSR and



Note(s): BLOY = brand loyalty, GENY = Generation Y consumers, PI = purchase intention

Source(s): By authors (2024)

Figure 4.
The moderation effect
of GEN Y consumers
on BLOY and PI

consumer engagement; this conclusion is consistent with that of (Al-Haddad *et al.*, 2022). This is an indication that DSR activities of firms stimulate consumers' engagement interest, and consumers who are actively engaged in the designing of DSR and giving feedback on online/digital responsible business practice programmes will support and legitimize such businesses and will continue to patronize them. Additionally, according to [hypothesis 2](#), DSR and brand loyalty are positively related. This result aligns with the study by (Aljarah and Ibrahim, 2020), which revealed that consumers are more loyal to firms that invest substantially in responsible practices. It also aligns with the study of (Rivera *et al.*, 2019). This revelation means that, nowadays, consumers have become very conscious of business and sustainability concerns, are very concerned about the impact of business on society, are willing to buy from responsible businesses and continue to be loyal to the brand. Moreover, in [hypothesis 3](#), it was found that DSR has a positive impact on purchasing intention, which is consistent with a recent study by (Puriwat and Tripopsakul, 2021; Al-Haddad *et al.*, 2022). In the era of technological advances, responsible business practices and initiatives through digital platforms can reach large and targeted customers. If a business is deemed to be very responsible to its stakeholders, it will stimulate consumer intention to purchase and repurchase. This result also aligns with a recent study conducted by (Gupta *et al.*, 2021; Gupta and Wadera, 2021). Furthermore, [hypothesis 4](#) revealed a significant relationship between consumer engagement and purchase intention. This means that consumers that are engaged in various responsible business practices virtually will favour such businesses and will develop the intention to buy from such businesses. This result is consistent with the work of (Wu and Zhu, 2021), who state that consumers who are engaged in responsible business

initiatives always have the intention to purchase from such firms. Again, [hypothesis 5](#) revealed that there is a positive association between brand loyalty and purchase intention. This result aligns with the work of ([Panda et al., 2020](#); [Catic and Poturak, 2022](#)). Consumers who are loyal to brands that have a positive impact on their stakeholders will always have the intention to purchase and repurchase from such businesses.

The result of the mediation analysis establishing the impact of consumer engagement in the relationship between DSR and purchase intention, which was for [hypothesis 6](#), was found to be positive and significant. This result was consistent with ([Kristia, 2021](#)) that consumer engagement mediates the relationship between environmental concerns, which are business responsibilities and purchase intention. By actively engaging with consumers and showcasing DSR, companies can enhance the likelihood of positive purchase intentions among their target audience. The result was also aligned with the study of ([Al-Haddad et al., 2022](#)). [Hypothesis 7](#) tested the mediation role of brand loyalty on the relationship between DSR and purchase intention, and the results revealed a positive effect. Some previous studies also confirmed our results ([Tunjungsari et al., 2020](#); [Huo et al., 2022](#)). This positive effect means that brand loyalty can enhance repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth and differentiation, thereby positively influencing consumers' intentions to purchase from a socially responsible brand.

Finally, the moderation effect of Generation Y consumer attitudes towards DSR was insignificant, which was contrary to the previous studies by [Arachchi and Samarasinghe \(2023\)](#), which revealed a moderation effect. This insignificant effect could be attributed to the fact that Generation Y consumers' awareness of DSR programmes does not automatically translate into behavioural outcomes such as brand loyalty and purchase intention. The brand must be committed to DSR initiatives its target consumers must take notice of responsible business practices in their everyday lives ([Luger et al., 2022](#)).

In conclusion, this study delved into the intricate relationship between DSR, consumer engagement, brand loyalty and purchase intention. Findings suggest a significant correlation between DSR and consumer engagement, reinforcing the notion that proactive DSR initiatives drive consumer engagement and support. Moreover, the positive association between DSR, brand loyalty, and purchase intention underscores the growing consumer preference for socially responsible brands. The mediating role of consumer engagement and brand loyalty further emphasizes their importance in shaping purchase intentions. While the moderation effect of Generation Y consumer attitudes towards DSR was insignificant, it highlighted the need for sustained commitment to DSR initiatives to foster consumer loyalty and purchase intent. These insights offer valuable implications for businesses navigating the digital landscape amidst evolving consumer expectations and societal concerns. Continued research in this area is essential to further elucidate the dynamics of DSR and its impact on consumer behaviour.

Practical implications

We made significant contributions to practices. We encourage firms to effectively allocate resources to DSR initiatives that support Generation Y consumers' beliefs and issues. Depending on the unique tastes and preferences of consumers, these resources should focus on social issues, environmental sustainability or ethical corporate operations. The positive relationship between DSR and purchase intention suggests that businesses should incorporate DSR principles into product development that align with generation Y consumers ethical values and preferences. Again, we create managers' awareness of the importance of DSR communication as a result of the positive link between consumer engagement and purchase intention. Businesses can use these findings to optimise customer relationship management considering the positive impact of DSR on consumer engagement,

brand loyalty and purchase intention. This may involve implementing personalized communication strategies that emphasize the company's commitment to social responsibility. By strengthening relationships with customers through DSR-focused CRM initiatives, businesses can increase brand loyalty and purchase intention among their customer base. We suggest that managers should create open lines of communication to successfully communicate DSR efforts to Generation Y consumers in order to develop lasting bonds with the firm's consumers. The positive link between DSR, consumer engagement, brand loyalty and purchase intention can guide businesses in creating more compelling and effective marketing strategies. In order to improve the customer experience, modern marketers must recognize new approaches to meaningfully engaging customers. Social media use in this situation is the beginning of a new era that involves various stakeholders, including customers, in DSR initiatives for fulfilling corporate responsibility. Customers who see an organization's sustainable practices identify positively with it; as a result, they share and like DSR-related content from that company to promote that company's positive posts on social media. In addition, we advise managers to make sure that Generation Y consumers can see and access the firm's sustainability initiatives, ethical sourcing and community involvement by using digital platforms and social media to spread the word. We further advise management to encourage Generation Y consumers to share opinions, take part in charitable endeavours and co-create content about the firm's brand's ethical business practices. We advise managers to make sure DSR activities align with the firm's brand values and are not seen as merely clever marketing ploys.

Theoretical implications

The finding that DSR, customer engagement, brand loyalty and purchase intention are all positively correlated among Generation Y consumers enhances and improves our theoretical understanding of consumer behaviour in the digital age. The increased significance of customer-centric marketing strategies is demonstrated by the positive association between DSR and consumer engagement. Consumer decision-making is moving away from traditional models that just assess the specifications and cost of a product and towards models that place a strong emphasis on social responsibility and ethical issues. Theoretically, researchers should take into account how the digital ecosystem is intertwined with consumer behaviour. The result lends credence to the notion that brand loyalty is not a one-dimensional concept that depends just on the value and quality of a product. It is actually a complex concept that has ethical and emotional components. Theoretical ramifications imply that companies should view DSR as a long-term strategic investment rather than a passing marketing strategy. The positive correlation between DSR and purchase intention suggests that ethical and sustainable business practices might increase long-term value by encouraging customer loyalty and repeat business. Understanding how DSR influences Generation Y consumers' engagement, loyalty and purchase intent sheds light on how various generations' values and priorities are changing. It demonstrates that younger consumers place a higher value on social responsibility and ethical issues than older consumers, emphasizing the significance of generational segmentation in marketing techniques. Theoretically, digital channels may serve as catalysts for enhancing consumer participation in DSR projects. These platforms facilitate in-the-moment communication, information sharing and collaborative content production, making them useful tools for fostering brand loyalty and buying intent among Generation Y consumers.

Limitations and future scope

As with other earlier studies, this one has limitations. No studies have yet looked at the impact of DSR on consumer behaviour in the Ghanaian economy or the moderating impact of

Generation Y consumer attitudes on this model. This study makes an effort to investigate these factors in emerging countries like Ghana; however, because there are few studies in this field and the study is cross-sectional, it limits the generalizability of the findings. We advise future researchers in developing nations to keep examining the impact of DSR on consumer behaviour beyond the industrial sector to the service sector because it is a newly discovered variable. Once more, the moderating function of Generation Y consumers in this study was unfavourable and inconsequential. Its moderate impact should be further investigated in future studies. In the future, we also advise conducting longitudinal research to help analyze how customer behaviour develops over time. Finally, since this study did not take into account any specific digital tool that makes DSR implementation easier, future research may take into account using specific digital social media platforms.

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Construct	Source
<p><i>Digital social responsibility</i> Company X is dedicated to using a percentage of its earnings to support societies and communities through digitally platforms Company X utilizes digital tools to give back to the areas where it conducts business Company X's efforts via digital platforms assist communities and societies Company X incorporates online donations to charities into its daily operations</p>	Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2021)
<p><i>Customer engagement in DSR</i> I feel enthusiastic when interacting with the company X online I get absorbed when I interact with the company x online I feel happy when I interact with the company X online I am passionate about using company X online</p>	Carvalho and Fernandes (2018)
<p><i>Purchase intention</i> I will purchase the brand/company the next time I need a product It is very likely that I will buy from company X Definitely, I will buy some products of that brand/company X</p>	Bianchi <i>et al.</i> (2019)
<p><i>Customer loyalty</i> It would be costly in terms of money, time and effort to end the relationship with this company X I shall continue considering this 1 as my main brand/company X in the next few years I would recommend this brand/company X if somebody asked my advice Usually use this brand/company as is my first choice compared to other hotel brands</p>	Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013)
<p><i>Generation Y consumers</i> I always consider purchasing goods with CSR-supportive brand names that have online presence I consider the CSR commitment on online platforms when purchasing goods I usually only shop in outlets with CSR-related brand names and activities online</p>	Casidy <i>et al.</i> (2015)

Table A1.
Measurement
construct

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